

Patron His Majesty The King

Bringing Horses
and People Together

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Draft Greater Cambridge Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document

Response on behalf of the British Horse Society.

According to DEFRA 'In 2020, the value of health benefits associated with outdoor recreation within the UK was estimated to be between £6.2 billion and £8.4 billion. An estimated annual saving of £2.1 billion would be achieved through averted health costs if everyone in England had good access to nature.'

Benefits of the Equestrian Industry in Cambridgeshire

The Equestrian Industry (EI) in Cambridgeshire creates commercial, social, mental and physical wellbeing and educational benefits. There are other groups and users of the soft surface Rights of Way network with equally positive social and wellbeing benefits.

The EI in Cambridgeshire (excluding the racing industry) contributes over £115 million per annum to the Cambridgeshire rural economy. Nationally the industry is the second largest rural employer – second only to agriculture.

The EI provides amazing equestrian centres who, under the BHS scheme Changing Lives through Horses, work with children and young people who have disengaged from the education system. Using the transformative power of working with horses, combined with a focus on developing key skills they can use throughout their lives, leading to increased confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to reengage with society. 3,000 children and young people have benefited from this scheme nationally since 2019.

The EI provides Riding for the Disabled Centres. RDA is a charity which pioneers the therapeutic use of horses and are leaders in disability sport. Their innovative programmes improve mobility, boost physical health and mental wellbeing, build confidence, and teach new skills for those with life challenges.

The EI provides commercial diversification opportunities for farmers and landowners in terms of livery facilities with all the additional business opportunities for farriers, vets, feed merchants, saddlers, trainers, hay merchants etc.

The racing industry is worth £4.1 billion pa to the economy nationally. It requires a huge workforce with a variety of skills and relies on large numbers of 'work riders' e.g. at Newmarket. The skills required rely on grass roots experience gained from learning to ride and hack out.

The vast majority of horse riders are female. Equestrian sport is one of the few (if not the only?) physical sport where men and women compete equally successfully for the same prizes.

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This is in addition to the well recorded benefits of horse riding which we know contributes to fitness and wellbeing both, mentally and physically.

All the above benefits rely on safe, off-road access to suitably surfaced public rights of way – amenities which are not being protected nor enhanced by the documents included in this consultation.

Since November 2010 BHS national records show that there have been 15,496 road incidents involving horses, 47 people have lost their lives and 1,686 have been injured, 636 horses have been killed and 1,522 horses have been injured.

S.106 Agreement Procedure

It is essential that stakeholders are consulted before the S.106 is agreed. Rights of Way stakeholder representatives are very well informed about the requirements of the groups they represent, and their voices should be given considerable weight.

The Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum is a statutory body which should also be consulted prior to any agreement being reached. If they are not consulted at that stage, the next opportunity would be at Planning Application stage when the S.106 has already been decided and it would be too late for their comments and input to have effect.

The viability review mechanism is an important policy in terms of rights of way and leisure route provision where a large tranche of land is being developed piecemeal without the input of a master developer. The individual sites would not be sufficient in themselves to claim a route but had the entire site come forward for planning in one go, there would have been the opportunity to require leisure / right of way provision e.g. peripheral bridleway. Every opportunity should be taken to future proof access provision given the current requirement for housing, including potential for linking two separate, but adjoining sites. Clearly, such a process would need careful wording to ensure that clever planning applications are not able to avoid being required to deliver this provision e.g. by exclusion of a small tranche of land to complete a circular route.

Active Travel

Active travel is a growing focus in urban planning, as governments aim to promote healthier lifestyles, reduce congestion, and decrease environmental impact. Policies often emphasize the use of bicycles as a primary mode of active transport, with campaigns targeting cyclists for infrastructure development, safety, and accessibility.

While much of this focus is beneficial in encouraging physical activity, there exists a significant oversight regarding the role of women in active travel and the inclusion of equestrian users in these policies. Despite the fact that more women engage in horse riding compared to men riding bicycles, equestrian needs are largely excluded from active travel initiatives.

