

Patron Her Majesty The Queen

The British Horse Society
Abbey Park,
Stareton,
Kenilworth,
Warwickshire CV8 2XZ

Email enquiry@bhs.org.uk
Website www.bhs.org.uk
Tel 02476 840500
Fax 02476 840501



Bringing Horses and People Together

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk

6 February 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Environmental Land Management Scheme

I write, on behalf of a number of organisations representing public access and the millions of people across the country who have an interest in getting outdoors and connecting with nature.

We, and the people we represent, were bitterly disappointed by recent announcements on the detail of Environmental Land Management (ELM), in particular the lack of reference to new permanent access provision and the inadequate detail on other ways in which public access to the countryside will be improved. This is particularly concerning given that Ministers have repeatedly stressed that access provision will be included within ELM, details of these are set out in the appendix hereto.

Can you please confirm how the government intends to honour these promises by providing a clear range of options for farmers and land managers to choose from to improve access provision, or are you saying that you are now resiling from these statements?

In a written answer on the 18th September 2018, you too seemed committed to the benefits that improved public access can provide the nation, when you said:- 'In England, the cornerstone of future agriculture policy will be the payment of public money for environmental public goods. The Agriculture Bill includes public access in the list of purposes that the Secretary of State may pay for in the future. Paths that provide access to farmers' land enable people to access and spend time in the natural environment. Infrastructure is required for recreational walking, cycling and horse-riding and providing access to greenspace and countryside for disabled people. This is important for maintaining and improving physical and mental health and wellbeing and therefore provides public benefits.'

We fully support the shift away from direct payments to the principle of public payments for public goods. With the £2.4 billion per year of taxpayer funding earmarked for ELM in the coming years, it is only right that a

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proportion of this financial assistance goes towards improving people's connection to nature and opportunities to get outdoors.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Weston, Director of Access, The British Horse Society
Tompion Platt, Director of Operations and Advocacy, Ramblers
Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary, Open Spaces Society
Cath Flitcroft, Policy Lead, British Mountaineering Council
Ben Seal, Head of Access and Environment, British Canoeing

For return correspondence, please contact Mark Weston, Director of Access, The British Horse Society
mark.weston@bhs.org.uk



Appendix

Written answers: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Countryside: Access (9 June 2021)

The Agricultural Transition Plan outlined the Government's plans for farming for the length of this parliament. We have a manifesto commitment to maintain the farming budget for the duration of this parliament. Over this period, as we phase out Direct Payments, we will redirect this money into our new environmental land management schemes. **Public access is one of the public goods for which Ministers will be able to provide financial assistance through our new schemes**, using powers in the Agriculture Act 2020. **Victoria Prentis: HC Deb, 9 June 2021, cW**

Agri-environment schemes: Permissive access – Question, 27 May 2021

There is an imperative, which has been particularly noticed during the Covid lockdown periods, when more people sought access to our countryside. We want to see that continue and be encouraged. That is why, in the schemes that we are bringing forward under environmental land management, **there will be a very clear access commitment, backed by funding**. **Lord Benyon: HL Deb, 27 May 2021, c1097**

Access for disabled people to the countryside will be funded under these schemes. Funding could be available for, for example, improving footpath surfaces, gates and access to footpaths. We are looking at this in the tests and trials that we are carrying out at the moment. **Lord Benyon: HL Deb, 27 May 2021, c1097**

Local access fora are absolutely vital in this, and what is decided at governmental level is often unimportant when you get down to the ground. Local access fora have been brilliant at bringing together farming and landowning interests with the desires and needs of walkers. I will also say that we are also encouraging farms to group together in clusters as part of the environmental land management scheme, so we can get improved

access across a landscape, rather than just across an existing farm. **Lord Benyon: HL Deb, 27 May 2021, c1098**

Written answers – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Countryside: Access (28 April 2021)

The Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme is based on sets of standards covering different activities producing desired environmental benefits. In the first phase of the pilot we are working with the first 8 standards that have been developed and will add to these over the course of 3 years of piloting. **We are exploring the development of a standard covering public access to the countryside.** **Lord Gardiner of Kimble: HL Deb, 28 April 2021, cW**

Written answers – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Public footpaths: Closures (10 March 2021)

During 2021/22 Natural England, on behalf of Defra, will be conducting research to determine what happened to access provision after the end of Stewardship agreements **to help inform future public access provision within schemes.** **Lord Gardiner of Kimble: HL Deb, 10 March 2021, cW**

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Bridleways (4 March 2021)

Our 25-year environment plan and landscapes review explain how we will help to connect people with nature. Our new environmental land management schemes will include payments to ensure that those goods are delivered. **Victoria Prentis: HC Deb, 4 March 2021, c365**

