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Introduction

The British Horse Society (BHS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan. We support the vision for sustainable, healthy places and enhanced connectivity. However, the Plan currently lacks explicit and robust policy recognition of equestrian access, particularly within its sustainable transport, active travel and rights of way provisions. This omission risks perpetuating the exclusion of horse riders and carriage drivers from many proposed routes, despite their significant economic, social and health contributions. Enhancing equestrian access in the Local Plan will help deliver genuinely inclusive, multi-user networks that benefit the wider community.

Policy I/ST – Sustainable Transport and Connectivity

Object.

The BHS supports the overall aims of Policy I/ST in promoting sustainable transport, reducing car dependency, and improving connectivity through non-motorised routes. We particularly welcome the recognition that new development should connect to the wider Rights of Way network.

Concern:

While the policy refers to walking, cycling and wheeling, equestrian users are only referenced inconsistently and, in places, conditionally (“where appropriate”). This risks equestrian access being omitted at the detailed design and delivery stage, despite horse riders and carriage drivers being recognised nationally as legitimate non-motorised and vulnerable road users.

Evidence shows that horse riders currently have access to only around 22% of the public rights of way network, with carriage drivers limited to approximately 5%, frequently forcing equestrians onto busy roads. This presents clear safety, accessibility and equality concerns and undermines the Plan’s objectives for inclusive sustainable transport.

Requested Modification

- Policy I/ST should be strengthened to ensure that equestrian access is embedded as a core requirement rather than an optional consideration.
- Specifically, the policy should:
 - Explicitly include equestrian users wherever non-motorised, active travel or sustainable transport routes are referenced.
 - Require new and improved routes to be designed as multi-user routes that are safe and accessible for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians.

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- Require development proposals to demonstrate how equestrian connectivity to the existing bridleway and restricted byway network has been considered and delivered.

Suggested Policy Wording

“Development proposals must provide high-quality, safe and convenient multi-user routes for pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair users and equestrians, connecting to other settlements and the existing and proposed Rights of Way network.”

Policy BG/GI – Green and Blue Infrastructure

Object.

The British Horse Society supports Policy BG/GI in principle.

Concern:

The BHS considers that stronger alignment with Policy I/ST is required. While green infrastructure includes access routes, the policy does not clearly reference public rights of way or equestrian users.

Requested modification:

To ensure consistency with sustainable transport objectives, BG/GI should explicitly require protection and enhancement of bridleways / byways and other rights of way, and the delivery of safe, inclusive multi-user routes suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians, including carriage drivers. This would ensure green infrastructure supports connectivity, health and wellbeing in line with the Plan’s transport policies.

Suggested Policy wording

Development proposals must protect and enhance existing public rights of way, including bridleways and byways, and deliver new or improved multi-user routes as part of green and blue infrastructure networks. Routes should be designed to safely accommodate pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians, including carriage drivers, and provide inclusive connections to the wider rights of way, other settlements and the transport network.

Policy GP/QP – Establishing High Quality Landscape and Public Realm

Object.

The BHS supports the ambition of Policy GP/QP to create inclusive, well-designed public spaces that promote health, wellbeing and accessibility.

Concern:

The policy focuses heavily on pedestrian and cycle movement but does not explicitly recognise equestrian users where green corridors, public realm routes and landscape connections link to the wider countryside or Rights of Way network.

Without explicit inclusion, there is a risk that design features such as narrow paths, unsuitable surfacing, restrictive barriers or exclusionary signage will unintentionally prevent equestrian use, even where routes logically connect to bridleways or rural access networks.

Requested Modification

Policy GP/QP should:

- Explicitly recognise equestrians as legitimate users of landscape corridors and public realm routes where these connect to the Rights of Way network.
- Require route design to avoid physical or legal barriers that exclude horse riders, unless there is an exceptional, clear and justified reason.
- Promote consistent, inclusive design standards that accommodate a range of users safely.

Suggested Policy Wording

“Public realm and landscape routes should be designed to support safe and inclusive movement for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians, particularly where they connect to existing or proposed Rights of Way.”

Active Travel and Health & Wellbeing Policies WS/HD and WS/CF

Object.

The BHS strongly supports the Plan’s emphasis on active travelling, health, wellbeing and access to green space.

Concern:

Throughout the Plan, “active travel” is generally defined in practice as walking and cycling only. This is inconsistent with national transport and health evidence, which recognises horse riding as a physically active mode of travel that delivers significant physical and mental health benefits.

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/ganngxh/health-benefits-of-riding-in-the-uk-full-report.pdf>

Research indicates that high proportions of riders engage in sustained activity (e.g. 30 + minutes at least three times weekly), helping them meet government guidelines for physical activity. The majority of riders are women, often in age groups with traditionally lower rates of physical exercise, meaning improved equestrian access supports wider health equity.

