

# Protests over 'closed' gate at country park

Residents in an East Lothian village staged a protest at a gate they claim is being locked regularly to stop them using it to access a country park at the weekend.

More than 30 adults and children joined in the rally at the Old Craighall gate which leads into Dalkeith Country Park.

Organised by East Lothian Council's Green councillor Shona McIntosh, they called on Buccleuch Estate to step in and ensure access rights are upheld at the gate after years of complaints.

She said: "Complaints about the locked gate at the Old Craighall entrance to the park have been going on for many, many years. To add insult to injury, while ignoring legal requests from East Lothian Council to restore access, someone has recently added mesh to both sides of the gate.



Old Craighall Gate at Dalkeith Country Park is often locked, residents say, and has had mesh added which they say makes it harder to climb over pic contributor

"The only possible purpose of this is to make it harder for walkers to exercise their right of responsible outdoor access."

Councillor McIntosh organised the protest along with her running club Hunters Bog Trotters and said she was surprised by the size of the turnout on Sunday.

She said: "I received lots of emails of support, and over 30 people attended. It really demonstrates how many people are fed up with this behaviour from the estate."

Derek Williams from Musselburgh's Active Toun Group added: "The problem with the locked gate at Old Craighall has been an issue for many years. It is preventing access to a large area

of local green space that families, walkers and cyclists should be able to use.

“It really is time for the council to give the estate a deadline to provide access. If the estate fails on this, then the council should start using its powers under Scottish Access Legislation to move the situation forward. This has been going on long enough and now needs to be resolved for the benefit of local residents.”

Dalkeith Country Park includes various business ventures, including a shop, ‘wellness studio’, and cafe at Restoration Yard, a Go Ape course, and an adventure playground.

A spokesperson for the Buccleuch Estates said: “We encourage access to Dalkeith Park and have made substantial investment in the park to improve the natural environment and also provide leisure facilities which are enjoyed by many thousands of people throughout the year.

“The gate at which this protest was held is also access to a working farm and the tenant does close the gate on the occasions where there could be a risk to or from livestock. In view of the concerns expressed over the weekend we will look into this further to explore future access arrangements. “

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter