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## Draft Local Plan January 2026

This is a response to the January 2026 consultation on the Milton Keynes Council draft Local Plan by The British Horse Society, on behalf of riders and drivers of horses and their use of bridleways, byways and roads. It does not include comments on horse-related business. Please see Supporting information below for more about the Society and equestrians.

### 1. Key points and definitions:

- A public bridleway is a public right of way on or leading a horse, as well as on foot or on a bicycle. A restricted byway is a public right of way by any means of non-motorised transport, including riding, leading or driving a horse.
- Bridleways and byways are used by people on horseback as well as on foot or cycle but their right to use them is often forgotten or ignored.
- Redways are unique to Milton Keynes and have no legal definition. It is reasonable and practical for riders to use redways, although that use is denied except where a redway is also a public bridleway. However, there is no distinction between redways which are bridleways and redways which are not bridleways, so there is no cogent reason for riders' exclusion from any.
- Horse riders are 'non-motorised users' and have a right to use all public rights of way except footpaths, and roads. Road verges may be designated specifically for horse use.<sup>1</sup>
- Horse riders are active travellers: riding is active and riders travel. Government has stated that active travel provisions should include horse riding. Some councils assume that 'active travel' is only where replacing car journeys, and that horse riding is recreational, but it is

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<sup>1</sup> Highways Act 1980 Section 71

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recognised that active travel routes are also used for exercise and recreation, so there is no cogent reason to exclude horse riders. Enabling a horse to be ridden from its base removes the need for vehicle journeys transporting a horse to a place to ride.

2. There are approximately 750 horses in the city area (Defra data 2022). Those horse owners contribute £6,887 (British Equestrian Trade Association 2023) per horse to the local economy, so over £5 million in total, an important part of the community.
3. Milton Keynes has a history of providing for non-motorised users on bridleways and redways and the draft Plan recognises the benefit of green space and public rights of way. The Plan refers to walking, cycling, recreation and exercise but omits horse riding. This is a serious omission which, in our experience, leads to equestrian activity being ignored or excluded and should be rectified in this crucial policy.
4. The omission is discriminatory and fails the Public Sector Equality Duty.
5. Paragraph 105 of the National Planning Policy Framework states, "Planning policies and decisions should **protect and enhance public rights of way and access**, including taking opportunities to **provide better facilities for users**, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails".
6. Policy GS10 Movement and Access (B) (7) states, "Safeguard and, **where possible**, enhance access to public rights of way". The experience of the BHS is that the words 'where possible' give developers an instant reason to deny enhancement of rights of way, for example by upgrading a footpath to bridleway, because the policy offers the presumption of 'it was not possible', even where that is untrue. The BHS requests that 'where possible' is removed so as to more accurately reflect the intention of NPPF 105 and result in better public rights of way.
7. The Plan should set out in more detail the need to protect existing public rights of way and to increase provision of public rights of way to accommodate the population growth and demand arising from the identified large increase in the built area and the incursion into green space. Public rights of way should be restricted byway to accommodate all non-motorised users and so that equestrians are specifically included.
8. Permissive paths are not adequate replacement for public rights of way which are defined in law and clear as to the rights, responsibilities, duties and powers of users, council and landholders. This is invaluable in ensuring paths are kept available.
9. More development increases motor traffic which makes roads less possible to cross or ride or drive a horse along so safe crossings must include all non-

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motorised users. There has been too much severance of bridleways by roads: the new Local Plan must ensure that continuity of travel for all non-motorised users, including horse riders, is included as a requirement by default, with signal-controlled crossings where underpasses or bridges are not feasible.

