



Homes
England

Making homes happen

West of Ifield

Updated signage in Ifield Brook Meadows Frequently Asked Questions

Date: September 2022

Introduction

Homes England owns over 7,000 hectares of land across England. This portfolio is diverse and ranges from high profile ornamental landscapes and buildings in town centres, to rural footpath corridors, urban fringe land under agricultural tenancy and brownfield former industrial sites.

As a responsible public body, Homes England is required to fulfil its legal obligations, proactively manage and safeguard its land assets, as well as protect and ensure the wellbeing of those who access our land.

Land to the West of Ifield (including land that make up part of the Ifield Brook Meadows – a designated Local Green Space and Local Wildlife Site) has been under the control of Homes England and its predecessor bodies since it was acquired as part of the support towards the delivery of Crawley as a New Town.

We are aware that the current approach to fulfilling our obligations and communicating access rights has raised concerns for number of local people who use the Ifield Brook Meadows and therefore have undertaken to review the signage strategy. **This review has only focused on the Meadows area and does not affect Homes England's wider land holdings to the West of Ifield which remains in agricultural use and where access is restricted to designated Public Rights of Way.**

The review has been undertaken with the objective to reduce, remove and replace the signage wherever possible within Ifield Meadows, where it would not impact on Homes England's ability to manage the site safely, protect uses and fulfil its legal obligations. As part of this process, we have sought to understand better how people use the site by undertaking targeted engagement with local users and including undertaking user surveys during Summer 2022.

Having reviewed and updated the way in which we provide signage on Ifield Brooks Meadows, new signs were installed in early September 2022. While it has not been possible to remove signage completely, the updated signs have enabled us to:

- Review and reduce the location of signs across the site so that it is prioritised for those entering, complements the signage for the Public Rights of Way network whilst also ensuring they are still noticeable once people are using the site;
- Consolidate various health and safety notices into a single advisory board;
- Consider our messaging, how this is interpreted and to be clearer about how people can use the land;
- Ensure that we continue to meet the required legal obligations as a responsible public body.

As a result of this updated strategy, we have been able to reduce overall signage within the Ifield Brook Meadows by around 45% compared to the previous layout as a result of relocating signage to where we consider it will be most effective.

While it has not been possible to address all of the concerns that have previously been raised, we hope that the revised strategy is more user friendly and improves the experience of those using the site.

Why have you updated the signage within the Ifield Meadows?

Land within the Ifield Brook Meadows has been in public ownership for many years. During that time, a number of different public organisations have been responsible for managing the site and there have been changes in legislation and / or management practices that have resulted in the need for additional signs to be put up across the site. There are also public rights of way across the site which are managed by West Sussex County Council – who have put in place their own signs relating to their network.

Over time, this has created an un-coordinated approach to signage across the site, with duplication and potentially conflicting signs which we know has created confusion and impacted on the experience of some users of the site.

We also understand that the wording of some of the previous signage caused concern for some users and have sought to revise this to make clear how the site can be used and what rights there are for local people to access the land.

Having listened to the concerns we have updated our signage strategy for the site so that Homes England can continue to fulfil its legal obligations while ensuring that the signage is more user friendly and the experience overall is improved.

Why have you not reviewed the signage strategy on other Land to the West of Ifield?

Outside the Ifield Brook Meadows area, Homes England land is under a private tenancy for agricultural use.

In order to protect the tenant farmer and minimise risk to crops and to manage safety within the site, access in these areas is restricted. **There are no permissive rights in these areas and the general public should not deviate from the designated Public Rights of Way.** On this basis, the current signage remains valid and does not need to be updated at this time.

Why do you need the signs? Can't you just remove them completely?

As a responsible landowner and publicly accountable body, signage is required on the site to clarify the ownership of the land and prevent potential trespassing, unauthorised use of the site or prescriptive rights claims on the land. It is also an important part of our standard approach to keeping visitors safe, making people aware of potential dangers, and managing our obligations under the Occupiers' Liability Acts.

Maintaining a signage strategy for the site is the most effective way of ensuring the continued safe management of the site.

Looking ahead, we are seeking to develop a positive legacy for Ifield Brook Meadows and wider area. This will enable a greater level of community ownership and local input into the maintenance and management of the site as part of a wider stewardship strategy for our plans for West of Ifield – which identify the retention and enhancement of Ifield Meadows as a key community and environmental asset. In previous consultations, we sought views on how the meadows should be managed and invited those who may be interested in managing the site to let us know.

Once there is more certainty around the future development proposals for West of Ifield and future stewardship options, it is our intention that there will be opportunities to further improve the access strategy for the local community and enable those responsible for managing the site in the future to review how best to meet any legal obligations and messaging to users.

What changes have been made and how does this affect the way in which I use Ifield Meadows?

In reviewing and updating the signage strategy, we have sought to rationalise signage across the site by co-locating necessary messaging on a single board – rather than multiple signs across the site. This has meant there are larger signs at key entrances / access points across the site but an overall reduction in signage has enabled us to remove signs within the site itself. Overall, we have been able to reduce the number of signs across the site by around 45%.

The new signage does not change the way in which people can use or access Ifield Meadows. The new signs make clear that people accessing the site should do so on the designated public rights of way (further information on the public right of way network can be found on the [West Sussex County Council i-map](#)) but also allows the use of other permissive routes with the consent of Homes England. In doing so, people use the site at their own risk and Homes England reserves the right to withdraw this right at any time if needed - for example if there are concerns around safety, the need to undertake maintenance works or if there are instances of vandalism or anti-social misuse / behaviour.



Wider health and safety messaging ensures that users are aware of how they are expected to use the site and draws their attention to potential dangers or hazards within the site. This will help ensure the safety and enjoyment of all users.

If the land is in public ownership, why do you refer to it as Private Land?

While Homes England is a public body, Homes England is the legal owner of the land and the term 'Private Land' is an established legal term used to prevent prescriptive rights being acquired over land and ensures that any unauthorised use of land can be prevented.

The term 'Private Land' does not affect the current or ongoing use of the Ifield Brook Meadows. The updated wording seeks to make clear that while users are encouraged to use the Public Rights of Way, Homes England is allowing use of other permissive routes within the site, albeit at the sole risk of the individual user.

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