

## **EXTINGUISHMENT OF HIGHWAY RIGHTS**

1. **What is an extinguishment?**

An extinguishment of highway rights, carried out under Section 116 of the Highways Act 1980, is a legal procedure to remove the public highway status from a piece of land. This procedure involves an application to a Magistrates Court for an extinguishment Order. There are prescribed preliminary consultation procedures and opportunities for objection. In particular, Parish Council's have an absolute right to veto an extinguishment.

2. **In what circumstances is it considered?**

An extinguishment can only be carried out if the land is considered to be "unnecessary" for public use as part of the highway.

3. **What is public highway?**

The definition of public highway is a "way over which all members of the public have a right to pass and repass". There are various types of public highway - the most common are footpaths, bridleways and full vehicular use highways.

Generally, the public highway extends over the whole width of a road, footway, verge and other land up to the boundaries of adjoining properties and fields.

4. **What if highway land is enclosed and "claimed" after so many years?**

It is not possible to "claim" land that forms part of the public highway. Once public highway comes into being it remains highway forever, even if it is not available for public use. The only way highway rights can be removed is by a formal legal procedure such as an extinguishments of highway rights.

It is unlawful to enclose or obstruct any part of the public highway without statutory authority. In such circumstances it may be necessary for the County Council to take action.

5. **What is the cost of an extinguishment?**

The basic charge for the County Council' £1,000 towards to the costs incurred by Highways Department, £1,750 for Legal Services, plus advertising costs. I would make you aware that Magistrates Courts have now introduced a charge for presiding over applications made for an Extinguishment Order. The charge levied will be dependant upon which court the application is made to. I would also advise you that if a hearing is contested there will be a further fee levied payable to the court. Should the application not proceed to a Court hearing for any reason there would be a minimum abortive fee of £500 plus any advertising costs incurred.

There may be other associated costs such as the cost of arrangements regarding any Statutory Undertakers equipment on the land. Planning permission or the purchase of the land may also be necessary before the applicant can use the land, on which highway rights are extinguished, for private purposes, These associated issues are outlined on page 2.

6. **What if there is any Statutory Undertakers equipment in the land (telegraph poles, underground cables, manhole covers etc.)**

If there is any Statutory Undertakers equipment within the area of highway to be extinguished it is necessary for the applicant to liaise with the Company regarding the removal/diversion of the equipment. It may be possible to enter into an agreement for equipment to be left in place, however, this may mean that certain restrictions have to be placed on the land, for example restrictions on building.

7. **Is Planning Permission necessary?**

Planning permission may be necessary for formal “change of use” of the land from highway to garden/other purposes, or for the erection of any fences/walls at a height greater than 1.0 metres above the natural ground level. In all cases the applicant should seek advice regarding the necessity for planning permission from the local Borough or District Council’s planning department.

8. **Is it necessary to buy the land?**

The assumption at law is that, unless there is evidence to the contrary, (e.g. a registered or verified owner), the land beneath the surface of the highway (the “sub soil”) falls within the ownership of the adjoining landowner. If this were the case, ownership of the land would usually revert to the adjoining landowner upon a successful extinguishment of highway rights.

In the case of an area of land being originally acquired by a developer for the building of an estate, which subsequently becomes highway, the land would revert to their ownership once the highway rights were extinguished. Therefore, it follows that the land would need to be purchased from the developer. (If this is the case, you may wish to instruct your own Solicitor to ensure that the land purchase coincides with the successful attainment of an extinguishment Order.) The County Council would require evidence that this transaction would be completed at the time the highway rights were extinguished

9. **What is the timescale for an extinguishment?**

An extinguishment is a lengthy and potentially complicated legal procedure taking approximately a minimum of twelve to twenty-four months depending upon the nature of the application and the County Council’s current staff resources.

10. **Why does it take so long**

A technical appraisal is carried out to determine whether the land is considered to be surplus to requirements and unnecessary for public use (either now or in the future). The Highways Act 1980 requires that consultations are carried out with certain bodies including the adjoining owners and occupiers, Statutory Undertakers, the District or Borough Council and the Parish Council.

Once all the consultations have been carried out and providing there are no objections, it is a statutory requirement that the proposal is advertised in the London Gazette and the local newspaper. Notices are erected on site and a Magistrates Court hearing is arranged.

11. **What happens at the Magistrates Court**

The application is presented to Local Magistrates at a Court hearing. Providing there are no objections and the Court is satisfied with the application, an Order will be made giving effect to an extinguishment of highway rights. At this point the land will either revert to the adjoining landowner or to the actual owner of the land.

It is not normally necessary for the applicant to attend Magistrates Court.

EOHR LEAFLET (LAND PURCHASE FROM DEVELOPER)