Patron Her Majesty The Queen

Bringing Horses and People Together

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Chichester Local Plan team
Via email: planningpolicy@chichester.gov.uk

11th December 2024

Dear Planning Team,

RE: Southbourne Allocation Development Plan Document - Reg 18 Consultation

I am responding to this email on behalf of the British Horse Society.

The BHS is the UK's largest equestrian charity with 125,000 members and represents the country's 3.2 million horse riders. One of our charitable objectives is "*to promote and secure the provision, protection and preservation of rights of way and of access for ridden and driven horses over public roads, highways, footpaths, bridleways, carriageways, public paths and other land.*"

- **Almost 16,000[i] passported horses** are owned by people living in the postcodes contained within Chichester District Council area, contributing in excess of **£110 million[ii]** per annum 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 **22% of the public rights of way network** nationally, with substantially less for carriage drivers. Many of these routes are inaccessible or disconnected as a result of increased traffic and/or development.
- Research undertaken by the University of Brighton and Plumpton College on behalf of The British Horse Society[iii] 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.
  - **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.**

Planning Policy, etc.

National Planning Policy Framework

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

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(c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

Including provision for equestrians within the "*equal opportunities for all*" referred to in Objectives 4.5 would make this objective truly equal.

Pedestrian / cycle bridge

5.10. Across the scenarios there are opportunities to improve pedestrian and cycle connectivity, by either introducing new crossing points or improving the existing informal crossing points.

Any crossings or improvement of informal crossings must include equestrians too, especially where onward connectivity is bridleway or otherwise suitable for equestrians.

Road Safety

Road Safety is a particular concern to equestrians, who are among the most vulnerable road users. Data shows that 3,383 road incidents involving horses were reported to the British Horse Society (BHS) in 2023. Among these, 66 horses died, 86 horses were injured; 3 people died and 94 people were injured because of road incidents. 85% of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too closely or too quickly. Research indicates however that only 1 in 10 incidents are being reported to the BHS. In 2021 alone, **3,288 horse riders and carriage drivers in England and Wales were admitted to hospital after being injured in transport accidents**. (NHS Hospital Episodes Statistics). These figures demonstrate how important it is that planning authorities, developers, Highways and Strategic Transport understand the requirement for safe access for equestrians both on the roads and the links to the Public Rights of Way (PROW) Network.

Safe crossings for **all** vulnerable road users over and connectivity beyond the A27 and A259 through Southbourne should be a priority for any non motorised user projects.

Pedestrian/cycle routes can best be provided via a public bridleway which provides better value for the tax payer with more users accommodated and keeps more users safe.

Sustrans Paths for Everyone

"We want to see a UK-wide network of traffic-free paths for everyone, connecting cities, towns and countryside, loved by the communities they serve."
The BHS is working with Sustrans to remove barriers to equestrian access wherever possible.

Highway Code Rule 215

Along with information on how to pass horse riders and carriage drivers safely, the Code reminds road users that, *"Horse riders are often children, so take extra care and remember riders may ride in double file when escorting a young or inexperienced horse or rider."* At the present time in too many areas we have the situation where a young child on their pony is afforded less protection than an older child or adult on their bike.

West Sussex County Council Right of Way Management Plan (2018-2028) (extracts)

"Ensuring visitors and local people alike have the opportunity to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of large parts of the West Sussex countryside is important. The rights of way network is a much valuable resource. It contributes to people being able to lead a healthy lifestyle whether enjoying the fresh air, appreciating wildlife and the landscape, improving fitness and well-being, exploring on foot, by bike or by horse, or simply to walk the dog."

*"The Council's Vision for PRoW in West Sussex is: To enable people to enjoy the countryside on foot, **by horse** and by bicycle, for health, recreation and to access services, while recognising the need to balance*

this with the interests of those who live and work in the countryside and the management of special landscapes."

"Horse riders – use local rides (bridleways, byways and quiet roads) where they exist for daily recreation and horse exercising. Whilst some horse riders box their horse to areas further afield, the majority of riders have no access to horse transport"

"While bridleways and restricted byways on the chalk ridge of the South Downs provide good access for these users, the coastal plain has virtually no suitable access for horses."

"In the north east of West Sussex, the limited bridleway network often lacks connectivity or is severed by the road network."

"A starting point for new schemes will be to consider who could benefit from a new route, such as walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and the disabled, and be as inclusive as possible, often the aim will be to achieve at least bridleway status"

It can be seen from the above that West Sussex County Council believes that equestrians are a user group for which provision is lacking in some areas and that the assumption for new provision is that bridleway status should be the minimum status.

Equality Act 2010

The arguments for inclusivity of walkers and cyclists can be extended to equestrians using the mechanism of the Equality Duty. This is a **form of discrimination**, and the Equality Act 2010 created a Public Sector Equality Duty for organisations to provide equal opportunities for all, which means that an organisation **needs a cogent reason for excluding equestrians**. The majority of off-road routes can and should accommodate *all* non-motorised vulnerable road users – pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians and mobility buggy users. None of these users should be excluded and forced onto carriageways with the increased danger that entails. This would then mean they would be truly (non-mechanically propelled) multi-user routes (Multi-user has no legal definition and is often confused in its meaning but generally means all users, not only pedestrians.) The BHS considers it to mean all non-motorised users.

Conclusion

We ask, not that equestrians should receive special treatment, but that, for all the reasons stated above, they are not *excluded* from provision for other vulnerable road users. Housing development encompassing or connected to public rights of way should be required to upgrade footpaths to bridleways (or restricted byways) and routes ordinarily identified as walking/cycling routes on plans should be created as public bridleways and added to the definitive map, thereby giving clear identification of the protected status and the maintenance responsibilities. Road crossings and railway crossings need to be fully "multi modal" with connectivity for all to both sides.

Highways improvements making provision for walkers and cyclists should also include equestrians unless there are cogent, irresolvable reasons for not doing so. We acknowledge that active travel provision is likely to be biased towards utility journeys (or even just active commuting) BUT these same routes will still be used safely by walkers and cyclists for leisure purposes, especially those on the outskirts of towns and villages. Furthermore, this provision need not *exclude* equestrians even if specific provision cannot be made for them. We already know that, where safe access is available, people DO use their horses for active travel: to visit the farm shop, collect the children from school, place their vote, post a letter, withdraw cash from the ATM, etc. The BHS works in partnership with other user groups, local and central government to make rights of way and other access areas useful and open to all, and our roads safer for all users. In the same way, we would be more than willing to work with Chichester DC in this regard.

Yours faithfully

Sarah Rayfield (Mrs.)
Access Field Officer – London & South East
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[i] DEFRA FoI Request April 2021
[ii] BETA – The National Equestrian Survey 2023
[iii] https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/gannghxh/health-benefits-of-riding-in-the-uk-full-report.pdf