THE NIGHT SHIFT

THE MEASURED LINE

A Novel in Six Surveys



TOBY MIKLE

INCOGNITA



THE MEASURED LINE

INCOPREA

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A Novel in Six Surveys

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ONE

Seven Hundred and Forty



INCOPREA

The gate went in on the sixth of February. Pauline Vickery found it on the eleventh of March, the first Tuesday she had been out since the middle of January.

She had used the path for thirty-eight years. It ran from the back of the village hall, along the top of two fields, to the footbridge at Hollow Lane. The field boundary had a stile: three oak steps and a dog gate at the bottom that the terriers went under.

The stile had been on the definitive map since 1952, as Footpath 14.

Now there was a gate.

It was oak. It had a curved top rail, a hanging post with a black iron strap hinge, and a brass plaque that read, in letters small enough to need a second look: ERECTED 2025. WICKENFORD PARISH PATHS PARTNERSHIP.

Pauline stopped the scooter in front of it. It was a Freerider Landranger 6, bought second-hand from a man in Leominster for eight hundred and forty pounds, and it was seven hundred and eighty millimetres wide. That was the figure on page 31 of the handbook, and she had checked it with a tape before she paid.

The gap in the gate was narrower than the scooter.

She got off and walked through, leaving the scooter on the field side, then looked at the gate from the other side. It was the same gap. She went home and found the tape measure.

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The throat of the gate was seven hundred and forty millimetres.

She measured it four times. The gate had an outer frame and a lighter inner section hung on the hinge. When the inner section was shut it rested against a stop on the far post. The distance between the inner section and the stop was the part a person walked through, and it was 740. The opening between the two main posts was 1,500, which was the width of the whole structure, but the structure was not the part you used.

She rang the county council on the Wednesday. The switchboard gave her four options, none of them rights of way. She chose highways, waited eleven minutes, and spoke to a woman called Sharon, who gave her another number.

The other number was answered by a man who said he was Daniel Ockendon, Countryside Access Officer for the southern area. He took the path number and the grid reference and her name, gave her a reference, ROW/25/0417, and said someone would look at it within twenty working days.

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Mr Ockendon came out on the twenty-fourth of March. He had a laser measure and a high-visibility jacket with the council logo. He measured the opening between the posts and got 1,500. He measured the throat and got 740. He wrote both numbers down.

"The gate's certified to BS 5709," he said. "The 2018 standard. Class B."

"What's Class B?"

"Bridleway. It's a higher classification than a footpath gate."

"But it's a footpath."

"It is. But the gate's the bridleway model. The certificate says it's tested to the bridleway clear width."

"So it should be wider."

"It is wider. Between the posts it's 1,500. That's the bridleway standard. A horse width."

She looked at the gate. "A horse can't get through a kissing gate."

“No,” he said. “But the standard’s about the clear opening of the gateway.”

She asked what could be done. He said the gate had been installed by the parish council with grant money, to a specification agreed by its paths working group, and that he would write to them. He said it was a nice bit of oak.

She wrote to the supplier as well. A sticker on the underside of the top rail said TARNFIELD GATE AND FENCING LTD, STANGROUND. She rang it and got Kevin Paskin, in technical sales.

Mr Paskin said the HV5 was their most popular heritage gate. They had sold three hundred and forty. It was rated to Class B, a higher standard than a footpath gate.

Pauline asked about the throat.

“The throat is a design feature of the kissing gate,” said Mr Paskin. “The dimension covered by the standard is the clear opening. That’s 1,500.”

“So a scooter can’t get through.”

“I couldn’t say about scooters. We sell it as a Class B gate. It meets the standard for a bridleway.”

He sent her the certificate. It was two pages, and the figure 1,500 appeared four times.

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The parish council met on the first of April in the back room of the Royal Oak. Seven members were present and one member of the public, who was Pauline. The clerk, Mrs Sylvia Trueman, read out Mr Ockendon’s letter.

The chairman, Ron Pargeter, a retired builder, said the gate had cost four thousand one hundred and eighty pounds. Eighty per cent had come from a Countryside Stewardship grant and the parish had found the rest from the precept. He said the gate had been specified as a traditional oak kissing gate to match the character of the village, and that the county's own specification, ROW-SPEC-04, clause 7.3, allowed a narrower throat where a traditional pattern was required by the parish council. He had the clause in front of him and read it out.

Pauline asked whether the specification said anything about mobility scooters.

