

ADVICE ON
Lobbying

The
British
Horse
Society



Introduction

Lobbying is the process by which individuals or organisations can attempt to influence decision makers (principally politicians) to change the law or policy to benefit the lobbyist.

In England horse riders currently have access to only 22 percent of the public rights of way network, while carriage drivers have access to only five percent. In Wales horse riders have access to only 21 percent of public rights of way and carriage drivers to only six percent. Many rights of way are now disconnected from each other because the roads that should connect them are no longer safe for equestrians to use because of the speed and volume of motorised traffic on them, leaving many equestrians without a safe local route to use.

Successive pieces of legislation have failed to provide any new statutory access for equestrians. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 provided open access for walkers but nothing at all for equestrians. Similarly, the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 provides for a coastal corridor around the English coastline for walkers but no statutory access for equestrians.

It is therefore vital that the Society and all equestrians continue to lobby for more access, to address this inequality of provision.

The Society lobbies and campaigns at national level on behalf of equestrians on many diverse issues.

In addition, it is important that all equestrians lobby their local MP and councillors to ensure that equestrian issues are not forgotten locally. There are no hard or fast rules for successful lobbying, but one of the key things you need to think about is identifying who you need to speak to.

You need to consider who can make a difference, or who is in a position to promote the cause. It is also important to think of other users who may be willing to join forces to pursue your issue.

Members of Parliament

To begin with often the most appropriate person to lobby will be your own MP. As a constituent it is most likely that you will receive a response from him/her. You will soon be able to find out whether he/she is sympathetic to equestrian issues.

You can find out who your existing Member of Parliament is by logging on to www.writetothem.com and typing in your post code.

Members of the Welsh Assembly Government

On 3 March 2011 the people of Wales voted in favour of power being devolved to the Assembly on all the matters listed in Schedule 7 of the Government of Wales Act 2006

The Welsh Government is constituted by the First and other Ministers. You can find out who the Welsh Government Ministers are by visiting www.wales.gov.uk/about/?lang=en.

Councillors

As well as lobbying your own MP, It is also appropriate to lobby at a more local level

through your local councillors (Unitary or County and District) as well as your local parish or community council. You can find out who your local councillor is by contacting your local council or by looking on their website.

MPs and Councillors hold regular surgeries and this is an ideal opportunity to put across your views. Notification of such surgeries is often given in local papers. Alternatively you can contact your MP and council to find out when and where surgeries are taking place.

Local Access Forums

There are 86 Local Access Forums in England. Their main function is to advise their appointing authority as to the improvement of public access to land in that area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area.

There are 29 Local Access Forums in Wales. They advise their local authorities, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government on access developments.

Effective lobbying

Use national and local statistics alongside case studies to highlight the points that you are raising and help you achieve your lobbying goals. Numbers do make a difference. The BHS has some useful statistics online at www.bhs.org.uk/our-charity/press-centre/equestrian-statistics which are a good source of information to use when developing your approach. The Society's commissioned research on the Health Benefits of Riding at www.bhs.org.uk/enjoy-riding/health-benefits may also be useful.

It is important when considering lobbying that you carefully consider what approach you are going to take. A well-reasoned, measured approach which is likely to seem logical even to someone with no knowledge of the issue is more likely to succeed than a hysterical or apparently irrational approach.

It may also be worthwhile to be prepared to be flexible when lobbying for something which will have adverse effects on other individuals (or other voters, in a politician's view). Sometimes offering compromises to those who might not support your position to achieve a partial outcome may be better than no outcome at all.

Politicians do not like to be lobbied for the sake of it: it is a good idea to have different people lobbying on different issues that are directly relevant to them. If politicians are always confronted with the same person lobbying over and over again on different matters they might start to view that person as a serial lobbyist which could be detrimental to their chances of success.

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the local riding club or riding establishment to take up a particular local cause.

It is often most effective when a number of constituents write concerning a particular issue so that the MP and/or Councillor appreciates that it is a matter that affects a number of his/her electorate.

Working Together

Often ramblers and cyclists will be in agreement with what you are trying to achieve. Try to get them to add their support to your issue.

Persistence

Lobbying can be a long process and persistence is required if you want to achieve your aim. You will frequently have to follow up replies that your MP or councillor sends you to ensure that they completely understand the issues and take the action they have promised.

Tips for lobbying

When contacting your MP or local councillor:

- Be brief.
- Ask a question so that they have to reply.
- Give your points local relevance (if possible).
- Remember that he or she may not know your subject, so give sufficient information for understanding but without unnecessary detail.
- Quote some statistics as set out in the Society's website page on statistics.
- Prepare a briefing note for the MP to use in pursuing the cause.
- Get your MP to ask a Minister a question.
- Challenge stereotypes – not all horse owners are wealthy; most make considerable sacrifices to continue to ride.

Other Action

- Invite your lobbying target to an event and try to show him/her the benefit of equestrian activity to the local and national economy.
- Invite him/her to present an award.
- Where they have championed equestrianism present them with an award.
- Local media: press, television and radio coverage (particularly if an award is made).
- If you can arrange press coverage of your issue, send copies of relevant articles to your MP. It is worth making contacts with your local newspaper – it will always be on the lookout for local interest stories or a local aspect of a national story.

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