

Bringing Horses and People Together

Local Plans Team
South Staffordshire Council

13 December 2021

Dear Local Plans Team

The response below is from the British Horse Society however our volunteers in the county may also respond at a local level.

The British Horse Society is the UK's largest equestrian Charity, with over 118,000 members representing the UK's 3 million horse riders. Nationally equestrians have just 22% of the rights of way network and are increasingly forced to use busy roads to access them.

Between 29.02.2020 – 28.02.2021

- 1,010 road incidents involving horses have been reported to The British Horse Society
- 46 horses have died
- 118 horses have been injured
- 130 people have been injured
- 45% of riders were victims to road rage or abuse
- 80% of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too closely to the horse
- 43% of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too quickly

This illustrates the importance of protecting, improving and extending safe off-road provision will help to prevent these numbers from increasing in the future.

Policies DS2, DS1 and SA1-4 refer to sustainable travel and recreational assets and maintaining character and openness of green belt and open countryside. Public Rights of Way (PRoW) are an important part of this, connecting communities and providing access to the countryside. 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. 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). Housing growth proposed is likely to increase pressure on roads and impact on vulnerable road users. Jesse Norman in House of Commons debate on Road Safety, 5 November 2018 said: "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". 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."

Policy DS3 refers to supporting 'tourism, sport and recreation' in rural areas. The equestrian industry generates £4.7 billion of consumer spending, £4,174 per horse (BETA, 2019) to the economy benefitting local economies where equestrian activities thrive. PRoW and off-road riding/carriage driving routes are

essential to draw equestrian industry and tourism. Protecting and improving existing PRow is one aspect of this – another is extending the PRow network.

Policy DS4 proposes new settlement development. New development plans provide opportunities to improve and extend the bridleway and byway network for the shared enjoyment of equestrians, cyclists and pedestrians. Policy DS4 highlights walkers and cyclists however there is a missed opportunity here to share routes with equestrians to avoid horses and riders/handlers being sandwiched between fast moving MPV traffic on the roads and cyclists on cycling/walking routes. Designing equestrians into development plans will enhance equestrian access and activity, reaping benefits for safety, health and wellbeing. According to BETA two-thirds of equestrians are women and Church et al (2010) found 37% of women who are horse riders are over 45 years of age and over a third would pursue no other physical activity. The therapeutic and physical benefits of horse riding and carriage driving have been proven for people with disabilities (Favali and Milton, 2010).

The BHS, through volunteers and staff, has submitted DMMO applications based on historic and user evidence to be assessed and routes recorded on the Definitive Map. Developments should consider the existence of these routes and opportunities to dedicate additional routes to enhance the network for all non-MPV users.

The BHS has detailed guidance on these crucial matters to ensure all users are included and developers meet requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and associated legislation. <https://www.bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/free-leaflets-and-advice>

The BHS would welcome further consultation.

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