

The British Horse Society Comments Bishop's Castle Neighbourhood Development Plan

The British Horse Society (BHS) welcomes the chance to comment on the Bishop's Castle Neighbourhood Development Plan (BCNDP) as we want to ensure that the needs and safety of horse riders are taken into account particularly when considering improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure and opportunities¹.

It is surprising how many horses are kept in urban and suburban areas – indeed recently I saw a horse and rider on Harlescott Lane in Shrewsbury! These horses need access to safe routes within, across and out of town to access safe off-road routes. Also, horse riders are part of the visitor economy in Shropshire bringing their own horses to stay in the county or riding their horses through the county on long distance routes. Horses in other parts of the county may also make day-trips to ride in the Bishop's Castle area.

The BCNP notes on page 52 that there are no Bridleways in the Parish which means that horse riders crossing the town must currently use the road network.

There are more than 20,000 horses in Shropshire (DEFRA 2021). As roads become busier the safety of vulnerable road users including horse riders is compromised. In the calendar year 2022 there were 68 horses killed in UK road incidents and a further 125 injured. Thankfully no riders were killed in road accidents last year but 139 were injured. The majority of incidents occurred when drivers passed too fast or too close.

Horse riders do not like to use busy A and B roads but are sometimes forced to in order to access a fragmented network of C roads and Public Rights of Way (PROW). Horse riders have, theoretically, access to just 23% of the PROW network in Shropshire but in practice it is much less owing to extensive fragmentation. Thus particular care needs to be taken on sections of A or B roads that might be used to link safer riding routes. In those cases cycles and horses should not be segregated unless both are off the main carriageway. For example if improvements are made on the A488 then horse riders need to be taken into account as the main A road is a link between C roads.

If they are not allowed to be in the same space as cycles then horses are forced onto the road carriageway squeezed between cycles (possibly oncoming cycles) on one side and motor vehicles on the other. This is very dangerous situation for everyone.

In general, everywhere that cycles are allowed, horse riders should also be allowed. Horse riders are legally entitled to use all highways and PROW except footpaths. They should therefore not be excluded from any part of a highway - including the footway or verge (road margin) - that is proposed for use by cycles/pedestrians only. In some cases, roadside footways that have already been designated for cycle/pedestrian use and sections of the highway already designated for cycles only should also be upgraded to allow use by horse riders.

Also to note is that the Sustrans Paths for Everyone initiative is ensuring that NCN routes are fully opened up for horse riders. Thus horse rider safety must be taken

into account when putting forward proposals that relate to the existing NCN 44 routes.

Where PROW footpaths are suitable for upgrade to Bridleway then this will also help keep horses off the roads.

If the project to open up the old Craven Arms to Bishop's Castle railway line is ever resurrected then this should be a multi-user route and designated at least a Bridleway and added to the Definitive Map or if possible a Restricted Byway so that horse drawn vehicles could also use the route.

Where there is no way for horses and other vulnerable road users to be off the roads we strongly support the introduction of Quiet Lanes/20 mph zones/Low Traffic Neighbourhoods.

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i The Dept for Transport has recently confirmed to the BHS:

"...we do encourage LAs [Local Authorities] ... to look for opportunities for safety improvements for horse riding as part of design and roll out of new or upgraded active travel schemes,..... particularly if they are nil or inconsequential in cost.

LTN 1/20 is also clear that engagement with equestrian groups at design stage is recommended and for mixed off road routes equestrians are considered as part of the design considerations (such as with parapet heights)."