"It says gates should be suitable for the needs of users," said Mr Pargeter.

"And is it?"

There was a pause. Mrs Trueman said she would make a note.

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The council's reply came on the second of May. It said the gate had been installed in accordance with ROW-SPEC-04 and the manufacturer's written instructions, that the manufacturer had confirmed it met BS 5709:2018 for bridleway applications, and that the correct procedure had been followed.

It said the council had considered its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and completed an equality impact screening, reference EQ1/25/118. The screening found no adverse impact, because an alternative route existed: Hollow Lane and the B4362, one and a half miles, with no footway for four hundred metres.

It said the grant agreement with Natural England required the gate to be maintained in its present form for ten years, and that removing it would trigger repayment of three thousand three hundred and forty-four pounds.

Pauline kept the letter she wrote in 2023. The parish had consulted on the improvements, and one of the questions on the form was what the work would mean for her. She had written: “I have arthritis in both knees and cannot manage the stile. If it were replaced I would be able to use the path again.”

The parish sent that letter to the county with the grant application, under the heading Wickenford Paths for All, as evidence of community support. The application called the new gate an accessible kissing gate. Mr Ockendon had rung her once, about the wording of the plaque. He had said it was good to have a letter from an actual user.

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The gate is still there. Pauline goes round by the road now. It takes fifty minutes instead of twenty, and she does it on Thursdays, when the traffic on the B4362 is lighter.

On the eleventh of August she walked up to the gate with the stick to see whether anything had changed. The oak had weathered to a grey-brown. Someone had painted the hinge. The plaque had been polished.

She stood in front of it and measured the throat again with the tape. It was 740 millimetres. It met the standard.

TWO

Footpath 14, Sallow Green



INCOPREA

The collision happened at twenty past eight on the morning of the fourteenth of April 2025, on the tarmac strip between the Marlow End bypass and the rear boundary of the Sallow Green allotments. A woman of seventy-eight, Dilys Ames, was walking to the post office to collect a parcel. A man of sixty-one, Peter Nunn, was cycling to the distribution centre at Marlow End, where he had been a shift supervisor for nineteen years. He rang his bell at the bridge. She stepped to her left. His handlebar

caught the strap of her shopping bag and she sat down on the path, heavily.

An ambulance was not called. Her daughter drove her to the minor injuries unit at Braycott General, where a sprain was recorded. A police officer attended, took statements, and gave an incident number. No further action was taken against anyone. The path was closed for twenty minutes while the officer measured it: two point one metres at the bridge, three metres by the allotment gates.

On the twenty-second of April a highway safety officer from Braycott County Council, Rachel Otty, walked the route with a clipboard. She noted two signs. The first stood at the Marlow End entrance on a galvanised post: a blue circle showing a pedestrian and a bicycle, diagram 955.2 of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016. The second was at Sallow Green, faded and loose on its post. Both had gone up in 2004, when the route was surfaced with a grant of forty-seven thousand pounds from the regional development agency.

Her report went to the highways safety group on the second of May. It made four recommendations. The relevant one was numbered three: that shared-use signage be removed as an interim safety measure pending a review of the route's designation. The group approved it in nine minutes. Works Order 4471 was raised that afternoon. The order did not say when the interim period would end.

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The sign came down on the sixth of May, a Tuesday, at ten past nine. Two men from the Sallow Green depot did it with a socket set and a pair of ladders. Four bolts on each post. The posts were cut off at ground level and the holes filled with black sealant. The signs went into the back of the van and were logged at the depot as surplus stock, catalogue number 44-0917, and put on the shelf above the grit bins.

Gerald Pike, clerk to Sallow Green parish council, wrote to the county on the second of June. He received a reply on the nineteenth, reference HW/25/0917.

"The route," the letter said, "is recorded on the definitive map and statement as public footpath 14 (Sallow Green). The cycle track provision was created by resolution under section 65 of the Highways Act 1980 and depends on signage complying with the 2016 Regulations. Following removal of the signage, the route reverts to its recorded status."

Gerald Pike underlined the word reverts twice, in pencil.

Reinstatement, the letter went on, would require a cycle track order under section 3 of the Cycle Tracks Act 1984. That meant a draft order, a notice in the Braycott Herald, consultation with the statutory consultees, a twelve-week objection period, and an estimated cost of eleven thousand four hundred pounds. The council had no allocation for it in 2025/26. The monitoring officer confirmed the position in writing on the eleventh of July and copied in the director of the environment and transport directorate.

