

Local Plan Team
Canterbury District Council
Via email consultations@canterbury.gov.uk

16th October 2025

Dear Canterbury District Council

RE: Draft Canterbury District Focused consultation (Regulation 18) September 2025

I am responding to this consultation on behalf of the British Horse Society, the UK's largest equestrian charity with over 126,000 members and representing the country's 3.2 million horse riders.

Economy

There are almost **42,000 horsesⁱ** passported to owners living in Kent, contributing **£289 million per annumⁱⁱ** to the economy, much of which is spent locally (vets, farriers, feed and hay suppliers, etc.)

Safety

In 2024, British Horse Society (BHS) recorded 3,118 road incidents involving horses, resulting in 58 horses being killed and 97 injured, along with 80 human injuries. The vast majority of these incidents, 81%, were caused by vehicles passing too closely or too quickly, despite the updated Highway Code guidance for safe passing. We know that these statistics are the tip of the iceberg in respect of the real numbers. NHS statistics indicate that in 2023/24 there were **2,493 hospital admissions** for "Animal-rider or occupant of animal-drawn vehicle injured in transport accident"ⁱⁱⁱ.

Gender Split in equestrianism

Sport England states 88% of adult equestrians and 85% of children or young people are female^{iv}.

Health Benefits of Riding

The BHS commissioned research into the physical health, psychological and wellbeing benefits of recreational horse riding in the United Kingdom which was published in 2010. It assessed riding as a moderate intensity exercise and examined the frequency with which individuals take part. Reliable evidence indicates that physical exercise produces wellbeing benefits linked to social interaction and changes in mood, anxiety, self-esteem and other personal emotions. The report also finds that,

"the existence of a disability or long standing illness does not appear to affect the level of exercise intensity or frequency and 46% of respondents with a disability or long standing illness reported horse riding as medium/high intensity exercise and had participated 12 or more times in the last month, compared to 47% of the sample as whole. This indicates that nearly half of the respondents with a disability or long standing illness are horse riding at a frequency and level of physical intensity that will generate health benefits."

The report is available on www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice under Other publications. See also *Nature Relatedness of Recreational Horseback Riders and Its Association with Mood and Wellbeing* (Schwarz Müller-Erber, Stummer, Maier, Kundi)^v

National Planning Policy Framework

96. Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

c) enable and support healthy lives, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs and reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities [...]

105. Planning policies and decisions should **protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, [...]**

For horses. For people. For life.

British Horse Society is an Appointed Representative of SEIB Insurance Brokers Limited (Firm reference 479477) who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

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125. Planning policies and decisions should:

a) encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or **improve public access to the countryside**;

DEFRA Circular 1/09 Rights of Way^{vi}

7.1 Proposals for the development of land affecting public rights of way give rise to two matters of particular concern: the need for adequate consideration of the rights of way before the decision on the planning application is taken...

7.2 The effect of development on a public rights of way is a material consideration in the determination of applications for planning permission and local planning authorities should ensure that the potential consequences are taken into account whenever such applications are considered.

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**”

(my emphasis)

Opportunities for equestrian inclusion within the Canterbury District Local Plan

Despite being a district with a large equestrian population and which is still largely rural, the Plan makes no mention of equestrians. This exclusion risks the health, safety and wellbeing of those residents.

- In its now withdrawn Active Travel: Local Authority Toolkit^{vii}, the Government defined active travel as “modes of travel that involve a level of activity”. Whilst the primary purpose of active travel routes is to encourage people to travel to and from work and school without using the car, the recreational use of these routes must not be discounted and, indeed, is likely to be the primary use in many areas. Where new active travel provision is made this must include equestrians. (See KCC LCWIP AL02 above)
- Where road crossings are proposed as part of development, these must facilitate equestrian use
- Green corridors – where these allow walking and, especially, cycling they should include equestrians too.
- All provision for pedestrian and cycle access needs to include equestrians unless there are cogent and unresolvable reasons for their exclusion.
- NO improvements made for walkers and cyclists should ever be to the potential detriment of equestrian safety.

- Consultation with local users – wherever any new, off-road provision or change in the highway or rights of way infrastructure is proposed, all users should be consulted on matters such as the width and surfacing of shared routes and provision at road crossings.

The British Horse Society would be happy to work with the Council and future developers in ensuring the above but the inclusion of equestrians within the Local Plan would provide a good foundation for those discussions.

Yours faithfully

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Access Field Officer – London & South East

ⁱ DEFRA FoI December 2024

ⁱⁱ BETA 2023

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2023-24>

^{iv} https://www.britishequestrian.org.uk/assets/EXTRA_Docs/Short%20State%20of%20the%20Nation.pdf

^v <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7312614/>

^{vi} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rights-of-way-circular-1-09>

^{vii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/active-travel-local-authority-toolkit/active-travel-local-authority-toolkit>