

## Written evidence submitted by the Horse Access Campaign UK (HAC UK) (AB29)

### 1. Summary

1.1 The Horse Access Campaign UK works for a safe, assessible and inclusive network of



*HAC UK campaigning for safe public rights of way for the very young. These routes are THEIR inheritance.*



minor roads and rights of way for equestrians, also benefitting other non-motorised users.

1.2 HAC UK's concerns for the future of equestrianism mirrors statements made by the British Horse Industry Confederation to Government about supporting a valuable horse industry beyond the EU, including the need for new route dedication.



*And for older folk with mobility issues. Sandy can hardly walk due to a rare schlerosis but he can ride his horse.*



**1.3 HAC UK is concerned that the wording of the Agriculture Bill 1(1)(b) does nothing to calm the fears of the industry. There needs to be a clear statement of intent that 'public access' means permanent investment through the public purse on the public rights of way network. Further a clear explanation needs providing in 1(1)(5).**

1.4 Ministers and other parliamentarians have said that public goods in access terms means permanent provisions on rights of way for equestrians and others.

1.5 The Scottish and Welsh Government both recognise that the countryside needs to be open to all – on foot, bicycle, with a horse and disabled vehicle. In Scotland all paths are open to all users, this has been a great success. In Wales a consultation to modernise an antiquated rights of way network has been launched – focusing on multi use.

1.6 It's high time England followed suit. This can start with the new Environment Land Management Subsidy Scheme.

### **2 About the Horse Access Campaign UK (HAC UK)**

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

2.1 HAC UK was launched in 2018 in response to serious concerns regarding the future of horse riding and carriage driving to and in the countryside. The lack of a safe network of off-road paths, increasingly dangerous roads, which must often be used to access off-road paths, are factors that are driving a decline in equestrianism and causing human and equine

obesity and other health issues. Green travel, leisure, recreation and Interaction with horses is recognised world wide as a powerful tool in promoting good health especially in children. Horse sports, travel and recreation engages a high number of women, elderly, those with disabilities, mobility and mental health or rural isolation issues,

2.2 In 2019 2 horses a week were killed and 845 incidents occurred on UK roads involving horses and motor vehicle drivers. In the past 9 years 3,737 incidents have occurred on the road, 43 people have lost their lives and 1085 injured, 315 horses have been killed and 945 horses injured. (British Horse Society).

2.3 2016 Government traffic accident report advises the cost of a fatal road traffic collision = £1.8 million x 43 riders = £77.4 million and the cost of a slight incident = £18,000 x 3737 = £67.3 million

A total cost in under 10 years of **£150 million** could go a long way to rewarding landowners to create routes where needed to avoid dangerous roads.

2.4 Since 1949 the number of motor vehicle miles driven on Britain's roads has risen from 28.9 billion to **327.1 billion miles**. No wonder no-one wants to cycle, ride or walk on them.

2.5 Successive Governments have done nothing to safeguard the horse industry or to preserve the nations' **cultural and rural heritage of green infrastructure** (bridleways and byways) so crucial for multi user public access and for wildlife and biodiversity corridors. Successive legislation (1949, 1968, 1981, 2000, 2006, 2009) has concentrated on recording rights (done badly), removing rights, or has been biased towards access on foot.

2.6 80% of the existing path network (138,000 miles), most long-distance trails, 100% of open space and woodland caters only for single right on foot, whilst millions of multi users (horse, cycle, foot and disabled) struggle to use a mere 20% of at least accessible (through gates rather than stiles) but disintegrating network.

Worst still an estimated 10,000 miles of unrecorded historic right of way will be dumped in 2026 in a move that **does not accord** with the Government's own twenty five year Environment plan (25 YEP).

**2.7 HAC UK members have frequently commented on the failure of the former 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.

### **3. Twenty five Year Environment Plan**

In the 25 YEP The Government promises this:-

3.1 'We will move to a system of paying farmers public money for public goods. The principal public good we want to invest in is environmental enhancement. We will introduce

a new environmental land management system to deliver this. It will incentivise and reward land managers to restore and improve our natural capital and rural heritage’.

3.2 We are fortunate to have accessible natural spaces in every county, mostly free to enter, **and a network of public rights of way.**

3.3 “Our aim is to improve **existing green infrastructure** by encouraging more investment while making sure there is a presumption for sustainable development. **Initially, we will focus on areas where we know that there is not enough accessible green infrastructure, or that what is there is of poor quality.**

#### **4. HAC UK Recommendation**

4.1 Together the Agriculture Bill and the Environment Bill are intended to deliver the 25 YEP. An opportunity to deliver a safe accessible network for everyone, at last delivering Rights of Way Improvement Plans, giving Local Access Forums real purpose and incentivising landowners to preserve historic rights of way and create new paths and additional rights.

**4.2 HAC UK asks that Agriculture Bill clause 1 (1) (b) is clear that public access goods are delivered through the creation of rights on rights of way and within open space – for everyone**

4.3 Chapter 1 (1) (5) of the Agriculture Bill - **clarity is needed** that tax payer’s money awarded through subsidy schemes must benefit the whole public through permanent path creation, upgrading and maintenance on the rights of way network and awarding additional rights for equestrians and cyclists within open access land including forestry.