Peter Nunn rang the council on the twenty-third of June and was put through to a different officer, Owen Prue.

“Is it the path or the sign?” Peter said. “The sign is what designates the track,” said the officer. “So put the sign back.” “That would need an order.” “Then get an order.” “That would need funding.”

The printer ran.

“Can I still cycle on it?” he said. “You’d be cycling on a footpath,” said the officer.

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In September the highways committee approved the terms of reference for a countywide review of shared-use assets. It would rank every route currently signed for pedestrians and cyclists by collision history and footfall, and recommend improvements. Sallow Green was not on the list. It was no longer signed. The review could not consider a route that had left the signed network, and the route had left the signed network so that it could be reviewed.

Rachel Otty raised the point by email on the fourteenth of October. The reply, from the review’s project manager, said that it was noted and would be picked up in the next cycle of the review. The next cycle was scheduled for 2028.

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The first fixed penalty was issued on the fourth of November. A PCSO, Denise Trapp, stopped Peter at the bridge at ten to six in the morning. She was polite. She asked him to confirm his name and address and read from her notebook.

“Cycling on a footpath,” she said. “Section 72 of the Highways Act 1835. Fifty pounds, or forty if you pay within fourteen days.”

“It was a cycle path in April,” said Peter. “It’s a footpath now,” she said. “Since when?” “Since the sign came down.”

He paid the forty pounds on the eighth of November and kept the receipt, which went through the wash. Two new signs were ordered in December from the road safety budget: FOOTPATH, NO CYCLING, red circle, six hundred and eighty pounds including posts. A man came out and set them in concrete on the eleventh of December, in the same four holes.

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Gerald Pike got up a petition. It asked the county to restore the shared-use designation on public footpath 14. Four hundred and twelve people signed it, including Dilys Ames, who said she had never had any objection to the bicycles and had walked that way for fifty years. It was presented to the council on the fourth of February 2026. The committee resolved to note the petition and request a report.

The report came in June. It said the route was well used, that reinstatement would cost eleven thousand four hundred pounds, that the active travel budget was committed to the Wexbridge junction scheme until 2028, and that the matter could be considered as part of the next local transport plan. It recommended no immediate action.

Peter Nunn read the report on his phone and went out to the shed. He had cycled the path every working day from 2006 until the previous November. The journey took eleven minutes. He

now left the house at five past five and walked the bicycle the whole way, one and four-tenths miles, and it took twenty-two.

"You could go round by the bypass," his wife said. "It's only a bit further." "There's no path on the bypass," said Peter. "There's a pavement." "That's for pedestrians."

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He walked it in all weathers. In March the sealant round the new posts went grey, and in April a crack appeared where the root of a willow had lifted the path, and the county put it on a five-year programme of minor works, reference HW/26/1188.

The blue sign stayed on the shelf above the grit bins, face down. At the end of the financial year it was written off as obsolete stock.

The definitive map and statement for the county showed public footpath 14 as a single black line running from Marlow End to Sallow Green. It had always shown a single black line.

THREE

The Recorded Line



INCOPREA

The auction particulars said eleven acres, a range of buildings and direct road access. Vincent Ottley paid one hundred and seventy-two thousand pounds for the land at Lower Barns in November 2025 and moved in the following March. He was fifty-eight and had spent thirty-one years as a structural engineer with a firm in Leicester. He liked a drawing with a scale on it.

The land ran north from the lane in two fields. The boundary between them had been a hedge until the winter of 1973, when a grant from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food paid for it to be grubbed out. What remained was a shallow ridge in the grass, and a line on the Definitive Map and Statement for the Parish of Elmswell, sheet four, Footpath 11.

Ottley ordered the extract for thirty-two pounds. The path ran from a stone stile on the lane, at grid reference SP 8412 2734, to a footbridge on the parish boundary at SP 8427 2761. The statement gave the length as one hundred and ninety metres. It did not give a width.

The sheet was drawn at a scale of 1:2500 and had last been reviewed in 1979. On it the path appeared as a broken black line between two perpendicular ticks, which meant a footpath. Ottley thought it a tidy piece of drafting. The broken line ran exactly along the field boundary as the Ordnance Survey had it in 1952.

His insurer, Wold Mutual, had noted when he insured the buildings in December that the lane boundary was not stock-proof, and had added three hundred pounds to the excess. Ottley had sixteen ewes coming in May. On the third of February he telephoned the county council and waited nine minutes for the Countryside Access team.