Requested Modification

All policies that promote active travel, healthy lifestyles and access to green infrastructure should:

- Explicitly include equestrian activity within the definition of active travel, unless there is an exceptional justified reason for exclusion.
- Recognise the contribution of equestrian access to physical activity, mental wellbeing, and social inclusion by improving accessibility for diverse demographic groups, including women and older adults.
- Apply design criteria that allow safe horse movement alongside other users.
- Signage and wayfinding must be clear for multiple user groups.

Suggested Supporting wording

“Active travel includes walking, cycling and equestrian activity, all of which contribute to physical health, mental wellbeing and sustainable movement.”

Rights of Way Network and Green Infrastructure Policies BG/RC, BG/PO, BG/EO

Object.

The BHS welcomes the Plan’s commitment to enhancing green infrastructure and improving connectivity between communities and the countryside.

Concern:

There is insufficient clarity that Rights of Way improvements will deliver new bridleways, upgraded routes and safe crossings for equestrians, rather than focusing primarily on pedestrian and cycle infrastructure.

This is particularly important where new development creates or exacerbates barriers such as major roads, railways or rivers, which disproportionately affect equestrians due to limited legal access options.

Requested Modification

Policies relating to green infrastructure and connectivity should:

- Commit to the creation of new bridleways/ restricted byways and the upgrading of footpaths to bridleways or restricted byways where appropriate.

- Ensure that new bridges, underpasses and crossings are designed as genuinely multi-user structures, suitable for horses.
- Prevent the loss or downgrading of existing equestrian access through development.

Suggested Policy wording:

Development proposals must protect, enhance and extend the public rights of way network. Proposals shall deliver new bridleways or restricted byways and, where appropriate, upgrade existing footpaths to bridleways or restricted byways to maintain and improve connectivity. Where development creates or exacerbates severance, including through roads, railways or other barriers, safe, direct and convenient crossings must be provided that are designed from the outset as genuinely multi-user infrastructure suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. Development must not result in the loss, severance or downgrading of existing equestrian access.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Object.

The BHS notes that the Cambridgeshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) does not appear to be explicitly referenced within the Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan. The ROWIP is a statutory document that sets out priorities for the management, improvement and accessibility of the public rights of way network and is directly relevant to policies on green infrastructure, sustainable transport, active travel and open space provision.

The Local Plan should formally reference the ROWIP within its evidence base and policy framework to ensure alignment, consistency and effective delivery of rights of way improvements through new development.

Failure to reference the ROWIP risks a lack of policy alignment and effective delivery of rights of way and multi-user access improvements through development. The Local Plan should formally include the ROWIP within its evidence base to ensure soundness and effective implementation.

Economic and Rural Policy Considerations Policy JR/E

Object .

The BHS supports the Plan’s objectives for supporting the rural economy and sustainable communities.

Concern

The equestrian sector contributes over £4 billion annually to the UK economy and supports significant rural employment, tourism and small businesses. Access to a safe and connected Rights of Way network is fundamental to the viability of riding schools, livery yards, equestrian tourism and associated services and the equestrian industry in general. In Cambridgeshire, the equestrian industry, excluding the racing industry, contributes over £115 million pa. Nationally, the industry is the second largest rural employer. Currently, the significant contribution that the equestrian industry makes to the rural economy is not specifically supported within the Local Plan.

Requested Modification

The Plan should explicitly recognise:

- The economic importance of equestrian activity.
- The role of Rights of Way and multi-user routes in supporting rural livelihoods.
- The need to protect and enhance equestrian access as part of sustainable rural development

Suggested policy wording

The rural economy will be supported by recognising and facilitating the economic contribution of equestrian activity, including riding schools, livery yards, equestrian tourism and associated rural businesses. Development proposals affecting rural areas must protect and, where appropriate, enhance

access to the public rights of way network, including bridleways and other multi-user routes, to support rural livelihoods, tourism and sustainable communities. Proposals should demonstrate that equestrian access is safeguarded and integrated as part of sustainable rural development.

Conclusion

The British Horse Society supports the strategic direction of the Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan. However, to deliver a genuinely inclusive, safe and sustainable transport and access network, the Plan must explicitly and consistently include equestrian users across its sustainable transport, active travel, public realm, green infrastructure and Rights of Way policies.

Without clear policy direction, equestrian access will continue to be excluded at the delivery stage, undermining the Plan's objectives for health, wellbeing, equality, safety and rural economic resilience.

We urge the Councils to:

- Amend policy wording to fully embed equestrian access in multi-user provision.
- Set clear standards for inclusive route design.
- Recognise the economic, social and health contributions of equestrianism in justifying investment in inclusive rights of way.

The BHS therefore requires targeted amendments to strengthen policy wording and ensure that equestrian access is fully embedded in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. By doing so, the Plan will better meet its sustainability and wellbeing goals and ensure Greater Cambridge's rights of way and transport networks are truly inclusive for all.

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