

Guidance for riders and carriage drivers in responding to forest and woodland plans

Most woodland and forestry planting and management is undertaken as part of a forest plan. Recreational access should have been considered in preparation of the plan, but forest design guidelines are somewhat vague about access provision. BHS is keen to encourage all forest plans to

- ❖ maintain and provide multi-use recreational access (i.e. for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders) in line with the Land Reform Act
- ❖ maintain access on existing paths/tracks for all legitimate users
- ❖ specify access infrastructure to provide multi-use access. Stiles, kissing gates and other restrictive controls are not acceptable unless there is an unlocked gate minimum 1.5m wide adjacent (or within 100 m) easily accessible with a horse.
- ❖ provide suitable well-signed diversions for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders when felling or other forest operations necessitate and justify closure of specific tracks, paths or parts of a woodland
- ❖ limit diversions or closure to the minimum area and time essential.

BHS has made representations at national level to get all of the above included in the necessary guidance and requirements for financial support. Protecting and improving equestrian access at local level depends on BHS access representatives, individuals and organisations such as riding clubs or affiliated access groups checking plans locally to ensure equestrian access is being taken into account where appropriate. It is well worth the effort: BHS volunteers' comments have already resulted in self-closing bridle gates being installed instead of kissing gates. The guidance below will help you check and comment on local forest plans and grant schemes.

What you need to do

1. Regularly check public registers of forest plans and operations (see notes below) to see what work is proposed in areas of interest to you

This might be your own local area or perhaps further afield where you walk/ride/cycle, where there might be opportunity to develop equestrian access or where you are concerned that new planting, fences or forest management may restrict future equestrian access.

2. Identify on a map where the proposal relates to

- If in doubt, or for older forest plans, check with your local Forestry and Land office.
- If it's in another area, is there someone else who might be interested to whom you can forward proposals and encourage them to comment?

3. Consider how important the wood or proposed planting ground is for recreational access

- Does anyone currently ride/walk/cycle through the wood or over the land?
- Are there any strategic link routes through the wood or proposed planting area?
- How does the wood/land relate to other access in the area?
- Is it in a remote area where no-one rides or wants to ride, in which case you might decide it's not worth commenting?
- Contact Helene Mauchlen (helene.mauchlen@bhs.org.uk) to find out how many BHS members or local riders there are in the area to help justify demand for access.
- **Remember to think about visiting riders as well as locals**

4. Assess how proposals might affect existing or potential equestrian access and what modifications might be required to maintain access

- Have existing paths and tracks been taken into account in designing woodland planting and management?
- Has suitable provision been made to maintain existing recreational access?
- Is any fencing proposed? If so, does this include sufficient gates at all entry/exit points to allow legitimate access by all recreational users under the Land Reform Act?
- Check that all gaps and gates are sufficiently wide (minimum 1.5m) to allow multi-use access and comply with best practice (see www.pathsforall.org.uk/resource/outdoor-access-design-guide).
- Any access points off the line of a path, track or forest road need to be readily accessible by horses as well as walkers and cyclists. Steep-sided ditches, boggy ground and impossibly tight turns between the main track and gap or gate need to be identified and designed out from the outset.
- How could proposals be modified to maintain existing access? Suggesting suitable 1.5m wide self-closing gates instead of a ladder stile or kissing gate could make a huge difference to people being able to use a wood (not just with a horse).

5. Is there any scope to develop or improve equestrian access which could be incorporated into proposals?

- Is there any scope to extend or develop the existing path or forest road network to improve access?
- Is there scope to link to other paths/tracks/woodland?
- Could a short section of new path or new access point make a significant difference?

6. Review and submit your comments either online or in writing.

- Review what you think is necessary or desirable to maintain and where possible improve equestrian access.
- Summarise your comments.
- Remember to ask for acknowledgement or feedback on our submission (none is sent automatically)

How to find out what is happening locally

Three public registers provide details of all woodland and forestry plans and allow anyone to submit comments on forest operations. Proposals are added at any time and generally displayed for 28 days.

1. Public register for new woodland creation and felling permissions which covers privately owned land, which enables you to view a map and submit comments online. <https://casebook.forestry.scot/w/webpage/prhome>
Use the filters to select new woodland or felling, to fine tune what you want to view and then follow the screen prompts to comment on the relevant application.
2. Forestry and Land Scotland publicise land management plans for all publicly (state) owned forestry Check the website <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/planning/consultations> for plans on which public feedback is invited and submit your comments.
3. Public register of legacy grant schemes and forest plans, which covers legacy schemes (i.e. older forest plans) <https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/public-registers> This website sadly does not include provision to download online application maps – if you would like to see a map or learn more about

any of the applications listed on the register, contact your local Forestry and Land conservancy office stating the applications reference.

Points to remember in commenting on forest plans and woodland proposals:

- ❖ State the basis or justification for your comments as clearly as possible.
- ❖ Be realistic. You might not like stony forest tracks but legally riders have no right to demand or insist upon resurfacing.
- ❖ Damage to tracks and paths is virtually inevitable during timber harvesting and forest operations but most tracks will settle down again over time. Soil and mud deposited during machinery movement soon blinds a stony surface. Tracks with a firm stone base which have grassed over are great.
- ❖ Forest plans are long-term.
- ❖ Remember that it's much easier to get forest design plans changed at design stage than it is to get inappropriate stiles or gates changed once they've been installed.
- ❖ Controlling illegal vehicular access is entirely legitimate so don't be surprised by locked gates but do insist on suitable alternative alongside or nearby to provide access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.