He said he wanted to put a fence up on the old boundary and he wanted to be sure the fence would not touch the footpath.

If it is on the line, the officer said, it is not on the path.

Ottley wrote that down. He wrote down the date, and the officer's first name, which was Alison, and the reference she gave him, RW/26/041. Then he engaged a surveyor, a Mr. Prentice of Prentice and Wray, for four hundred and twenty pounds.

Prentice set the line out with a total station and pegged it at two-metre intervals. The pegs ran straight across the field, through the middle of the shallow ridge.

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T. Rudd and Sons, agricultural contractors, erected the fence in the last week of April for three thousand nine hundred and forty pounds. It was a stock fence of treated posts at two-metre centres, four-foot netting and two strands of plain wire. It ran from the stone stile to the footbridge in one straight run of one hundred and ninety metres. Ottley walked it afterwards with a hand level and found nothing out of true.

Mrs. Doreen Catchpole, who was eighty-four and had walked the path since she was a girl, came up from the lane on the second of May and found the fence starting at the stile. She stood and looked at it for some time. Then she walked the whole length of it on Ottley's grass and went home and telephoned her daughter.

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Elmswell Parish Council met on the twelfth of May. The clerk, Mrs. Barbara Tye, wrote to the county on the fifteenth, quoting reference RW/26/118, and asked for the fence to be removed. The local footpath secretary of the Ramblers, a Mr. Peter Mabb, submitted Form RW1, Report of an Obstruction, on the nineteenth.

Alison Reeve attended on the fourth of June at ten past ten. She carried a handheld receiver and did not trust it. The county's own survey followed on the eighteenth, using a receiver accurate to twenty millimetres over a baseline of four hundred metres. It found the fence lying between thirty and sixty millimetres west of the recorded line, along the whole of the one hundred and ninety metres.

Reeve wrote to Mrs. Tye on the twenty-third of June. The footpath, she said, was recorded as a line. The statement recorded no width. The fence did not stand on the line. There was therefore no obstruction within the meaning of section 137 of the Highways Act 1980, and no works the council could require Mr. Ottley to carry out.

Mrs. Tye telephoned her.

So the path is where the fence is.

The path is where it always was, Reeve said. It is just that there is nowhere to stand.

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The county solicitor's opinion was dated the eighth of July and ran to four pages. It said the same thing in longer words. It had been drafted by a Mr. Corcoran, whose time was charged to a cost centre called Highways General. It added a point of its own. Section 130 of the Act placed a duty on the highway authority to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of the highway. The public's right was to pass along a line. A fence between thirty and sixty millimetres west of that line did

not prevent them passing along it. The duty was being discharged.

On the ninth of July the cabinet member for environment and highways asked officers to consider a modification order under section 53(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, to add a width of two metres to the statement for Footpath 11. Officers costed the work at eleven thousand four hundred pounds and put it behind thirty-one applications already in the queue. The earliest realistic decision was the summer of 2029.

The parish council wrote again on the twenty-fourth of July. It received an acknowledgement on the fifth of August.

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Ottley heard about the queue from Mrs. Tye, who telephoned to say he might be written to. He asked whether he should take the fence down in the meantime. Mrs. Tye said that was a matter for him.

He did not take the fence down. He bought a mower instead. In August he began running it along the western side of the fence, on his own grass, at a width of about a metre. He put a small sign on the gate. It said: FOOTPATH 11. PLEASE KEEP TO THE MOWN MARGIN. DOGS ON LEADS. THANK YOU.

The margin was dry. It did not cross the wet patch. In September a family from the caravan site walked the path and noticed nothing at all.

On the council’s public map Footpath 11 was still a green broken line. The fence did not appear, being no asset of the council’s.

The works order was raised on the second of October: replace two waymark discs, Footpath 11, Elmswell, one at the lane and one at the footbridge. The contractor attended on the seventeenth and fixed each disc to the nearest post of the new fence, at eye height, with two galvanised staples. The post at the lane was the first post. The post at the footbridge was the ninety-sixth. Both arrows pointed north along the fence.

The order was closed on the nineteenth of October at a cost of one hundred and eighty-four pounds.

Mrs. Catchpole walked the path on the twenty-first. She kept to the margin, because the sign asked her to. She passed within a foot of the disc and did not look up.