4.4 In the Environment Bill it is essential that enjoyment of the natural environment is enabled through the public access improvements needed to remedy poor connectivity, the accessibility and the lack of available routes for all users on rights of way. Clearly there should be priorities and targets associated with this.

4.5 HAC UK asks that the Scrutiny Committee sends a strong message of intent to create, preserve, target and prioritise a permanent safe minor road and permanent rights of way network safeguarding and investing in the health and vitality of future generations.

#### **5. HAC UK Evidence**

5.1 In 2012 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs outlined the Government’s vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years. It said

5.2 “(4.33) Clear, well-maintained paths and bridleways are important to give people access to the natural environment and can be enjoyed by cyclists, walkers and horse riders. There is considerable scope to improve and extend this network, for example through Local Access Forums and Rights of Way Improvement Plans. We will make it easier for local communities and civil society groups to get involved in developing and maintaining networks of paths and accessible green space.”

5.3 It could be made easier, we suggest if there was the means to encourage landowners to participate.

**5.4 Access to a route network is crucial to the growth and prosperity of the horse industry**

In 2017 the British Horse Industry Confederation (BHIC) made a statement to Government concerned with safeguarding and helping the industry prosper after the UK left the EU.

“The equine industry in the UK is both vibrant and valuable, contributing **£8bn a year** to the economy. With around 1m horses, the sector has a gross output of £4.3bn a year and is the **second largest rural employer** after agriculture.

“Many pieces of legislation concerning the horse have their origins within the EU. EU Exit, as well as the demand on diminishing Defra resource, heralds an opportunity for the Equine Sector Council to provide continuity of expertise, advocacy and leadership on behalf of this distinct and responsive animal sector, focusing on the three key areas below”

Key area 3 (Increasing participation in recreational riding and horse sports...)

**3b) “Ensure access to off road riding and new route dedication provides for horse riders so that they are considered equally and in full partnership with cyclists and walkers”**

5.5 **Statements** by successive ministers and politicians with regard to horses and rights of way

**5.5.1 Lord Gardiner** Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biodiversity said in 2019:-

‘The cornerstone of future agriculture policy will be payment of public money for environmental public goods. Paths that provide access to farmers’ land enable people to access and spend time in the natural environment. Infrastructure is required for horse – riding, recreational walking and cycling and providing access to green space and countryside for disabled people. This is important for maintaining and improving physical and mental health and wellbeing and therefore provides public benefits”.

**5.5.2 Robert Goodwill MP** Minister of State for Defra 2019 said (27/03/18)

‘One of the public goods that we could deliver through the Agriculture Bill is better public access, which could include bridleways to join up existing paths so that not as many horses have to use the roads’ in response to:-

**5.5.3 Dame Caroline Spelman**

‘I chair the all-party parliamentary group for the horse, and we heard yesterday that 87 horses were killed on our roads last year. Will it be possible under future farming policy to extend bridle-paths? Will the Minister consider extending the period for the registration of existing paths so that none are lost and so that our overstretched volunteers and authorities have time to confirm them?’

**5.5.4 Robert Courts MP** Active Travel Debate 09/07/19 said

‘Footpaths are protected, and I agree that they must remain so when new developments are built, to ensure that our latticework of footpaths continues to exist. I would extend that to bridleways as well, which similarly have an historical provenance. I ask the House to bear in mind that, although we tend to think of cycling and walking in the context of the strategy I mentioned, horse riders in areas such as mine and my hon. Friend’s are also vulnerable, and ought to be thought about in the context of active travel as well.’

### **5.5.6 Michael Ellis MP** Minister of State for Transport said in 09/07/19

'I congratulate my hon. Friend [Robert Courts](#) on securing this popular debate about active travel, local walking and cycling infrastructure. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to hear the contributions of hon. Members from across the House...I was also pleased that my hon. Friend and [Dr Drew](#) mentioned equestrianism. [Active travel](#) includes horse riders and bridle paths—this debate includes them'.

### **5.5.7 Jesse Norman MP** Minister for transport 05/11/18

"It is therefore rather important that all the unregistered roads and byways are properly acknowledged, notified and recognised in order to make sure that spaces are available for people to be able to ride happily and safely without having to go on to the highway."

"We should be clear that the cycling and walking strategy may have that name but is absolutely targeted at vulnerable road users, including horse-riders"

## **5.6 Scotland The Land Reform Act**

Scotland's land reform act 2003 for public access to the outdoors has seen a transformation under the Scottish Parliament, with the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 establishing a statutory framework of public access rights to most land and inland water.

These legal rights are based on the principle of responsible access, with obligations both on the access users and on the managers of the land. Guidance on these responsibilities is set out in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Access rights apply to any non-motorised activities, including walking, cycling, horse-riding and wild camping. They also allow access on inland water for canoeing, rowing, sailing and swimming.

Scotland's local authorities and national park authorities are the access authorities in their areas, with a number of specific duties and powers under the Act. These include developing a Core Paths Plan, keeping routes free of obstruction, and establishing a local access forum.

A 10-year review of the legislation by a government advisory group concluded that 'the new statutory framework should be judged a considerable achievement that has delivered significant public benefits', and it 'has delivered a progressive statutory framework for improved public access over land in Scotland'.

## **5.7 Wales**

The Welsh Government is consulting with user groups, landowners and land managers about upgrading rights in open access land so that more users can enjoy those spaces, upgrading footpaths so that more users can travel along them and communicating better what rights exist where.

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