

## Written evidence submitted by the Horse Access Campaign UK (HAC UK) (AB36)

1. **The Horse Access Campaign UK (HAC UK)** was launched on social media in response to very serious concerns within the equestrian world regarding the future of horse riding and carriage driving in the countryside in the UK. The lack of a safe network of off-road paths, combined with increasingly dangerous roads, which must often be used to access off-road paths, are factors that are leading to less and less horse riders and carriage drivers riding and driving in the countryside. From the comments on social media, a grim picture emerges nationwide of a lack of safe routes, the loss / prevention of use of existing routes for horses, random exclusion from purpose built paths and an increase in horse road related incidents. Thus HAC UK was borne.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HorseAccessUK/>

### **Summary**

2. The Horse Access Campaign (HAC UK) was launched because of the very serious concerns nationwide about the future of horse riding and carriage driving in the countryside. HAC UK strongly supports inclusion of Part 1, section (1) (b) in the Bill that financial assistance be given to support public access and believes that the Agriculture Bill offers the Government an opportunity to solve the current problems. A programme of financial assistance to landowners and farmers that provides for more shared routes by creating paths where needed, upgrading paths where suitable, providing access for everyone to open space and ensuring that the public rights of way network is maintained will significantly benefit horse riders and carriage drivers in addition to many others. We provide evidence on **how** this can be achieved through financial assistance to landowners via the Agriculture Bill, and **why** this support is necessary.

### **Recommendation**

3. We strongly support inclusion of Part 1, clause (1) (b) in the Bill, i.e. that financial assistance be given to landowners to improve public access. We ask that this includes financial assistance to improve the public path (public rights of way) network and access to open spaces and that this includes access **for horses**.
4. We provide evidence on how this can be achieved through financial assistance to landowners via the Agriculture Bill and why this support is necessary.



5. **Picture: a local footpath upgraded to bridleway at Upper Vobster in Somerset.**

This former railway line linking two communities was once an overgrown public footpath. Thanks to negotiations by a local group and a fantastic local rights of way officer, several landowners express dedicated permanent bridleway rights in 2007. The route bypasses two miles of very dangerous rural road and links a community without facilities to a larger one that has shops, a pub, church, school etc.

During the project to open the route for shared use it was visited by a senior rights of way officer from Defra who said “a wonderful shared route - this is exactly what the Government wants to see happen”

Nowadays the path is shared by horse riders, cyclists, runners and walkers. Thanks to the landowners it is there forever.

## **The Evidence**

### **How the Agriculture Bill can improve access to the countryside for horse riders and carriage drivers.**

6. We believe that clause (1) (b) Agriculture Bill offers the opportunity to learn from past schemes and approaches to improve access to the countryside for all, including horse riders and carriage drivers. These schemes are:

7. **The Paths for Communities Scheme (P4C):**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/paths-for-communities-p4c-scheme-final-report>

This successful but limited Government scheme, (2012 to 2014), created 183.2 km of permanent Public Rights of Way, along with improvements to connecting routes, through co-operation between users and landowners. These newly created paths encourage healthy outdoor exercise and recreation, support sustainable travel and support local businesses. This scheme provides positive evidence of the value of creating permanent routes. HAC UK urges the Government to build on P4C **by ensuring financial assistance is given to landowners in the Agriculture Bill to accelerate the creation and improvement of public paths.** See appendix for examples.

8. **The Higher Level Entry Stewardship Scheme:**

<http://cwr.naturalengland.org.uk/>

This scheme was managed by Natural England on behalf of Defra. Landowners received payments to provide permissive access on foot or for horses. A major pitfall was the provision of time limited permissive access and paths, not necessarily where the public needed or wanted to go which represents very poor value for money. Many agreements have terminated.

#### 9. The British Horse Society's Paths for Communities scheme

<http://www.bhs.org.uk/our-work/access/campaigns/paths-for-communities/where-the-fund-has-gone-so-far>

This modestly funded scheme was set up after the success of the Government's P4C scheme. To date it has funded a number of path improvements including new linking paths, confirming the need for such funds. However, to make a significant impact nationwide, much greater funding is required as could be provided through part 1 clause 1(b) of the Agriculture Bill.

#### 10. Express dedication

<http://www.thetrailstrust.org.uk//pages/creatingtrails.php>

The Trails Trust has worked with landowners and farmers to upgrade footpaths and create new routes where needed using a process called express creation / dedication. This is not a statutory process therefore it is capable of attracting significant grant funding, which TTT used to encourage landowners to dedicate. Offering financial assistance to landowners through the Agriculture Bill would encourage uptake of this approach.

#### 11. The possible mechanisms to improve the public path (public rights of way) network and access to open spaces **for horses** are.