FOUR

Minimum Sixty Linear Metres



INCOPREA

The sett was found on the fourteenth of April 2026, at chainage 1+850 of the Harrowden Northern Link, during the second stage of the soil survey. Nine entrances in the hedge bank. From the spoil, twelve chambers, and one of them large. The surveyor put in eleven marker pegs and ran out, so the last two entrances shared one.

Alison Prynne came up on the Monday. She was forty-one, self-employed, retained by Carrow Construction at £410 a day plus mileage. She walked the hedge with Ray Chudleigh, the site agent, who was fifty-four and had a knee.

“It’s a big one,” he said.

“It’s a main sett. It’s been here a while.”

“How long’s a while?”

She looked at the heap of red spoil under the hawthorn. “Twenty years. Maybe thirty.”

The embankment for the new roundabout came through at 1+845. The ground had to be stripped to a metre and a half, which meant the hedge and the bank under it. Prynne wrote the method statement over two days and sent it on the Wednesday. The licence came back from Natural England on the second of June, under section 10 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. It had a condition in it, as these licences did. The sett could not be closed until a replacement had been built to the specification at Schedule 3 and had been established for three months, to the satisfaction of the county ecologist.

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Schedule 3 was the council’s own document. Badger Mitigation: Design, Construction and Aftercare, Revision C, sixty-two pages, issued in 2024. Prynne had commented on the draft in 2023 and her comment had not been taken up. Paragraph 4.2 required a minimum of sixty linear metres of tunnel, measured along the centre line between chamber centres, with not fewer than eight chambers, each of 600 millimetres

internal diameter. Two entrances to face between south-east and south-west. Depth between 600 millimetres and one metre fifty. Free-draining ground. Not less than thirty metres from any carriageway. Not less than four thousand square metres of connected foraging habitat within two hundred and fifty metres.

The only land in Carrow's control was a triangle of 3,100 square metres between the roundabout and the Harrowden North water recycling centre. It belonged to Eric Mabb, who was seventy-one and farmed 190 hectares of wheat on the other side of the lane. He signed a licence for a pound a year and the promise of his hedge back. The shortfall in foraging habitat was dealt with by sowing six thousand square metres of his margin with a wildflower and vetch mix, at £1,850 for the seed. Mabb thought this was funny. He told Prynne he had been trying to grow wildflowers in that margin for eleven years and the council had spent eleven years telling him to cut it.

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Wildbank Habitats Ltd, of Towcester, built the sett for £58,910. They started on the twenty-first of September. The chambers were precast, 600 millimetres internal, UPVC, with sealed end caps. The runs between them were 285 millimetres. The whole was roofed with two hundred millimetres of puddled clay, backfilled with the excavated spoil and capped with three hundred millimetres of loose topsoil. Wildbank's foreman had done four of these and was quietly proud of the second, which had been occupied within a fortnight of the machines leaving.

Prynne inspected on the second of October. Chudleigh carried form E28 on a clipboard with a broken clip. The seed had taken on the south side and not on the north. There were worms in the topsoil, which was a good sign. She signed the interim.

The measurement was on the twenty-third of October. She walked the runs with a tape and a wheel, and Chudleigh read the numbers back to her, and she wrote them down. Eight chambers. Total along the centre lines, 58.4 metres.

"Short," said Chudleigh.

"Short by one point six."

"I can put a spur on the east end Monday."

"Don't put a spur on the east end. The sewer easement's on the east end."

"West end, then."

She said she would come back on the Tuesday. She drove to Leamington and did a bat survey on a barn, and it rained, and she got home at half past one.

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Chudleigh rang her at half seven on the Monday. There was fresh spoil on the north side of the sett, on ground that had been bare topsoil when she left it.

She got there at nine. He was already there with his hands in his pockets.

"Badgers," he said.

"Badgers."

"That's good, isn't it? That's the whole idea."

It was a run of 3.2 metres between the two southern chambers, dug from the outside in, with a new entrance at the end of it and clay dragged out along the line of it. The sett now measured 61.6 metres, with eight chambers and three entrances, two facing south-west and one south-east. It was, on the plain reading of Schedule 3, compliant. It had been made compliant by the animals the licence was written to protect.

Prynne measured it twice. In the box for further observations on E28 she wrote: Includes 3.2m of tunnel excavated by badgers. Total 61.6m. Compliant. Martin Pellow, the county ecologist, counter-signed it on the fourth of November and noted, in his own hand, sett established.

