

6 Railway Cottages  
Garsdale  
Sedbergh  
Cumbria  
3<sup>rd</sup> may 2011

Dear Mr Harper

### **CONSULTATION FROM CUMBRIA TIMBER TRANSPORT GROUP**

Thank you for your email of 8 April and the helpful dialogue we have had with you over the last couple of weeks regarding the above, on which we have some grave concerns regarding the proposed use of the A684 through Garsdale as an 'Agreed Route' for any Timber Traffic.

Whilst noting the three forest exit points onto the A684 within Garsdale requiring its use with little or no alternative options, we would ask has the geography and condition of the road been taken into consideration when deciding on the type and size of vehicle that can be used and whether the amount of traffic travelling westwards along the road towards Sedbergh could be minimised by transporting timber from the Garsdale Head Station. The Carlisle-Settle Railway is used to transport timber from Ribbleshead, and utilising the sidings at Garsdale Head Station could make the transport by rail a more cost effective option as well as a more environmentally and community friendly option.

As I am sure you are aware the A684 has restrictions for HGV over 7.5 tonnes except for local access, due to the unsuitability of the road for these vehicles. We would like to draw your attention to the following problems with using the A684 as an 'agreed route' for timber haulage. We are particularly concerned that this could lead to timber from Yorkshire being transported to the M6 along the A684. Our research has indicated that there seems to be more concern about timber wagons on single track roads. However, on single track roads drivers expect vehicles to be in their path and drive accordingly. We would suggest that the presence of such large wagons on narrow meandering double track A roads, where vehicles do not expect to travel round a bend and find a large wagon on their side of the road is in fact far more dangerous.

- The A684 has many narrow stretches. As shown on the enclosed map and photographs the road regularly narrows to 4.5 – 4.8m and there is one section where the road narrows to 3.85m (although the central white line has been scrubbed off here). These narrow sections often occur on the pinch point of a bend and the road may be enclosed by buildings or walls which result in a driver's visibility being severely restricted. As the 'Road haulage of round timber code of practice' states that single track forest roads need to be a width of 3.5 – 3.7 m, it is clear that the A684 is too narrow for timber wagons to travel safely when there maybe unseen

traffic, including large agricultural vehicles and other HGV, approaching from the opposite direction. As timber wagons are up to 2.55m wide and agricultural vehicles can be a similar width, it can clearly create numerous problems negotiating the two vehicles past each other on a section of road that is less than 5m wide!

- Many sections of the A684 within Garsdale are enclosed by dry stone walls with no or little verges (see photographs). This tends to push vehicles into the middle of the road; unfortunately these sections regularly coincide with narrow, windy sections where visibility is limited. The danger of vehicles straddling the white line is exasperated by the large number of motor bikes that use the road as a racing circuit choosing to race down the white line for maximum speed.
- The road has a number of tight 90° bends and blind corners (see photographs) requiring the timber lorries to make full use of the entire width of the carriageway, pulling out into the path of oncoming traffic who are unaware of the obstacle until the very last moment creating an impasse.
- The timber wagons travelling westwards along the A684 have to travel through the small market town of Sedbergh, with narrow pavements, children playing, and 90° bends. The consultation map shows that agreed route continues along the A684 towards the M6; however, this takes them up Black Horse Hill which has a 17.5% gradient. We note that the 'Road haulage of round timber code of practice' states that gradients should be generally limited to 10% on forest roads and we presume that this should also apply to public roads.
- Local pedestrians and walkers passing through the valley have to use the A684 to join up sections of footpath. There is no pavement and often no verge and pedestrians are forced to use some very narrow, dangerous sections of road (see map and photographs). During the recent period of extensive timber transport many of residents felt unable to walk through the valley and effectively became house bound. Whilst not actually in Garsdale we would like to point out that the A684 to the east of Sedbergh is particularly notorious for having large numbers of pedestrians walking between Sedbergh and the Pinfold Campsite or the minor road leading to Cautley. This includes runners from Sedbergh School and pedestrians sometimes wheeling pushchairs two abreast!
- Many cyclists use the road throughout the year and are in particular danger from all vehicle types. Only recently someone in the valley was forced to swerve off the road to avoid being hit by a car on a bend, and came off their bike on the gravel at the edge. The car did not even notice their plight and stop. HGV vehicles make such accidents more likely, and they like cars, can often not be heard in their approach, particularly if it is windy. Motorbikes and agricultural vehicles tend to make sufficient noise that cyclists are warned of their approach and can get off the road.
- Whilst the A684 is designated as an A road it was never constructed as an A road. Since the number of HGV and in particular timber wagons increased the road surface has significantly deteriorated. The Cumbria