10. The Plan should state that parts of the carriageway set aside for non-motorised users should specifically include equestrians, otherwise our experience shows that only cyclists and pedestrians are accommodated, forcing equestrians into the carriageway.
11. Some specific example policies which lack inclusivity:
  - 89 use of “adjacent green space” should include riding as well as walking and cycling.
  - GS10 3 “Maintain and, **where feasible**, expand the public rights of way network”. Omit ‘where feasible’ see 6 above, as it offers the obvious denial of ‘feasibility’ by developers. As equestrians are forgotten or ignored, it would be helpful if this went further and stated “public rights of way on foot, cycle and horse”; also in 7 to ensure that riders are included by default. Development affects public bridleways and byways, and other routes used by horse riders, in areas which are currently green space, but provisions in the development rarely replace the loss for riders.
  - GS10 E, F, H should specifically include equestrians to avoid them being omitted. Equestrians may have limited mobility and use their horse as their mobility aid to gain outdoor exercise and health benefits, including a horsedrawn vehicle.
  - GS11 6 should include riding as well as walking and cycling.
  - GS18 refers to green and open space criteria and to ‘active travel’, but does not mention the public bridleway or its crossing of the A4146. This is a strategic route for local riders and provision is required at the earliest stage to protect the bridleway as green space through the site **and** to ensure there is provision for its users – on foot, horse or cycle – to safely cross the A4146. A protected crossing is essential to avoid this development and its associated increase in road traffic making the road impossible for riders to cross.
  - GS21 6 refers to bridleways (including Redways) to connect to existing routes beyond the site, but it excludes horse riders in requiring “appropriate pedestrian and cyclist crossings of the A422 and suitable safe and attractive crossings of the M1 as appropriate”. Horse riders have as much need as pedestrians and cyclists to reach the rights of way beyond the development and therefore have equal need of safe and attractive crossings of the A422 and M1.

## Supporting information

The British Horse Society is the UK's largest equestrian charity, representing the UK's 3.2 million horse riders and carriage drivers (British Equestrian Trade Association (BETA) survey 2023).

Only 15% of BHS members identify as 'competition riders', using private facilities; most are enjoying their horses in active recreation and exercise on public bridleways, byways, roads and other public areas such as forests, commons and beaches.

### Restricted byway or bridleways essential

Most public rights of way are only footpaths so horse riders may use only the 22% of public rights of way which are legally recorded as bridleways or byways, of which many are unavailable because they are severed by roads which have developed for motor traffic only.

Drivers of horses are in a much worse position, as only 5% of rights of way are byways, the remnants of old roads which were not 'upgraded' for use with motor vehicles.

Equestrians have as much right to use public roads on a horse as they would in a car, but many roads are too high risk and unpleasant to traverse because of motor traffic. It is forgotten that most roads were previously bridleways, 'upgraded' for use with motor vehicles, which has made them unsafe for use other than by motor vehicle.

Equestrians are typically forgotten or ignored in provisions for non-motorised road users, which today focuses on pedestrians and cyclists, resulting in equestrians being unable to use the carriageway and also excluded from foot-cycleways. Riders are also ignored in provision of safe road crossings, resulting in fragmented bridleways and byways truncated by roads which cannot be crossed.

Restricted byways accommodate all non-mechanically propelled users, including on tricycles or horse drawn vehicles.

### Poor road safety for equestrians

In 2024, 3,118 road incidents involving horses were recorded with The British Horse Society (many not reported) in which:

- 58 horses died and 97 were injured
- 80 riders were injured

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This demonstrates the importance of protecting, improving and extending safe off-road provision for equestrians to prevent these numbers from rising.

### Horse owner contribution to local economy

There are approximately 750 horses in the city area (Defra data 2022). Those horse owners contribute £6,887 (British Equestrian Trade Association 2023) per horse to the local economy, so over £5 million in total, an important part of the community

### Social wellbeing

Over half of equestrians identify as girls and women, with an increasing proportion (38%) of men and boys now participating (BETA 2023).

Horse riding is defined as 'moderate intensity exercise' (NHS Health Survey for England, 2016) and both horse riding and carriage driving provide modes of travel for those with limited mobility to access and enjoy the countryside. 22% of equestrians are under 16 years old and 15% are over 45: it is an activity that spans generations and lifetimes.

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