....The schemes we are introducing **will incentivise farmers to enhance public access across the piece.** **Victoria Prentis: HC Deb, 4 March 2021, c365**

Written answers – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Bridleways (22 February 2021)

The Government is a great supporter of the health and wellbeing benefits that access to the countryside can bring. As articulated in the 25 Year Environment Plan, public access to the countryside provides a huge range of benefits, including improving physical and mental health and supporting local communities and economies. The Government is supporting and enhancing access to the countryside in several ways, for example by completing the England Coast Path, supporting our network of National Trails, ensuring that rights of way are recorded and protected, **as well as developing ways to support access through financial provisions in the Agriculture Act for environmental land management.** Our new schemes will make a significant contribution to the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan, including beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment. Public access is a key way that people can engage with the environment and so supporting greater and more varied access is an important aspect of achieving this goal.

We are looking at ways in which our new agri-environment schemes could fund the creation of new paths, such as footpaths and bridleways, providing greater and safe access for cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians. Working in close collaboration with stakeholders we are exploring the best ways of making further enhancements to our wonderful access network. **Rebecca Pow: HC Deb, 22 February 2021, cW**

Environmental Land Management schemes – Question (14 December 2020)

My Lords, as we said in consideration of the Agriculture Bill, access will be part of the schemes, and work is under way in those areas. I look forward to working with your Lordships to ensure that there is a rollout of not

only the environmental advancements **but access where it will have considerable benefits for people.** Lord Gardiner of Kimble: HL Deb, 14 December 2020, c1416

Written answers – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Recreation Spaces Health (1 October 2020)

The Government is taking a number of steps to encourage and ensure public access to parks, and green spaces more generally, now and more so in the future, to enhance health and wellbeing.

Over the summer we worked with stakeholders to plan and problem solve the easing of restrictions and funded a bespoke multi-media campaign that encouraged access to the outdoors and in a safe and responsible manner. This period saw a significant rise in visitor numbers to green and blue spaces as well as to membership of outdoor activities' organisations.

We are working to complete the England Coast Path and to support our network of National Trails, and intend to create a new National Trail across the North of England. We are ensuring that rights of way are recorded and protected, **as well as developing ways to support access through the Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme.** Rebecca Pow: HC Deb, 1 October 2020, cW

Agriculture Bill – Report (1st Day): Amendment 1 (15 Sep 2020)

I am a great advocate of the benefits that access to the countryside and the natural world can bring. Clause 1(1)(b) will allow financial assistance to be given to support public access to and enjoyment of the countryside, farmland and woodland...

The ELM scheme will reward land managers for the public goods that they deliver, including beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment. **Public access is a key way that people can engage with the environment. Supporting access is therefore an important aspect of achieving this goal.**

We are looking at how the ELM scheme could fund the creation of new paths, such as footpaths and bridleways, which provide access for cyclists, riders and pedestrians where appropriate. This will be in addition to current local authorities' rights of way arrangements. The scheme could also support wider access opportunities to, and on, water and waterways, such as lakes and rivers, for canoeists, anglers and swimmers where appropriate. Again, this is about balance. We all know—this is so often the case, in my view—that when this is done through interested parties meeting together, some of the hostility evaporates: they all get round what is perhaps in these times the proverbial table and work through the issues to everyone's mutual interest.

We will determine in more detail what ELM will pay for as we develop further the scheme; importantly, we are engaging with stakeholders to inform this. The current wording of the Bill allows us to develop, in close collaboration with stakeholders, **the best ways of making further enhancements to our exceptional access network, including waterways.** Lord Gardiner of Kimble: HL Deb, 15 September 2020, c1147

Agriculture Bill, Second Reading

Financial assistance will be provided for protecting or improving the environment and will allow the environmental land management—ELM—scheme to provide financial assistance for the delivery of outcomes such as cleaner air and water and thriving plants and wildlife. The Government will also provide financial support in connection with managing land or water to help mitigate flooding. There will also be support for

action to improve animal health and welfare, reduce endemic disease, keep livestock and soils healthy, **and support public access to and enjoyment of the countryside**. Farmers and land managers will be rewarded for their vital work in enhancing our environment and looking after our landscapes. **Lord Gardiner of Kimble: HL Deb, 10 June 2020, c1751**

A number of points were made on results. We will be working on that because we want to ensure that the approach achieves the results we need. **On access, of course, all farmers and land managers will continue to comply with the regulatory standards, including those on public rights of way. We think the ELM can fund the creation of new paths and the maintenance of footpaths and bridleways, which will be very beneficial.** **Lord Gardiner of Kimble: HL Deb, 10 June 2020, c1829**