

The British Horse Society's Equestrian Access Manifesto for the 2024 Westminster General Election.

The British Horse Society (BHS) is a membership charity with over 123,000 members representing the UK's 3.2 million riders and carriage drivers.

More off-road horse riding and carriage driving opportunities are needed:

- i) to help reduce the awful number of current horse collisions that occur on our roads.
 - **In 2023**, 3,383 road incidents involving horses were recorded with the BHS, 66 horses died and 86 were injured, 3 people died, and 94 people were injured.
 - 23% of riders were victims of road rage or abuse, and 85% of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too closely or quickly.
- ii) because horse riders currently have a legal right to use just 22% of the public off-road rights of way network and carriage drivers just 5%. The public rights of way network is a valuable resource and would be so much more valuable if legal access could be given to other users for those routes, that currently only walkers can access, but which could, reasonably, accommodate other users as well.
- iii) to ensure that the horse industry continues to grow. Most horse riders and carriage drivers are women and children. Their passion provides them with regular physical activity that continues into later life. Those with physical disabilities gain greater independence and there are also established mental health benefits. Many equestrians spend a great deal of their spare time and disposable income on this activity which makes a significant contribution to local employment and the economy as a whole. The British Equestrian Trade Association's 2023 national equestrian survey data estimates the horse industry to be worth £5bn per annum (excluding racing).

Our equestrian access manifesto calls on the next Westminster Government to increase the opportunities for more safe off-road equestrian access by: -

Providing more Definitive and Permissive Paths by:

1. Repealing the 2031 cut-off date – over 78,000km of off - road routes are at risk of being extinguished and lost for ever. These are public routes that exist at present but are not currently recorded as public rights of way and will be extinguished on 1st January 2031 if the cut- off date is not repealed.
2. Ensuring that permanent and permissive public access options are embedded in the Environmental Land Management Scheme paying landowners also to improve and enhance existing bridleways and byways (such as rolling green lanes, or leaving cross-field bridleways uncultivated), and to create parking places so that people can access and enjoy those opportunities.
3. Ensuring that local authorities prioritise the determination of Definitive Map Modification Order applications which seek to record bridleways and byways so that more users, including equestrians, benefit from those determinations.
4. Stop the surfacing of definitive bridleways and restricted byways with tarmacadam unless they are within an urban environment and are already tarmacked.

- Recording suitable recreational trails on the definitive map as bridleways. Currently a lot of these trails have no defined status or exclude horse riders. Recording them as bridleways on the definitive map would ensure that they are available to more users, and therefore of benefit to more people.

Ensuring Equality of Access Provision by:

- Ensuring there is a presumption in favour of including provision for equestrian access automatically alongside access for walkers and cyclists in (i) all Local Development Plans and Local Transport Plans, (ii) when roads are created or improved, and (iii) when new developments are planned, unless there is a strong evidence reason why this would not be possible.
- Extending the right of access to equestrians to access land, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- Ensuring that horse riders have access to active travel routes. Horse riders like walkers and cyclists are vulnerable road users. Currently horse riders are often excluded from these routes leaving them to ride on roads that are not considered safe for walkers and cyclists to use.
- Ensuring that equestrians are not required to purchase permits to ride/carriage drive in the Forest England public forests. At present there are some forests where equestrians are required to purchase permits when this is not required of walkers and cyclists. This is unfair and discriminatory.
- Allowing equestrians to use tow paths unless tow paths are shown to be unsuitable. Some towpaths are existing definitive bridleways which horse riders' access perfectly safely.