County Council, South Lakes Highways Engineer has informed us that the maintenance costs for the A684 are one of the highest in the county. Much of the road was resurfaced last year but before this the local community has had to endure large bills for new tyres, rebalancing of wheels, warped wheels and replacement of suspension. Most people find the claims procedure too intimidating to pursue reimbursement, but it is unfair that our community has to face these costs.

- We also have concerns about the hidden structure of the road. The bridges maybe tested but the strength of the culverts appears to be unknown. For example to the west of New Bridge the road is subsiding over a culvert, the depression was filled with tarmac during resurfacing but a Highways Engineer told us the culvert looked as if it had been built with Lego bricks! It is questionable whether it is strong enough to support large HGV's.
- We accept that timber wagons are often carefully driven but there have been occasions when drivers have been seen using mobile phones and they do tend to go significantly faster on straighter sections where there may still be pedestrians on the road. We feel that a 25mph restriction is warranted throughout the valley due to the lack of pavement and the numerous sections with no verge.
- There are numerous accidents on the A684 in Garsdale, whilst many of these are caused by winter conditions there is also a high number which result from the road being too narrow, with too many blind bends. Only recently a motorcyclist was killed near one of the 90° bends.

The Parish Council accepts that timber has to be transported from the forests in the Garsdale and Dent valleys, but we request that the A684 is classified as a 'Consultation Route' with the size of wagon chosen to suit the road conditions and structure. It may also be desirable to have restrictions on the season or time of day. For instance avoiding timber transportation during hay time may make everyone's lives easier and safer. Ultimately we feel it would be safer for everyone if the timber was transported by rail from Garsdale Head Station.

## Photographs



A. East of Hallbank, road is 4.64 m wide at bend to rear of photo. There is very poor visibility as you approach this bend from both directions.



B. East of Longstone Fell, a narrow stretch of road is down to 4.6m wide. Bends at the bottom of the hill have poor visibility (see photo below) and have been the scene of an accident between a timber wagon and three motor bikes. The upper section of road is littered with wing mirrors despite having better visibility.



C. Bend at the bottom of the hill on the above picture showing the poor visibility



D. Looking east and west from a bend near Long Holme. Pedestrians regularly use this section but there is no verge to take refuge on and the road is only 4.45m wide in places. The photos are taken from a bend and the far bends are much closer than they look. Pedestrians often have to run from one side to another to avoid vehicles, as vehicles approach around the bends far too quickly.



E. 90° bend at near Village Hall. The second picture just shows how far a vehicle with a trailer has to cross the white line to go round the corner.



F. 90° bend at near Village Hall showing poor visibility as you approach bend from other direction. This is the scene of a recent motor bike fatality



G. Another 90° bend



H. Road is less than 3.85m wide here. The white line has been scrubbed off but there is no warning that the road is basically a single track width other than a 'road narrows' sign similar to those placed in numerous other sections of the road.

We trust these comments are helpful in your considerations.

