

British Horse Society

Comments on Cleobury Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan

The British Horse Society (BHS) is the largest and most influential equestrian charity in the UK. We aim to protect and promote the interests of all horses and those who care about them, including the 3.0 million people in the UK who ride or who drive a horse-drawn carriage. The BHS also works at county level to ensure our members are represented locally. We thus welcome the opportunity to comment on the Cleobury Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan (CMNP).

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We are surprised to see that there is no mention of equestrians or horses or bridleways in the CMNP. A circular part of the widely promoted long distance ride the Jack Mytton Way (JMW) starts/finishes in Cleobury Mortimer. The JMW can also be used as a linear route from Cleobury Mortimer to Clun and Llanfair Waterdine. This is important to local riders as well as to riders visiting with their own horses (tourists).

Perhaps no horse riders respond to the initial calls for input to the Big Cleobury Survey? Perhaps they thought it was not relevant to them.

We at the BHS think that horses are relevant in our modern age as they:

1. Are a means of access to the countryside, particularly for those who are unable to walk far but can ride a horse (see Annex 1)
2. Are a conduit to a physically active lifestyle particularly amongst a group who are often not very active (see Annex 1).
3. Are good for mental health; many children as well as adults benefit greatly from interactions with horses (Annex 2).
4. Make a significant contribution to the economy (Annex 3)
5. Provide an opportunity for the tourist economy (Annex 3)

These assets of horses contribute to a number of the visions as outlined in the CMNP:

- Access to the beautiful countryside is available for all with good connections between rural and urban areas (point 1 above);
- Mental and physical health is good for all members of the community because there are ample opportunities to exercise, meet others, and obtain specialist support when it is required (points 2 and 3 above);
- There is a prosperous local economy that meets the needs of the town and surrounding villages (points 4 and 5 above);
- Tourists will visit and contribute to the local economy (points 4 and 5 above).

We note that the countryside is greatly valued in Cleobury Mortimer and applaud the plans to maintain and enhance the green corridors.

The Environmental Principle in the CMNP “**Creating better access for people to the countryside and to observe (but not disturb) natural habitats**” can also include horse riding or carriage driving not just cycling and walking.

It is also important to bear in mind Section 100 of the National Planning Framework Policy: “**Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users**”

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We ask the Cleobury Mortimer Steering Group to take account of these benefits and consider the needs of equestrians:

- Providing safe main road crossings of minor roads in the Parish by providing good signage and ensuring good visibility and requesting lower speed limits where possible;
- In developing new off-road pedestrian and cycle routes always consider the needs of horse riders, providing multi-user shared paths where possible;
- If considering on-road or roadside cycle paths also include horse riders (otherwise horses are relegated to the road carriageway and dangerously squeezed between traffic including HGVs and cycles.)
- Working with landowners to upgrade existing footpaths to bridleways where there are missing links (this will benefit cyclists as well as horse riders)
- Working with local landowners to create new “behind the hedge” multi-user paths parallel to the A4117 to link fragmented bridleways and minor roads thus providing better access to the countryside and keeping all vulnerable road users safe.
- Making equestrian tourists welcome in Cleobury Mortimer by demonstrating the needs of equestrians have been taken into account.

Evidence and Supporting Arguments

Equestrians are classified as vulnerable road users (Highway Code 2022) and as such should be given due consideration when considering movement in an area and access to the countryside.

There are over 20,500 horses registered in Shropshire (according to DEFRA passport statistics, June 2021) with 1,510 registered in the SY5 postcode.

The road network is increasingly busy and **unsafe** for equestrians and other vulnerable road users. Road incidents involving horses are increasing. During the calendar year 2022, as many as 3,552 road incidents involving horses were reported to The BHS – nearly 10 per day:

- 68 horses have died and 125 were injured
- 139 people have been injured because of road incidents
- 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

Only in February 2023 was there a serious incident near Shrewsbury with a horse hit by a car, landing on the windscreen which was smashed and the rider thrown and injured. There was police involvement in this incident.

Equestrians currently have access to the following Public Rights of Way (PROW):

- Horse riders: Bridleways, Restricted Byways and BOATs (on average about 23% of PROW in Shropshire - SGO Strategy 2018-2028).
- Carriage Drivers: Restricted Byways and BOATs (less than 4% of PROW in Shropshire).