Two things followed from that. The first was that the sett was occupied, and the Act applied to it, and the Act did not distinguish how the occupancy had come about. Nothing could be done within thirty metres of the outermost chamber without another licence, which would have taken twelve weeks and which Carrow would not wait for. The haul road to the northern embankment passed twenty-six metres from it. The second was that an established date of the twenty-sixth of October put the earliest closure at the twenty-sixth of January.

They moved the haul road forty metres north, through Mabb's wheat, at a cost of £11,400 in crop and £38,900 in stone. Mabb said it was the best crop he had ever lost.

The original sett was closed on the ninth of February 2027, by excavation and by filling the tunnels with foamed concrete at 0.5 newtons per square millimetre, in accordance with paragraph 9.1. Paragraph 9.2 required the fill to be verified by CCTV survey of not less than thirty per cent of the tunnel length. The survey

covered the three western entrances and the two central chambers, which was thirty-one per cent. The rest of the system had been inferred from the spoil. The tunnels ran deeper than the plan.

The road opened on the twenty-third of July.

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The aftercare inspection at Long Meadow was carried out on the sixteenth of March 2028, by which time the sett had been empty for a year. No fresh spoil. No latrine. No tracks. The record read: Condition good.

Two days earlier a scanner survey had found a dip of thirty-eight millimetres in lane one at 1+855. The core was taken on the twenty-first. It went through three hundred and eighty millimetres of asphalt, three hundred of Type 1, and nine hundred of air.

The works order went out the same afternoon. Forty millimetres of regulating course, nearside lane, chainage 1+850 to 1+880, with a note to keep an eye on it.

FIVE

To Deer Specification



INCOPREA

The inspection was booked for half past nine. Pauline Arkwright arrived at twenty past, which was her habit, and sat in the car park until a quarter to. It was the fourteenth of March. Hollowmeadow Wildlife Park ran to forty-one acres on the B1164 outside Retford. Eleven staff in winter. Nineteen in summer.

Martin Rudd met her at the gatehouse. He had owned the park since 2004. He carried a clipboard he did not use.

"You'll want the tour," he said.

"I'll want the measurements," said Pauline.

The council had sent a new form that year. ZL/3 (Rev. 2024). The old form had one line near the back, perimeter fence satisfactory, with a box for Y or N. The new one had a table. Eight points round each enclosure. Height in metres. She had been on a training day in Nottingham about it in January and thought it was an improvement.

They did the deer first, then the wallabies, then the birds. The licence covered fifty-one species. It took most of the day. At the deer paddock she measured one metre ninety-eight at the highest post and wrote it down without comment.

The wolf enclosure was one point one hectares, with a mound, a pond and a stand of birch. Bramble and Flint were fourteen, brothers, and had come from a collection in Norfolk that closed in 2019. Pauline stood at the north-west corner and put the laser against the post.

"Two metres," she said. "Two exactly."

"That's the fence," said Martin.

"The standard is three."

"Since when?"

"Since 2012. Section 8.3. Three metres on a straight run. An overhang on the returns." She wrote 2.00 in the table. "It's a deer fence."

"It's a wolf fence. It's had wolves in it for twelve years."

Pauline turned the page. "It's a deer fence," she said.

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The report went to Trentvale District Council on the twenty-eighth of March. It ran to nine pages. Page six said the boundary of the wolf enclosure was to deer specification throughout, that section 8.3 of the Secretary of State's Standards was not met, and that the shortfall was one metre.

Licence ZL/09/14 ran to the thirtieth of June.

Martin read the letter in the office by the ticket hut. Mr Deakin, team leader, Environmental Health (Commercial), was sorry to have to write it. The council would renew on receipt of a satisfactory report. The report could not be satisfactory while the fence was below three metres. The council had no discretion. The word discretion appeared twice.

He rang Deakin.

"Can I have a year?"

"The licence is four years. It ends on the thirtieth of June."

"I know when it ends."

"Then you'll know I can't renew it on an unsatisfactory report. And if it lapses, you're keeping wolves without a licence. That's an offence under section one. I don't say that to be difficult."

"It's a good fence."

"I'm sure it is," said Deakin.

"It's been there since the deer."

"I know," said Deakin. "I've read the file."

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Tarn Fencing Ltd of Worksop quoted eighteen thousand four hundred pounds, plus VAT, which the park could not reclaim. Seven weeks' lead time. New posts, deeper footings, an overhang. Martin looked at the quote for a while and put it in the drawer.

Then he went to planning, because he had remembered something.