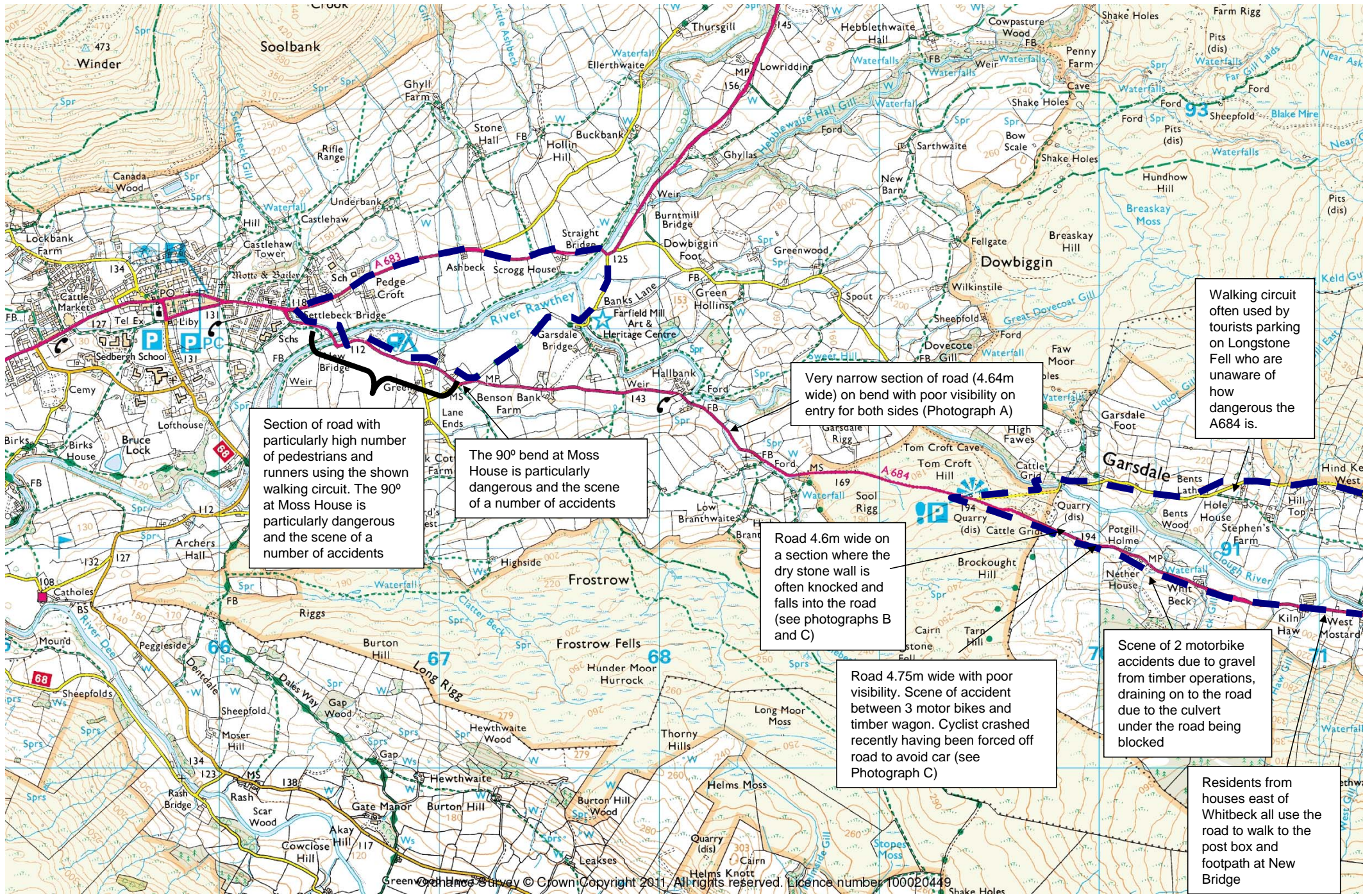
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Roper'.

Michael Roper

Chairman

Garsdale Parish Council



Section of road with particularly high number of pedestrians and runners using the shown walking circuit. The 90° at Moss House is particularly dangerous and the scene of a number of accidents

The 90° bend at Moss House is particularly dangerous and the scene of a number of accidents

Very narrow section of road (4.64m wide) on bend with poor visibility on entry for both sides (Photograph A)