- Filling in missing links by creating new shared routes (of bridleway / restricted byway status) with landowners to be paid subsidy for permanent route creation
- Starting a process of upgrading footpaths, where suitable, to shared use. We suggest that: Every landowner to upgrade one footpath across their land when subsidy received; additional incentives are provided through subsidy for further footpath upgrading to shared use where these are required for the community network.
- Landowners / farmers to be paid for non-statutory maintenance work on the rights of way network
- Cycle tracks and paths to be available to horses (no justification for random exclusion)
- Use of open access land and public land such as woodland should be extended to horse riders and carriage drivers
- Traffic calm and sign (sealed) unclassified county roads that are used as part of the network
- Preserve unsealed unclassified county roads by recording on Definitive Maps

Some examples of landowners, farmers and users working together to create new routes and upgrade rights of way to accommodate shared use are in the appendix.

#### Why support is necessary

#### 12. The failure of Government and Local Government policy over decades to provide equally for horse riding and carriage driving on a shared (with walkers and cyclists) access sustainable transport network of routes impacts negatively on communities, rural

economy and environmental pollution. Those who try to ride / carriage drive and their horses are increasingly being placed at risk of death and serious injury on the roads with the consequential cost to the nation. Less and less people are riding and driving out into the countryside because of the lack of a safe, joined-up network of off-road paths.

13. 74% of the 2.7 million people who ride are female, with an estimated 500,000 being children, and 500,000 being carriage drivers. Both activities permit its participants to engage in healthy sport and recreation from a very young age into old age. 9% of horse riders have a declared disability. Riding and driving out in the countryside instils an appreciation of the countryside and farming practices as well as increasing physical and mental wellbeing.

<http://www.beta-uk.org/pages/industry-information/market-information.php>

<http://www.bhs.org.uk/enjoy-riding/health-benefits>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results>

14. It is heartening to see that the Government has chosen to include countryside access at the centre of environmental policy. Government has the power to change for the good of all. Existing good practice evidence of route creation and shared route projects carried out with the input of farmers and landowners has lasting benefits to vulnerable users, particularly children, communities and the rural economy. Government has a once in a lifetime opportunity to support and accelerate positive access action through the Agriculture Bill.



Carriage driving offers people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to engage with the countryside

## **Appendix**

### **Evidence of good practice from the Government's P4C scheme**

15. The P4C fund created 183.2 km of Public Rights of Way (PROW) including both new creations and improvements to connecting routes.

PROW network improvements included

- Providing missing links and routes that open up the network to more users including links from residential areas to the natural environment
- New multi-user routes providing opportunities for different types of public access (essentially walking, horse-riding and cycling) and for all levels of ability (including wheelchair access as well as routes suitable for pushchairs, and for people with additional mobility needs);
- Delivery of economic benefits to rural communities (for example, to rural shops, eateries, attractions and accommodation);
- Delivery of social benefits to rural communities (including evidence of health benefits, social cohesion, outdoor education, safe and active travel)

16. The project included a wide range of landowners including notable contributions from private landowners. Of the 43 projects funded, only 3 involved a facilitation payment to the landowner. Each landowner affected by the proposed project had to give their consent to the project taking place across their land. The percentage of consents received by landowner type were: Private landowner – 39.5% Public sector – 36% Voluntary sector – 18.5% Corporate business - 6%

#### **17. Successful case studies included:**

Nesscliffe - A householder agreed to the bridleway coming across their land to adjoin with the existing PROW. Without this small piece of land the route wouldn't have connected the new section of bridleway to the rest of the 83 km Nesscliffe trail.

Mid Cheshire Bridleway – creation of a new 4 km long bridleway link in the local network. Much of the route skirts around the edge of the Lafarge Tarmac working quarry. Lafarge Tarmac, a large private company, took the time and effort to engage with the local Bridleway Association to form an effective partnership to deliver the project.

Penrose bridleways - two excellent P4C schemes were proposed in Cornwall, Penrose, by the National Trust and the West Penwith Bridleways Association both of which involved the use of Express Dedication at Common Law as the 'creation' mechanism. This enables a landowner to dedicate a new or upgraded PROW unilaterally, as a common law alternative to signing a statutory public path creation agreement

Marston Vale - For many projects, the P4C grant unlocked more than just a discrete length of Public Right of Way. The addition of a new route often opened up access to many more kilometres of the access network. For example, whilst the scheme funded over 2.8 km of new bridleway through the Forest of Marston Vale's Millennium Country Park, these new routes also provided users with access to the wider network of rights of way and permissive routes for 7km south and 3.5km north of the project site.

Dane Meadow – The main aim of the project was to open up an underused greenspace for community use. The new bridleway provides easy access to all, including wheelchair users

and people who are less able, who couldn't previously access the site due to steep inclines and no footpaths.

Godmersham - There are just over 20 businesses and services in the villages of Chartham, Chilham and Wye that will benefit from a safe route for walking, cycling and riding, avoiding the busy A28. The businesses range from local food stores, train stations, pubs, B&B's and hotels.

Chevet Branch Line an active travel project - one of the aims of the P4C scheme was to create strategic links and extend the existing ROW network. A good example of this was the creation of the Chevet Branch Line which created 5 km of new bridleway on a disused railway line. This new bridleway was a 'missing link' in the local network of off road routes around Wakefield. The route has created many more opportunities for active travel.

END

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