

Patron Her Majesty The Queen

The British Horse Society

Email enquiry@bhs.org.uk

Abbey Park,

Website www.bhs.org.uk

Stareton,

Kenilworth,

Warwickshire CV8 2XZ

The logo for The British Horse Society, featuring the text "The British Horse Society" in white on a dark red background.

Bringing Horses and People Together

Canterbury District Local Plan

Via email consultations@canterbury.gov.uk

8th May 2024

RE: Canterbury District Local Plan consultation

I am responding to this consultation on behalf of The British Horse Society, the UK's largest equestrian charity, representing the country's 3 million horse riders.

The questions contained within the consultation questionnaire do not lend themselves to our response and so we are submitting it in this letter.

Our response is fundamentally the same as that submitted in December 2022 albeit that individual policy numbers and page numbers have not been referenced. (Please find our December response attached) A summary of our proposals are at the foot of this letter.

Key information

- **3813ⁱ passported horses** are owned by people living in the postcodes contained within Canterbury District Council area, contributing in excess of **£26 millionⁱⁱ** to the economy, much of which is spent locally (feed, bedding, farriers, vets, riding instructors and riding schools, etc.).
- Horse riders have the right to access just **16.7% of the public rights of way network in Kent**, with substantially less for carriage drivers. Many of these routes are inaccessible or disconnected as a result of increased traffic and/or development.
- British Horse Society statistics for road incidents involving horses and riders for 2023 show that:
 - A total of 3,383 road incidents involving horses were recorded with the BHS
 - Of those, 66 horses died and 86 were injured
 - Three people died, and 94 people were injured
 - 23% of riders were victims of road rage or abuse
 - 85% of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too closely or quickly.
- Research undertaken by the University of Brighton and Plumpton College on behalf of The British Horse Societyⁱⁱⁱ found that
 - More than two thirds (68%) of respondents participated in horse riding and associated activities for 30 minutes or more at least three times a week. Sport England estimates that such a level of sporting activity will help an individual achieve or exceed the government's recommended minimum level of physical activity.
 - A range of evidence indicates the vast majority (90% plus) of horse riders are female and more than a third (37%) of the female riders of respondents were above 45 years of age. **Horse riding is especially well placed to play a valuable role in initiatives to encourage increased physical activity amongst women of all ages.**
 - Amongst the horse riders who took part in the survey, 39% had taken no other form of physical activity in the last four weeks. This highlights the importance of riding to these people, who might otherwise be sedentary.

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- **Horse riders with a long-standing illness or disability** who took part in the survey are able to undertake horse riding and associated activities at the same self-reported level of frequency and physical intensity as those without such an illness or disability.

For all the reasons detailed, it is evident that there are sound financial, health and wellbeing and safety reasons for ensuring the inclusion of equestrians within planning policies as well as walkers and cyclists.

Planning Policy, etc.

National Planning Policy Framework

*“104. Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, **including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users**, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.” (my emphasis)*

Providing for equestrians within this plan meets with NPPF requirements.

Kent County Council Right of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

The ROWIP has a significant role in supporting sustainable economic growth in the county, directly contributing to transport, green infrastructure and open spaces; three areas identified in Kent and Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework as critical to support growth in the period to 2031. Much of this is only achievable through support from local councils in their planning policies.

“The ROWIP will aim to encourage active lifestyles through:[...]”

- *working in partnership with planning authorities and developers to create well-designed, accessible environments that encourage active travel and walking, cycling and horse riding as leisure and recreational pursuits.”*

AL01 Increase health & wellbeing benefits

“1.3 Improve connectivity and consider equestrian and other parking where reasonable to encourage recreational and leisure activity; including access to country parks, honey pot sites and other facilities of high leisure use, such as National Trails, promoted routes and routes within and leading to AONBs.”

“1.5 Work with partners to support implementation of health improvement initiatives, such as Walking for Health, cycling and equestrian initiatives and GP referrals.”

AL02 Active Travel

“1.9 Provide motorised traffic free, safe walking, cycling and equestrian and routes linking to towns, urban and rural areas. Seek to provide longer distance links between urban centres.”

KT06 Grow New Markets

“3.17 Improving priority routes which facilitate horse riding, cycling and walking for more targeted tourist leisure and recreational use”

It is evident from a health & well-being viewpoint, as well as an economic one, that the Borough Council should include the needs of equestrians in every aspect of their plan but in particular those aspects involving active travel and health and wellbeing. *Most* walking and cycling journeys are made for leisure purposes and *most* journeys on horse-back or in a horse and carriage are also made for leisure purposes. Active Travel does not mean Active Commuting; it simply means using an active means of getting from A to B. It should not preclude equestrians because few can ride or carriage drive to work or school.

Proposals

- Wherever walking and cycling is mentioned in any policies, so too should horse riding and carriage driving (unless there are cogent and insurmountable reasons for their exclusion).

- The requirement to upgrade existing footpaths to bridleways or restricted byways where onward connectivity is desirable (for equestrians as well as cyclists) to local roads and other bridleways and byways should form part of planning policy.
- Internal “loops”/green space within development boundaries should include equestrians by default.
- Alongside new developments, “behind the hedge” paths should be required next to roads to keep NMU/VRUs off the roads wherever possible.
- Developer contributions should be sought to provide local equestrian light controlled crossings (for the benefit of all NMU/VRUs) where required or where likely to be required in the future with further development thus improving safety and improving and/or maintaining connectivity.
- Existing PROW must NOT be used as access roads nor should they be “improved” (sealed surface for example) for access travel to the detriment of equestrians and leisure users.
- The aspirations of KCC’s ROWIP should be borne in mind in all applications. It is obvious in larger proposed developments but even quite small sites might provide key locations for improvement.
- The protection and provision of routes primarily for leisure purposes for all VRUs should be given equal balance to those for commuting. Health and wellbeing is so important for all

As always, we would be very willing to work with the Council and would-be developers in providing these improvements for EVERY vulnerable road user.

Yours faithfully

Sarah Rayfield (Mrs.)
Access Field Officer – London & South East

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ⁱ DEFRA Fol Request April 2021

ⁱⁱ BETA – The National Equestrian Survey 2023

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