

# Advice on Safeguarding and improving equestrian access in Scotland

## Core path plans

Access authorities have a legal right to assert and maintain core paths, but do not have a legal obligation to promote or maintain core paths. However, such limited resources as are available for maintenance, and likelihood of persuading access authorities to pursue removal of obstructions, are usually concentrated on core paths, so it is worth checking that the most important off-road equestrian paths and tracks are included in the relevant core path plan.

Drawing up and consulting on core paths plans was an arduous process, which most access authorities are reluctant to repeat. Review of core paths plan can provide opportunity to include additional paths on the core path map. Ask your access authority if and when they propose reviewing their core path plan, and how to propose any additions or revisions.

## Lobbying for equestrian access

Lobbying is the process by which individuals or organisations can attempt to influence decision makers (principally politicians) to change the law or government policy. There are no hard or fast rules for successful lobbying, but the following tips may help.

### Identify who you need to lobby

Think carefully who can make a difference, or in a position to promote or defend the cause you want to pursue? MSPs are often the most appropriate because most of the legislation that affects access is devolved to Scottish government so comes under the remit of MSPs rather than MPs. One of the tents of Scottish Parliament is its approachability, so don't be afraid to try and get MSPs to understand and support equestrian access. Most MSPs will be interested to know if the Land Reform (Scotland) Act is working in your particular area.

Your local constituency MSP will usually be the first choice, but if you are unsure if they will support you, you could choose a list MSP from your region. To determine who is likely to be most supportive, check out which MSPs are on the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, or perhaps the Health and Sport Committee. Do any of them ride, or have an interest in horses or access?

At local level, you will need to lobby local councillors and community councils.

## Establishing support

You will have a much stronger case and are far more likely to get support if you can demonstrate that you are talking about access for all types of user, and people of all ages and abilities, rather than simply equestrian access. Very often obstructions to equestrian access also limit disabled access. How do your concerns affect other people trying to exercise their access rights responsibly? Are there any other recreational interests or users who might be willing to join forces and help lobby?

## How to lobby

A measured, inclusive approach is always preferable to a hysterical, self-centred approach. Look at things from other peoples' perspective, and be prepared to compromise. Offering compromises to those who might not support your position may be better than no outcome at all.

Politicians quickly lose interest when confronted by the same person lobbying them over and over again on different issues. Identify different people to lobby on different issues directly relevant to them so that they can add a bit of a personal story to the problem. Can the local riding club or a riding establishment take up a particular local cause?

## Petitions

Inviting people to sign a petition which is then submitted to the Public Petitions Committee at Scottish parliament can be an effective way of pursuing action on a problem, either if you are having difficulty finding a politician to support your cause, or to demonstrate the level of local, regional or national concern about an issue. E-petitions may attract a wider audience than hard copy petition, and lend themselves to promotion through social media.

## **Working with the media**

Local newspapers and radio stations are nearly always interested in local stories, particularly if the issues involved affect or are potentially of interest to a wide range of people. It's worth cultivating good relationships with local media, and trying to find a sympathetic journalist who may help you pursue your cause. Press coverage can be particularly useful in influencing local councillors and persuading them to take action. Whoever you contact, make sure you have your facts straight first, and think carefully before levelling or implying criticism of the access authority who. When it comes to the crunch, access authorities are the only ones who can pursue legal action against a land owner or manager to remove obstructions to access.

If you need further advice on equestrian access in Scotland, contact your local BHS access representative (see [www.bhsscotland.org.uk](http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk) for contact details) or Helene Mauchlen, national manager for BHS Scotland Tel. 01764 656334 or email [Helene.Mauchlen@bhs.org.uk](mailto:Helene.Mauchlen@bhs.org.uk).

For guidance on equestrian access in England and Wales, contact Access and Rights of Way Department, The British Horse Society, Abbey Park, Stareton Lane, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2XZ. Telephone 02476 840581. Email [access@bhs.org.uk](mailto:access@bhs.org.uk).

**IMPORTANT** This guidance is general and does not aim to cover every variation in circumstances. The Society recommends seeking advice specific to a site where it is being relied upon.