The deer park had gone up in 2011 under permission 11/00642/FUL. Condition 4 of that permission said no means of enclosure within the site should exceed two metres above existing ground level. The reason given was the view from the Trent Valley Way. The deer fence had been built to the condition. It was, in the council's own language, compliant.

The decision notice was in a wallet in Martin's office, with the site plan and the officer's report. It had been complied with in 2011 and nobody had looked at it since.

Alec Bream was the planning officer. He was twenty-six and answered emails within the hour.

"You want to vary condition four," he said.

"I want a three-metre fence."

"You can have a three-metre fence. You'd be in breach of condition four."

"And if I apply?"

"Section seventy-three. Thirteen weeks at the moment. We're at eleven on householder."

"I've got until the thirtieth of June."

"Then you'll want to put it in this week. The fee's two thousand three hundred and forty."

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He put it in on the second of April. Reference 31/00219/VAR. The parish council objected on the nineteenth. The clerk wrote that the fence would be visible from the church tower at Babworth and that the park had given no notice of its intentions. The Retford and District Ramblers wrote about the Trent Valley Way. One letter, four signatures. Bream said the application was finely balanced, that it would probably go to committee, and that committee did not sit in August.

Deakin rang on the eleventh of June.

"How's the application?"

"Committee on the twenty-fourth of July."

"Your licence ends on the thirtieth."

"I'm aware."

"Then you'd be keeping wolves after that date without a licence. I'd have to consider a closure notice. I don't want to. But I would."

· · ·

The Lound Edge Canid Centre, near Selby, had a three point two metre fence and two empty runs. They would take both wolves for nothing. Martin sent them five hundred pounds and put it through the books as a donation, which was what it was.

The crates went in at six in the morning on the twenty-third of June. Bramble walked into his. Flint did not, and it took forty minutes and the vet, Dr Crowe, and in the end Flint went in after

his brother, which was how he had done everything for twelve years. The horsebox left at ten past eight. Martin swept the yard.

On the thirtieth of June the deer came up from the paddock by the car park. Eleven does and a buck. The old paddock was point four of a hectare and poached to mud. The wolf enclosure had a mound, a pond, a stand of birch and a fence two metres high.

The buck stood on the mound for most of July, doing nothing, which is what a buck does on a mound.

The sign said WOLVES. A. Cawley and Sons of Newark made a new one for eighty-four pounds. FALLOW DEER. Same size. Same screws.

On the seventh of July Martin withdrew the application. Bream emailed to confirm, and to say the fee was not refundable, and that condition 4 remained in force. The file was closed.

. . .

Pauline came back on the fourth of November for the interim inspection. She used the new form. At the north-west corner she put the laser against the post and read the number.

She wrote 2.00 in the box marked Perimeter height (m). For fallow deer the standard was one metre eighty. She ticked Satisfactory and drove on to Worksop.

SIX

Four Minutes Away



INCOPREA

The app was called Sanderling Live. It had cost £86,000 and was built by a firm in Leighton Buzzard. It showed the buses as green dots and the time to your stop in minutes. The council's cabinet member for transport launched it in March 2025 and said it would put passengers back in control.

Kiera Lynch had the job title Performance and Reporting Analyst. She was twenty-six. She sat on the second floor of the

depot on Barrowfield Road, with a view of the bus wash and four windows open on one screen.

On the twenty-second of January she went out to the stop by the Royal Oak, because a passenger had written in. The app said the 18.02 was four minutes away. It said four minutes for nine minutes. Then it said due. Then the bus disappeared and a new one appeared eight minutes behind it. Nothing came past the Royal Oak. At 18.19 she walked back to the depot.

She spent the morning in the log. A journey that had run left its marks in the ticket machine. A cancelled journey left none, and still thirty-eight of the forty-one in December had appeared in the feed. Each was generated at its origin stop at its scheduled departure time and carried along the registered route at 11.4 miles an hour, arriving at its terminus within a minute of the timetable.

She took it to Alan Pierce, the operations manager, on the Thursday.

‘It’s the prediction,’ she said.

‘I know about the prediction.’

‘It’s predicting buses we’ve cancelled.’

Alan had been at Sanderling nineteen years. He read the printout twice.

‘How many?’

‘Thirty-eight in December. Two hundred and eleven since September.’

‘And nobody’s complained?’

‘Four complaints. All about the same thing. The bus didn’t come.’

He put the printout down. ‘So we turn it off.’

. . .