Cyclists also have access to these PROW. Equestrians, cyclists and even pedestrians also use minor roads as part of their network.

The PROW network is fragmented – especially around Cleobury Mortimer and most horses will be using the minor roads. Several bridleways in the east of the Parish start/end on the main road making them essentially unusable by equestrians and pedestrians as it is not safe to ride or walk on the A4117..

The long distance JMW heads north out of Cleobury Mortimer. The Shropshire Great Outdoors guide splits the route into 8 rides: routes 1 to 6 make up a 75 mile linear ride from Cleobury Mortimer to Llanfair Waterdine. A 60 mile circular ride follows routes 1 to 3 from Cleobury to Roman Bank then routes 7 and 8 from Roman Bank back to Cleobury Mortimer.

The whole of the route is also available to walkers and cyclists

Annex 1

The Health Benefits of Horse Riding and Horse Care in the UK.

The following data comes from research undertaken by the University of Brighton and Plumpton College on behalf of The British Horse Society¹.

¹ <https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/ganngxh/health-benefits-of-riding-in-the-uk-full-report.pdf>

- 68% of questionnaire respondents participated in horse riding and associated activities for 30 minutes or more at least three times a week. 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.
- Women have been identified in government studies as a social group with relatively low levels of participation in physical activity. Some 93% of questionnaire respondents were women and 49% of female respondents were aged 45 or above.

These are comparable figures to a major Sport England survey which found that 90 % of those participating in equestrianism were women and 37 % of the female participants in equestrianism were aged 45 or above. The gender and age profile of equestrianism is not matched by any other sport in the UK².

- Amongst the horse riders who took part in the survey, 39% had taken no other form of physical activity in the last four weeks. This highlights the importance of riding to these people, who might otherwise be sedentary.
- Horse riders with a long-standing illness or disability who took part in the survey were able to undertake horse riding and associated activities at the same self-reported level of frequency and physical intensity as those without such an illness or disability.

Annex 2

Many reports of the mental health benefits of interactions with horses are anecdotal and particularly through the Covid challenges these were widely discussed.

One programme for which the documentation is more structured is The BHS's Changing Lives Through Horses (CLtH) programme which is an alternative education curriculum of regular sessions, taking place in a BHS Approved Riding Centre with qualified and experienced BHS Accredited Professional Coaches.

The programme is suitable for young people, aged 5-25, who have special needs and may be either permanently excluded, or at risk of exclusion in its widest sense, and those who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). They may also be at risk of becoming socially excluded with income below the poverty line and without the skills to improve their economic situation.

The CLtH programme uses a range of awards and achievements within a professional equine setting linked to the school curriculum, but focused and structured towards promoting holistic development and nurturing six life skills: building relationships, communication, confidence, responsibility, teamwork, and perseverance.

For success stories see:

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/support-us/our-campaigns/changing-lives-through-horses/>

² Sport England (2010) Active People Survey (2010/11)

The Devon Partnership NHS Trust has been collaborating with the University of Exeter to research the benefits of a programme where horses are central to improving mental health and wellbeing showing the importance that is attributed to the potential benefits.

http://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/archive/2019/may/title_715469_en.html

Annex 3

Economic Contribution of Equestrians

The British Equestrian Trade Association National Equestrian Survey (2019)³ indicated:

- The economic value of the (non-racing) equestrian sector is £4.7 billion per annum.
- There are 27 million people in Britain with an interest in the equestrian industry.
- £5,548 is spent on average per horse per year which represents a significant contribution to the local economy.

We cannot isolate the economic contribution to Cleobury Mortimer Parish but with 1,510 horses in the SY5 postcode area the contribution could be as much as £8,377,480 per annum in SY5.

Equestrian facilities are important economic entities with activities such as bring your horse on holiday (horse and rider B&B), pleasure rides, competitions all increasingly popular in addition to established activities such as schooling and hacking.

The equine industry provides diverse employment (vets, farriers, feed outlets, saddlers, instructors, competition venues, liveries, etc). Promoting, nurturing and enabling equestrian access would support the equestrian industry.

For more information contact:

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³ <http://www.beta-uk.org/pages/news-amp-events/news/national-equestrian-survey-2019-provides-optimistic-view-of-industry.php>

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