

Bringing Horses and People Together

Whissendine Neighbourhood Plan
Planning Policy,
Rutland County Council,
Catmose,
Oakham,
Rutland,
LE15 6HP

28 June 2023

Dear Rutland County Council

Whissendine Neighbourhood Plan

The response below is from the British Horse Society however our volunteers in the county may also respond at a local level.

Overall

The British Horse Society is the UK's largest equestrian Charity, representing the UK's 3 million horse riders. In Rutland, equestrians have access to 39% of the rights of way network however the network is fragmented and therefore they are increasingly forced to use busy roads to access them.

Between 1/1/22 and 31/12/22

- 3,552 road incidents involving horses have been reported to The British Horse Society
- 69 horses have died
- 125 horses have been injured
- 139 people have been injured
- 26% of riders were victims to road rage or abuse
- 82% of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too closely to the horse
- 78% of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too quickly

This illustrates the importance of neighbourhood plans being committed to protect, improve and extend on and off-road access for vulnerable road users including equestrians to prevent these numbers from increasing in the future. ***'Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users'*** (NPPF, s100).

DEFRA has recorded a population of 1,846 horses in the LE15 postcode area (2021). The contribution per horse to the economy, according to BETA (2019), is £5,548, therefore in this case a significant contribution of £ 10,241,608 per annum. The equine industry provides diverse employment (vets, farriers, feed outlets, saddlers, instructors, venues, liverys, etc). Promoting, nurturing and enabling equestrian access would support the equestrian industry.

The Neighbourhood Plan aims state that development should be 'well-designed, sustainable', 'enhance quality of life' and 'preserve rural environment' improve connections between people and places', 'protect and enhance the natural environment', have 'no detrimental effect on existing community facilities' and enhance 'health and wellbeing'. These are commitments which would be promoted by the protection and enhancement of PRow and multi-user routes.

Footpaths and bridleways are mentioned in the draft in terms of *Design*. The opportunities to connect new infrastructure as bridleways or multi-user routes to improve the network noted in *Infrastructure* would be welcome to avoid pushing equestrians onto roads which could see an increase in MPV traffic where housing and employment developments grow. Such provisions would futureproof the routes and engage a wider range of users in active travel and leisure which in turn will impact positively on health and wellbeing and road safety statistics. Page 42 of the draft illustrates the benefits of walking and cycling only; the majority of horse riders who 'hack out' are women and they enjoy health benefits from this activity.

Equestrian activity contributes to health targets. Research undertaken found that 68% of respondents participated in horse riding and associated activities for 30 minutes or more at least three times a week (University of Brighton and Plumpton College on behalf of The British Horse Society). Sport England estimate that such a level of sporting activity will help an individual achieve or exceed the government's recommended minimum level of physical activity. According to BETA two-thirds of equestrians are women and Church et al (2010) found 37% of women who are horse riders are over 45 years of age and over a third would pursue no other physical activity.

All vulnerable road users should be included otherwise the scenario is horses become sandwiched between MPV traffic on one side and cyclists on the other. **Active travel/utility travel does include equestrians.** Jesse Norman in House of Commons debate on Road Safety, 5 November 2018: "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". Amendment is need re *Infrastructure* to reflect this.

The Whissendine Village Design Statement referred to only mentions footpaths. Bridleways, which include a greater range of users, and the structures on them must also be accessible.

The BHS would welcome further dialogue. Information is available from <https://www.bhs.org.uk/go-riding/leaflets-and-downloads/>

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British Horse Society