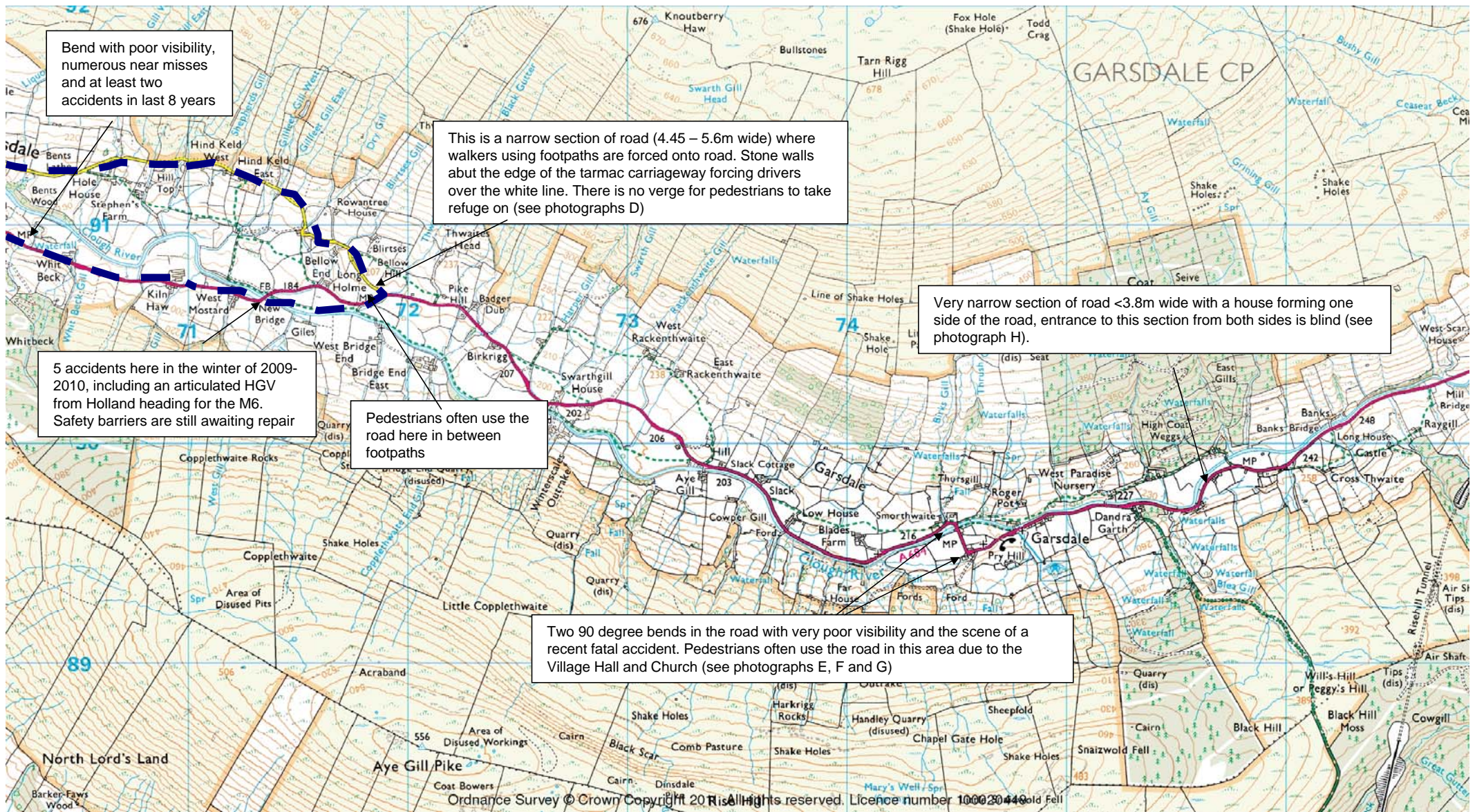
Road 4.6m wide on a section where the dry stone wall is often knocked and falls into the road (see photographs B and C)

Road 4.75m wide with poor visibility. Scene of accident between 3 motor bikes and timber wagon. Cyclist crashed recently having been forced off road to avoid car (see Photograph C)

Scene of 2 motorbike accidents due to gravel from timber operations, draining on to the road due to the culvert under the road being blocked

Walking circuit often used by tourists parking on Longstone Fell who are unaware of how dangerous the A684 is.

Residents from houses east of Whitbeck all use the road to walk to the post box and footpath at New Bridge



Bend with poor visibility, numerous near misses and at least two accidents in last 8 years

This is a narrow section of road (4.45 – 5.6m wide) where walkers using footpaths are forced onto road. Stone walls about the edge of the tarmac carriageway forcing drivers over the white line. There is no verge for pedestrians to take refuge on (see photographs D)

Very narrow section of road <3.8m wide with a house forming one side of the road, entrance to this section from both sides is blind (see photograph H).

5 accidents here in the winter of 2009-2010, including an articulated HGV from Holland heading for the M6. Safety barriers are still awaiting repair

Pedestrians often use the road here in between footpaths

Two 90 degree bends in the road with very poor visibility and the scene of a recent fatal accident. Pedestrians often use the road in this area due to the Village Hall and Church (see photographs E, F and G)