

Riding Out and Carriage Driving • Preserving Access Lobbying • Providing More Access

To enable every horse rider and carriage driver to be able to ride or drive from their stable onto a safe network of off-road paths, and until that time, to be able to access those safely via the road network.

The British Horse Society's (BHS) access vision will be achieved over a number of years; how much will be achieved every year will depend on the resources available at the time. The implications arising out of the cost-of-living crisis are ongoing and we are already seeing that many authorities are facing ongoing cuts to their rights of way budgets, meaning bridleways and byways are not being maintained, and definitive map modification order applications are sitting in ever-growing long lists waiting to be determined.

Access is one of the Society's key charitable aims:

'To promote and secure the provision, protection and preservation of rights of way and of access for ridden and driven horses over public roads, highways, footpaths, bridleways and byways, carriage ways, public paths and other land.'

The Society's access aim is intertwined with other BHS objectives especially:

- The promotion of community participation in healthy recreation involving the horse.
- The promotion and advancement of the education, training, and safety of the public in all matters relating to the horse.

There are several pending legislative changes that will impact on the Society's access work over the next few years, including Active Travel legislation, the Deregulation Act, and the rights of way provisions therein that are still to be implemented.



Need for an Access Strategy

An access strategy is needed:

- To improve the quality and connectivity of the riding and carriage driving network.
- To increase the safety of equestrians by providing safe off-road access and routes.
- To enable the horse industry to grow.
- To increase the health and wellbeing of the nation – equestrian access benefits walkers and cyclists as well as equestrians.

Lack of Safe Off-Road Access for Equestrians

Many equestrian rights of way can now only be reached using busy roads. In England and Wales, riders currently have less than 22% of the public rights of way network and carriage drivers only 5%, and much less in many counties. In some areas, there are no bridleways or byways at all. Many rights of way are now disconnected from each other because the roads that connect them are no longer safe for equestrians to use due to the speed and volume of motorised traffic on them. This leaves many equestrians without access to a safe local route to use.

In Northern Ireland there are so few places to ride out, the majority of equestrians just ride on the busy roads.

In Scotland, whilst the Land Reform (Scotland) Act introduced access rights enabling one to go on to most land to enjoy the outdoors as long as you behave responsibly, equestrians still face significant problems in gaining access to some areas.



Safe Access

Equestrians desperately need safe routes for the same reasons as walkers and cyclists; many roads are no longer safe for them to use due to the speed and volume of traffic on the roads.

Between November 2010 and December 2023, The British Horse Society reporting system has recorded there have been:

- 15,496 road incidents.
- 47 people have lost their lives and 1,686 injured.
- 636 horses have been killed and 1,522 horses injured.
- 81% of these incidents were because vehicles passed too close to the horse.

Research indicates that these reports represent approximately 10% of total actual incidents.

British Equestrian Trade Association National Equestrian Survey 2023

- The number of regular riders – those who have ridden at least once in the past 12 months – has risen from 3 million in 2019 to 3.2 million in 2022.
- The number of regular riders – those who have ridden at least once a month for the past 12 months – has risen from 1.8 million in 2019 to 1.82 million in 2022.
- There are 726,000 horses in Great Britain.
- There are 331,000 horse owning homes.
- 58% of riders are female, 38% are male and 8% are non – binary/other.



The Society's Vision for Access is:

'For every horse rider and carriage driver to be able to ride/drive from their stable onto a safe network of off-road paths, and until that time to be able to access those safely via the road network.'

The Society's research shows:

- Two thirds of BHS members ride at least four times a week.
- 93% of our members hack out and 96% of BRC members hack out.
- 82% of our members have to ride on the public roads as part of their hack, with this figure rising to 85% for BRC members.
- 72% of our members ride for pleasure.
- 66% of BRC members ride for pleasure.

The Covid 19 pandemic demonstrated how important access to the outdoors was to everyone. More people are now recognizing the value of accessing outdoor spaces. It is important that these public spaces are available to everyone to access responsibly and safely. It has been clearly demonstrated that outdoor access is vitally important for the health and wellbeing of the nation, and this is particularly so for equestrians who need safe places to ride. The Government has also recognized this and has set its sights on getting 3.5 million more people active by 2030, through its Get Active Strategy. It has also committed to giving the public access to green and blue spaces within a 15-minute walk of home, through its Environmental Improvement Plan. The most cost-effective means of realising both targets is through an expansion of our rights of access to the outdoors.



Resources

In recent years, the Society has invested heavily in Access, obtaining a grant of £150,000 of funding from Sport England to fund our 2026 work. The Society match funded this sum, making it a £300,000 project which ran over three years. Due to Covid, this was extended for a further year, with extra funding of £75,000 from Sport England which was match funded by the Society. The funding has been extended to 2026 with a further grant of £200,000 from Sport England which is match funded by the Society.

