

Patron Her Majesty The Queen

The British Horse Society

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Bringing Horses and People Together

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The logo for The British Horse Society, featuring the text "The British Horse Society" in white serif font on a maroon square background.

30th January 2025

Dear Nick,

I am responding on behalf of the British Horse Society, the largest UK equestrian charity with over 117,000 members representing the 3 million horse riders in the UK.

We welcome the mention of horse riders within the current plan, thank you. However, your plan does not go far enough to enable real, tangible change for the better.

The BHS is very willing to work constructively and collaboratively with you to help improve your plans to assist in meeting equestrian needs in the area.

It is also vital to consider our contributions in context of the national work the British Horse Society has been doing regarding road safety (lack of) for horse riders, who are recognised under the Highway Code as vulnerable road users. Many horse and pony riders using the roads are children, a fact that may not be immediately obvious to a car driver seeing a rider on a horse.

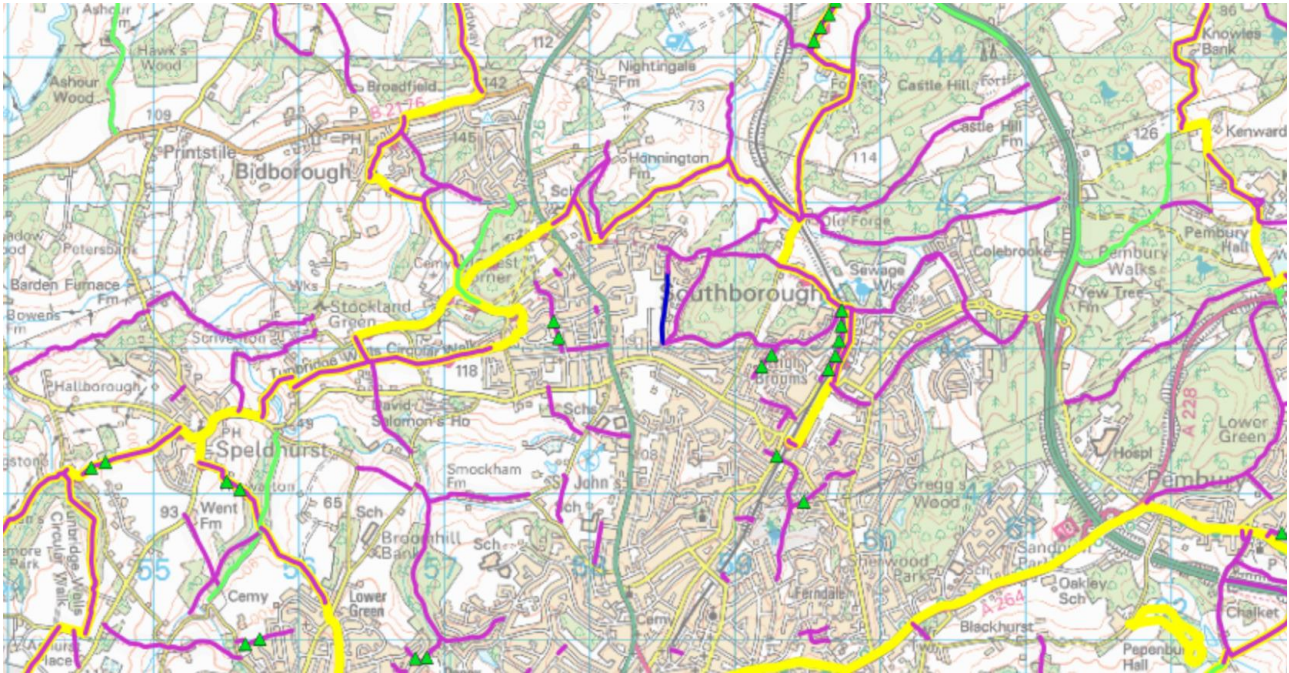
Although once (not too long ago), roads were entirely the domain of the horse and carriage, they are now shared with many motorised users. The roads are becoming increasingly dangerous for horse riders and carriage drivers because of the increasing volume of motor traffic. Bridleways and restricted byways are so important to enable safe travel for equestrians, safe off-road riding.

The most recent figures from KCC indicate that **18% of the public rights of way network is available to horse riders and 6% is available to carriage drivers**. When was the last time you saw a horse and rider on Southborough Common or on a road in the High Brooms area? They are simply pushed out.

Horse riders in the Southborough and High Brooms area currently have nowhere to ride out except on the roads (see KCC's ROW map below, green and blue indicate equestrian access on a bridleway or restricted byway).

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Active Travel

Whilst the BHS supports the national initiative to encourage more cycling and walking as part of Active Travel Plans it is *imperative* that Active Travel plans ALSO includes equestrians.

The government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy Safety Review says:

"1.2 But safety has particular importance for vulnerable road users, such as walkers, cyclists and horse riders. All road users have an equal right to use the road, and safety and the perception of safety are key factors in determining how far people use these modes of transport. The safer they feel, the more they will use these active modes of travel. The more people who use Active Travel, the fitter and healthier they will be, and the more their communities will benefit from lower congestion and better air quality, among a host of other benefits"(Jesse Norman, Minister for Transport p 4)

Jesse Norman in House of Commons debate on Road Safety, 5 November 2018:

"We should be clear that the cycling and walking strategy may have that name but is absolutely targeted at vulnerable road users, including horse-riders"

And final point by Jesse Norman in debate:

"Horse riders are vulnerable road users—there is no doubt about that, and there never has been—and they have been included in the work we are doing."

Health & Wellbeing

THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF HORSE RIDING IN THE UK

(Data comes from research undertaken by the University of Brighton and Plumpton College on behalf of The British Horse Society)

- These are comparable figures to a major Sport England survey which found that 90 percent of those participating in equestrianism are women and 37 percent of the female participants in equestrianism are aged 45 or above. **The gender and age profile of equestrianism is not matched by any other sport in the UK^[1].**

^[1] Sport England (2010) Active People Survey (2010/11)

- 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.**
- 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 further information, please see:

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/~media/documents/marketing/health-benefits-of-riding-in-the-uk-full-report.ashx?la=en>

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/~media/documents/access/access-leaflets/statisticsarow-1119.ashx?la=en>

There is mention in your plan of removing steps on a bridleway to benefit horse riders and other users. Yes, this is welcome. However, there is no further suggestion around specific potential equestrian improvements, while plenty for walkers and cyclists. Yes, more people ride bikes and walk than they ride horses, however this is largely caused by lack of access and opportunity. Those opportunities are shrinking and without real suggestions for increasing the likelihood of more people riding to and from destinations or enjoying riding as a leisure activity, things are not going to improve. Any new routes to include cyclists, can also include equestrians. A restricted byway allows for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers.

Policy SHB13 goes some way to suggest support for upgrades for equestrian access but without a specific, detailed plan and KCC/TWBC support, it is mere lip service rather than an intentional plan.

There is a table for potential improvements for walkers and a table for potential improvements for cyclists. Where is the table for equestrians?

Yours faithfully,

Anna Hawkins

British Horse Society Volunteer Assistant Access Officer for Tunbridge Wells Borough