



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs Implementation of CAP Reform in England Consultation

Response of The British Horse Society

1. The Society supports the Government's desire to promote rural development. The horse industry is a major contributor to the rural economy, its contribution is estimated to be worth over £7 billion¹ to the UK economy.
2. It is important that within Pillar 2 the opportunity is taken to invest some of the £1.84 billion in the development of new programmes which include recreation, tourism and public access related measures. In so doing, this will help improve the nation's access infrastructure and give a significant boost to rural growth and development.
3. Opportunities for recreation, leisure and tourism, and enhancements to access infrastructure have enormous potential to deliver not only rural growth but a range of benefits, including improvements to public health, well-being and an increase in public understanding of and support for the environment and farming. These multiple benefits maximise value for taxpayers' money and provide demonstrable evidence of public gain from subsidies for land management.
4. With the expectation that CAP will be a significant contributor to meeting the Government's environmental objectives and legal obligations in respect of woodland creation and management the opportunity to maximise the benefit of this investment should not be lost, the provision of access opportunities should be required as a condition of any payments. Previous low uptake of both the Woodland Creation Grant and Woodland Improvement Grant options which included public access demonstrates the need for such a requirement.
5. Increased public access to the countryside directly supports the Government's ambition, set out in the Natural Choice: the Natural Environment White Paper², to reconnect people with the natural environment. The NEWP states that "a healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and

¹ www.bhic.co.uk/facts-and-figures/beta-survey.html

² Defra (2011), The Natural Choice: The Natural Environment White Paper

personal wellbeing” and that “everyone should have fair access to a good quality natural environment”. The NEWP also highlights the findings of the UK Government’s National Ecosystem Assessment³, which asserts that the social benefits of people being able to access and enjoy the countryside should be valued at £484 million per annum.

6. The Society supports the offering of a capital only grant of the proposed new environmental land management scheme which allows improvements to access infrastructure. The access capital items should be wide ranging and include improvements to path infrastructure where this would create multi-user routes and access for everyone including use by horse-riders and carriage drivers, cyclists and those using wheel chairs or pushing buggies. Any payments should encourage use of the least restrictive access by replacing stiles with horse friendly gates or gaps.

7. Improvements to access have enormous potential to assist rural development and rural economies, and provide opportunities for business diversification. A small investment in improving access for visitors can bring benefits for small businesses, boost economic growth and create jobs. This effect can be particularly beneficial in remote rural and upland areas where opportunities for economic growth are limited, and helps to keep tourist related expenditure within the local area.

8. Recreational access infrastructure is a hugely important resource in helping people to get outside and get active. More people, horse riding, carriage driving, walking, cycling, climbing and enjoying responsible recreation could bring vast savings to the nation’s health bill. Physical inactivity currently costs the NHS in England between £1billion and £1.8billion a year. Costs to the wider economy are conservatively estimated at £5.5billion in sickness absence and £1billion in premature deaths – a total of £8.3billion⁴.

9. Equestrianism has an important part to play in improving the health of the nation. The BHS commissioned the University of Brighton and Plumpton College to research the health benefits of recreational horse riding⁵. A key finding of this research was that horse riding and activities associated with horse riding, such as mucking out, expend sufficient energy to be classed as moderate intensity exercise.

10. Funding for the provision of margins and buffer strips should not be deemed incompatible with public access. Attached at Appendix 2 is the advice of Natural England which sets out where landowners can allow access.

³ UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>

⁴ Steven Allender, Charlie Foster, Peter Scarborough and Mike Rayner 2007, ‘The burden of physical activity related ill health in the UK’ in Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 61

⁵ The health benefits of riding in the UK
http://www.bhs.org.uk/Riding/Health_Benefits_of_Riding.aspx

11. The Society supports the extension of the so – called ‘negative list’ of business types which will be ineligible to apply for direct payments to include public bodies whose primary purpose is not farming.

12. Experience has shown that agri-environment funding is rarely, if ever, refused or withheld due to land owners not meeting their duties around existing public rights of way. Whilst ‘cross compliance’ is potentially a useful tool to support the maintenance and accessibility of the existing rights of way network, its effectiveness is limited by the very small inspection sample size adopted by the Rural Payments Agency, the lack of a defined process for communication between the RPA and Highways Authorities (as the relevant enforcement bodies) and the fact that the RPA do not act on or accept a report about failure to keep paths free from obstructions from a member of the public (including those representing a national organisation).

13. For cross compliance to be useful, more inspections are needed which take into account the condition of rights of way. It is therefore important that GAEC 8 is carried forward and is enforced.

Appendix 1

The British Horse Society

1. The British Horse Society (BHS) represents the interests of the 3.5 million people in the UK who ride or who drive horse-drawn vehicles⁶. With the membership of its Affiliated Riding Clubs and Bridleway Groups, the BHS is the largest and most influential equestrian charity in the UK.

2. The BHS is committed to promoting the interests of all equestrians and the welfare of horses and ponies through education and training.

The Paucity of the Equestrian Public Rights of Way Network

3. The length of the public right of way network in England currently amounts to about 190,000km⁷, consisting of 146,600km of footpaths, 32,000km of bridleways, 3,700km of byways and 6,000km of restricted byways. Horse riders therefore, currently have access to only 22% of public rights of way and horse-drawn vehicle drivers to only 5%.

The safety of roads for equestrians

4. As many rights of way are now disconnected from each other equestrians are forced to use roads to connect them. However many are inaccessible because the roads that link them are no longer safe for equestrians to use because of the speed and volume of motorised traffic on them. This leaves many equestrians without a safe local route to use.

⁶ BETA Survey 2010-2011

⁷ www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/access/rightsofway/prow/default.aspx

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