The prediction had been added in October, at a cost of £9,000, after a meeting about the cutting at Carrow Hill, where the signal dropped for forty seconds and the app lost every bus on the 24. The council’s officer asked for a fix.

The fix worked like this. If the system had not heard from a vehicle for a hundred and twenty seconds, it carried the bus forward along its registered route at the scheduled speed and showed it to the passenger as a normal bus. In the cutting it was right. Where a journey had been cancelled and no vehicle had ever reported, it also worked, because the system did not know the journey was cancelled. It only knew there was a registered journey and no vehicle.

The cancellation lived in the running board, which lived in the scheduling system, which was made by a different firm in Basingstoke. Nothing joined the two.

. . .

The money came through the Enhanced Partnership: £1.31 for every mile the feed reported, plus a performance payment of up to five per cent on reliability as shown by the feed. In the year to the thirty-first of March 2026 the mileage payment was £1,406,880. Fifty-eight thousand nine hundred of the reported miles had been generated by the prediction, and Kiera valued them at £77,159. The performance payment, at the full five per

cent because the app showed 96.8 per cent, was a further £70,344.

She sent the note to Alan on the sixth of February. It was one page. He read it and rang the council.

Hannah Vesey had been Transport Officer since the previous June. She was validating all four operators, because the Department for Transport had said somebody would be looking at the returns.

Alan told her about the prediction and said he would send the detail. She asked him to send it in writing.

. . .

The detail arrived on the eleventh of February. Hannah read it and took it to her manager, who took it to the head of service, who took it to the Section 151 Officer, because the Council's financial regulations required any overpayment above £25,000 to be reported within ten working days.

The Section 151 Officer wrote back on the second of March. He used the phrase 'public money'. He asked for a recovery figure.

The figure was £147,503. Sanderling's operating margin that year had been 3.1 per cent, or £94,000. Alan did the sum in the margin of the letter and did not need to do it twice.

He rang Hannah on the fourth of March.

'If you take that back we're not a bus company any more.'

'It's not my figure, Alan.'

'It's the app's figure.'

‘It’s the app’s figure in your feed.’

‘Can we do it over three years?’

‘I’ll ask.’

. . .

Kiera was asked to make the feed accurate. It took six days. She wrote a rule that checked every journey against the running board and suppressed the cancelled ones, and tested it on the eighteenth of March. The green dots behaved themselves.

The first live month was March. Reliability as shown by the feed was 79.2 per cent. The Enhanced Partnership required 82. On the ninth of April the partnership board issued a Service Improvement Notice, requiring a plan within twenty-eight days and ninety days to reach the standard. At the same meeting the recovery was agreed at £147,503, payable over three years, first instalment in May.

Alan wrote the plan himself. It proposed two additional vehicles on the 24 at peak and a revised layover at Thurlow End. It did not propose anything that would raise reliability by two point eight per cent, because nothing he could afford would.

Kiera found him in the yard on the twelfth of May, the day the first instalment went out.

‘There’s a meeting on the twenty-first,’ she said.

‘I know.’

‘They’ll ask about the ninety days.’

‘Yes.’

He looked at the vehicles. Six were parked nose-in against the wall, and the wash was running, and it was a warm evening.

‘What did the specification say?’

‘Which one?’

‘The one the council wrote. Schedule 3.’

Kiera had read it. ‘It says we must provide predicted arrival times for all registered journeys.’

‘All of them.’

‘Yes.’

‘And the performance payment is calculated on the feed.’

‘Yes.’

‘Turn it back on,’ he said.

‘You what?’

‘Turn it back on. Then ring Hannah and tell her you’ve turned it back on, and tell her why, and copy the board.’

. . .

The note Kiera sent on the thirteenth of May was two pages. It set out paragraph 9 of Schedule 3, paragraph 4 of Schedule 4, and the fact that both had been written by Wardle Blake Partnership in the same month. It said the company could comply with one or the other, not both. It did not say anything else.

The board met on the twenty-first of May. The minutes record that the Service Improvement Notice was withdrawn on the grounds that reliability had returned to 96.9 per cent, and that the recovery would continue. There was no discussion of paragraph 9. The board had eleven other items.

Kiera went back to the second floor and opened the feed. The dots came up: the 17 at the bus station, the 24 in the cutting at Carrow Hill, the 61 at Netherton.

At 18.02 the 17 appeared at the Royal Oak, four minutes away, and began to move. Below the window the wash had finished and the six vehicles stood where they had been left.

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The Measured Line

Toby Mikle

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