Whilst walking is included in active travel, it is urban travel on sealed surfaces required by ATE and LTN 1/20. Active travel does not provide adequately for pedestrians wanting to access the countryside and walk on natural surfaces. It does not provide for dog walkers nor runners needing softer, natural surfaces. It does not provide for off road cyclists wanting to travel on natural surfaces.

Cambridgeshire has declared that equestrians are not part of active travel and are excluded from these extremely costly new schemes. At the same time, there is very little funding available for maintenance and creation of the Rights of Way network which includes bridleways, byways and restricted byways – the paths available to equestrians. This results in unnecessary dangerous road safety situations with equestrians forced off safe access and into the traffic flow. The consequences resulting from this exclusion of vulnerable road users, do not meet the aims of Vision Zero.

Meanwhile, public money (vast quantities of it) is being found to ‘improve’ the rights of way network for cyclists – this means creating environmentally damaging sealed surface paths totally unsuitable for soft surface users (walkers, runners, dog walkers, off road cyclists and equestrians as well as those who simply want to travel on natural surfaces in green and pleasant surroundings.) Examples of these disastrous ‘improved’ rights of way are Reynolds Drove byway, Wilsons Road bridleway and the Mere Way byway, an ancient green Roman Road which is now technically a tarmac road. The Mere Way is an example of how a S.106 Agreement failed. This SPD provides an opportunity to ensure that cannot happen again.

Active travel paths for urban walking and cycling are needed in addition to rights of way paths, not instead of them.

Interestingly, this is East West Rail’s definition of active travel:

Active Travel	Making journeys in physically active ways - like walking, wheeling (using a wheelchair or mobility aid), cycling, scootering or riding a horse.
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A definition which the BHS would support.

Green Infrastructure (GI)

Unlike rights of way, GI is widely referenced throughout this SPD document. GI is included in the South Cambs Local Plan. It is included in the Cambridge Local Plan. GI is included in the District Design Guide. However, the definitions of GI are different within these documents. In some, rights of way are included as part of GI, in others, including this SPD, they are not.

It would be very easy to misinterpret GI as green rural public paths and conclude that the need to protect and enhance the rural rights of way network is covered under this heading. It is not. On the contrary, it seems to infer that the only purpose of the bridleway network is for urban sealed cycling route opportunities which impacts negatively on the rightful users of the bridleways.

Please can this section be revisited, clarified as to exactly what is included in GI and the rights of way section changed to ensure that the proper protection and enhancement of the rights of way network is included. In particular, it is important to ensure that equestrian and off-road cycle access is included by provision of paths with higher status than footpath.

Rights of Way

The meagre Chapter 21 is the only reference to public rights of way. Developments only ‘may’ create a need for publicly accessible routes on-site or to move in and out of the development and then only to link with existing pedestrian and cycle routes and the wider rights of way network! Equestrians cannot use pedestrian / cycle active travel routes therefore they are, once again excluded. This statement is

highly discriminatory against those residents who want to use soft surface rights of way and not urban style sealed cycle and pedestrian paths. It fails to meet the requirements of the Cambridgeshire ROWIP and CPCA Transport Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

South Cambridgeshire, within its obligations to Public Rights of Way in new developments, (the leisure network which CCC tells us is the network for equestrians as they are excluded from the active travel network), is apparently focussing on delivering **'attractive and safe opportunities for walking, cycling, public transport ..'**. The only provision within the rights of way network for equestrians is **'where appropriate'** with no explanation of how 'appropriate' is to be decided nor by whom.

South Cambs does not even mention carriage driving – a means of transport for both utility and leisure purposes for those people who can no longer or may never have been able to – sit astride a horse or who have some form of mobility challenges or other disabilities. It is hugely discriminatory to fail to even acknowledge the existence of this disadvantaged group particularly given the benefits of Riding for the Disabled which includes the use of carriage driving.

The incredible provision that has been included in this document for wheeling and walking and nothing for equestrians will only serve to highlight the different and inequitable way in which the groups have been served. It will impact negatively on road safety because without access to safe off-road routes, equestrians will be left in the traffic flow which the accident statistics tell us, is not where they should be.

Public Realm

Cambourne was innovative in its day by creating a settlement with a peripheral bridleway. That route has developed into a well-used, much loved, rural buffer encircling the site with a little bit of countryside only a short distance from the village centre. No tarmac, just natural surfaces suitable for all.