The Society had a vision of enabling more delivery of its access work regionally and the Society now has nine employed Access Field Officers, meaning all of England's regions, Scotland and Wales are now covered by an Access Field Officer.

The Society's greatest access resource is its team of over 300 Access and Bridleways Officers, 47 Access Representatives in Scotland, over 100 Historical Research volunteers, and over 80 Affiliated Equestrian Access Groups, who work tirelessly across the UK to deliver better access for equestrians.

The Society has a wealth of resources available to our Access and Bridleways Officers, Members, Affiliated Equestrian Access Groups, and members of the public to assist them with their access issues, including a suite of access advisory leaflets, bhsaccess.org.uk, training courses, Map My Hack, Ride Maps, Access Fighting Fund and the Ride Out Fund.

Working with Partners and Landowners

The Society will work with its partners and landowners to achieve its access aims when it is in the Society's interests to do so.

Examples of some of the partners we currently work with are: British Driving Society, The Ramblers, Ramblers Cymru, The Disabled Ramblers, Cycling UK, British Cycling, Open Spaces Society, British Mountaineering Council, Byways and Bridleways Trust, Paddle UK, The Trails Trust, the National Federation of Bridleways Associations, Ordnance Survey, Network Rail, the National Trust, the Canal and Rivers Trust, the NFU, the CLA, Sustrans, Forestry England, Natural Resources Wales, the Woodland Trust, Parish and Community Councils.

The Society will continue to work with more than fifty other organisations to push the aims of Outdoors for All to government, namely More People, More Active, More Often – Nature Rich Species that Everyone, Everywhere can access – A Commitment to Respect Protect and Enjoy our Special Spaces.



The Strategy

The Society's Equestrian Access Strategy has four strands:

1. To lobby for more and better equestrian access.
2. To increase recreational horse riding and carriage driving.
3. To create and connect routes.
4. To protect, reinstate, and improve existing access.

With the following objectives:

Lobbying

- Engaging in high level lobbying across the UK to ensure that equestrians are considered and included where appropriate in all legislation.
- Ensuring there is a presumption in favour of including provision for equestrian access automatically alongside access for walkers and cyclists in (i) all Local Development Plans and Local Transport Plans, (ii) when roads are created or improved, and (iii) when new developments are planned, unless there is a strong evidence reason why this would not be possible.
- Ensuring that horse riders have access to active travel routes. Horse riders, like walkers and cyclists, are vulnerable road users. Currently horse riders are often excluded from these routes leaving them to ride on roads that are not considered safe for walkers and cyclists to use.
- Ensuring that permanent and permissive public access options are embedded in the Environmental Land Management Scheme paying landowners also to improve and enhance existing bridleways and byways (such as rolling green lanes, or leaving cross-field bridleways uncultivated), and to create parking places so that people can access and enjoy those opportunities.
- Ensuring the 2026 cut-off date in Wales is repealed and the 2031 cut-off date in England is repealed.
- Extending the right of access to equestrians to access land, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- Lobbying for the creation of new routes.
- Encouraging riders and carriage drivers to lobby their MP.

Increasing riding out and carriage driving

- Encouraging people to ride and carriage drive out.
- Making routes easily accessible via maps, GPS, waymarking.
- Developing our Rideathon hacking challenge.
- Developing park and ride (horse box and trailer parking).
- Encouraging responsible behaviour and use of routes and spaces.
- Running pleasure rides.
- Marketing events.

Creating routes to link existing routes and to avoid dangerous roads

- Gaining access for horse riders and carriage drivers on footpaths, cycle routes, tow paths, access land, behind the hedge routes, the public forest estate.
- Working with large landowners to create new routes.
- Recording suitable recreational trails on the definitive map as bridleways. Currently, many of these trails have no defined status or exclude horse riders. Recording them as bridleways on the definitive map would ensure that they are available to more users, and therefore of benefit to more people.
- Ensuring routes are created in new development proposals.

Protecting, reinstating, and improving existing routes

- Researching and make applications to record routes.
- Recruiting more Access volunteers.
- Training and supporting Access and Historical Research volunteers.
- Working to defeat illegal and damaging use.
- Responding to definitive map modification order applications and public path orders.
- Ensuring that equestrians are not required to purchase permits to ride/carriage drive in the Forest England public forests. At present there are some forests where equestrians are required to purchase permits when this is not required of walkers and cyclists. This is unfair and discriminatory.
- Working for equestrians to be able to use tow paths, unless tow paths are shown to be unsuitable. Some towpaths are existing definitive bridleways which horse riders' access perfectly safely.
- Stop the surfacing of definitive bridleways and restricted byways with tarmacadam, unless they are within an urban environment and are already tarmacked.
- Repairing routes, route furniture and improving signage.

Reporting

We will produce an annual report setting out what has been achieved in furtherance of the Strategy.

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