The fact that the extension to Cambourne and the design for the new development at Bourn, have extended the bridleway and adopted the idea of linking the route to the rights of way network, is indicative of the success of the peripheral bridleway concept.

That design has been repeated at Wintringham. A visit to the site will demonstrate how well the idea works. A multiuser leisure route around phase 1, a bridleway creation to be delivered around phase 2 and promised multiuser inclusion around phase 3. The Wing development in Cambridge City contains a section of rural bridleway. Residents have said how much they like to see the horses out and about on the bridleway as it makes them feel 'as if we are in the countryside'.

The recent changes to national planning policies to reduce protection of the Green Belt and the countryside from urbanisation, makes it even more essential that green corridors are designed into new developments in Cambridgeshire, which is a rural county. Green rights of way could provide those corridors, benefiting both humans and the environment.

There is nothing in this SPD to encourage rurality into public realm design nor access to the countryside. There is an opportunity within the rights of way section to include the need for a rural peripheral restricted byway around developments and enhance the opportunities for residents. In fact, this is an opportunity for Cambridgeshire to create a policy to ensure that this happens. That concept is already supported by the Cambs ROWIP and NPPF 104.

Highways and Transport

The rights of way network forms part of the public highway infrastructure yet it is not even mentioned. Nor is there any reference to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan in the documents which have informed this SPD.

There is no recognition that equestrians are stated as equally vulnerable road users as cyclists in the Road User Hierarchy and therefore this document fails to provide for them.

According to the Local Plan, Sustainable Travel includes the rights of way network and undertakes to protect and improve the amenity of these routes – that has to include for soft surface users not just walking and cycling. There is no indication of protection of this obligation within the SPD which is an omission.

Consequences of this Document for the Equestrian Industry

This document is full of missed opportunities to protect and enhance the rights of way network for users and for the community which is being created. Protection and enhancement of the rights of way network is required under NPPF 104, the Cambridgeshire ROWIP and the CPCA Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

It fails to use the S.106 opportunities to:

- improve health and wellbeing opportunities for women and girls which is delivered through horse riding and carriage driving,
- maximise the environmental opportunities which green rights of way can bring in terms of BNG,
- protect the environment from loss of green bridleways to fast, smooth surfaced, environmentally damaging, sealed cycling surfaces.
- Improve the public realm by bringing a little bit of rurality into dense urban developments
- to meet equality policies – the vast majority of horse riders are women and girls whereas the majority of cyclists are male.
- it disguises the fact that a large proportion of cycle journeys are for leisure not utility ‘active travel’ – and if that is the case, the provision should be multiuser including access for equestrians.

The safety of equestrians (80% women and girls) has been excluded from the sections entitled Highways and Transport, Public Realm, Green Infrastructure, Active Travel and are only included ‘where appropriate’ in Rights of Way, although, as stated above, there is no information on how ‘appropriate’ is arrived at, nor by whom.

Conclusions

Horse riding and carriage driving is an activity that happens in cities and rural areas with 9% of equestrians having a disability.

Equestrians can be anyone from an older retired person to teachers, nurses and children. We come from all walks of life and deserve to be treated the same as any other outdoor activity for publicly funded projects.

The exclusion of equestrian users from active travel projects and failure to enhance and protect the rights of way network, represents a significant gap in both gender equality and transportation policy. While women are more likely to engage in horse riding than men in cycling, they are not given the same level of support in active travel initiatives.

To encourage more women to participate in physical activity and to align with broader goals of promoting gender equality in sport, it is crucial for policymakers to recognize the needs of equestrians and include them in active travel policies and projects. By doing so, LA's can create a more inclusive, equitable, and effective approach to promoting active travel for all individuals, regardless of their chosen mode of transportation.

Throughout, this SPD promotes urban style walking, cycling and wheeling opportunities from which horse riders are excluded but promotes off road access for these groups, often designed to bring cyclists on the inside of horse riders which is contrary to the highway code and impacts negatively on road safety for all users. There is opportunity within this SPD to correct the imbalance and improve the rights of way provision. This document is a request for that opportunity to be taken.

Lynda Warth
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