



Local Plan Team, Surrey Heath Borough Council
Via email: planning.consultation@surreyheath.gov.uk

17 June 2026

Dear Sir or Madam

RE: Consultation on Main Modifications to the Surrey Heath Local Plan 2019 – 2038

I am responding to the above on behalf of the British Horse Society, the UK's largest equestrian charity, with over 125,000 members and representing the country's 3.2 million horse riders and carriage drivers.

Our comments on the plan are included in the table below. The overarching premise is that equestrians should be included in provision for cyclists unless there are cogent and unresolvable reasons for their exclusion.

The justification for our comments is included below the tables. We urge the decision makers, and those assisting them, to please read this information carefully and thank you in anticipation of the same.

Pg No	Submission Surrey Heath Local Plan (2019-2038) Schedule of Main Modifications
31	<i>Policy HA4 Mindenhurst, Deepcut</i> <i>g) Measures to reduce the impact of traffic upon and arising from Deepcut which will include reducing demand for travel, improved public transport provision, a safe integrated footpath/cycle route network linking to neighbouring settlements and key services and improvements to the surrounding highway network</i> Equestrians should be included in the provision of safe networks linking settlements. This can be done by means of making these routes bridleways/restricted byways or by ensuring proper multi use routes (including equestrians) are created.
55	<i>HA12/01 – Swift Lane Extension, Swift Lane, Bagshot, GU19 5NN</i> <i>d) Provide compensatory improvements to the surrounding Green Belt, which could include the delivery of improvements to existing green infrastructure, wider biodiversity improvements, and new and enhanced walking and cycling routes.</i> Equestrians should be included within the new and enhanced routes for walkers and cyclists. This can be done by means of making these routes bridleways/restricted byways or by ensuring proper multi use routes (including equestrians) are created.
81	<i>Policy IN2: Transportation</i> <i>c) provides safe, convenient access both within the development and to adjoining areas for all potential users including those with disabilities, giving priority to walking and cycling routes over vehicular traffic...</i> As above
124	<i>Policy DH1: Design Principles</i> <i>Safe, connected and efficient places</i>

For horses. For people. For life.

The British Horse Society is an Appointed Representative of Howden Insurance Brokers Limited (Firm reference 309639) who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Registered Charity Nos. 210504 (England and Wales), SC038516 (Scotland) and 1382 (Isle of Man).

	<i>i) maximises permeability to enable good pedestrian and cycle movement through the development to support healthy living and the creation of a high quality public realm.</i> As above
125	A Healthy Place <i>h) enables and supports healthy lifestyles, in accordance with Policies SS3a and SS3b, taking into account the design of buildings, streets and neighbourhoods.</i> Safe, connected and efficient places <i>i) maximises permeability to enable good pedestrian and cycle movement through the development to support healthy living and the creation of a high quality public realm.</i> The inclusion of equestrians can only help to achieve these principles

Pg No	Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Surrey Heath Local Plan SA Report Addendum
9	<i>4.2.1 Elsewhere there are limited community infrastructure opportunities set to be realised via the new proposed allocations / SLAA sites, although numerous sites have potential to support improved walking and cycling linkages / permeability. Also, a drawback of the proposed strategy relates to several small sites in less accessible locations, although these sites together comprise only a small element of the overall strategy.</i> <i>With regards to site specific policies, there is a clear focus on use mix and realising opportunities for increasing permeability and improving walking/cycling links. With regards to borough-wide development management policies, numerous policies are supportive of accessibility objectives (no tensions are highlighted), with Policy CTC1 (Camberley Town Centre) considered to be particularly important.</i> Equestrians should be included within provision for walkers and cyclists. This can be done by means of making these routes bridleways/restricted byways or by ensuring proper multi use routes (including equestrians) are created
14	<i>4.15.3 The proposed modifications do not give rise to any significant tensions with sustainability objectives, although it is notable that several site specific requirements relating to delivery of walking and cycling improvements are proposed to be deleted.</i> It is disappointing to note any removal of requirements to provide for vulnerable road users.

Pg No	Main Modifications Habitats Regulations Assessment
58	Policy IN2: Transportation <i>c) provides safe, convenient access both within the development and to adjoining areas for all potential users including those with disabilities, giving priority to walking and cycling routes over vehicular traffic</i> Equestrians should be included within provision for walkers and cyclists. This can be done by means of making these routes bridleways/restricted byways or by ensuring proper multi use routes (including equestrians) are created

Pg No	Equality Impact Assessment
	Research undertaken by the University of Brighton and Plumpton College on behalf of The British Horse Society in 2010 suggested that • <i>the vast majority (90 percent plus) of horse riders are female</i> • <i>more than a third (37 percent) of the female riders who took part in the survey were above 45 years of age.</i> • <i>Horse riders with a long-standing illness or disability who took part in the survey are 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.</i> As a result of being involved with horses, Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) reports^[viii] • <i>90% of participants feel more confident in themselves</i> • <i>82% feel more connected to others</i> • <i>72% are better able to regulate their emotions</i> • <i>71% have improved their motor skills.</i> The protected characteristics of age, disability and sex would be aided by the inclusion of equestrians within access provision for cyclists (a male dominated activity) in this plan.

Justification for equestrian inclusion

Economic Value There are almost **28,000 horses^[iii]** passported to owners living in Surrey, the contribution for which to the economy is almost **£194 million per annum^[iii]**, much of it likely to be spent locally (vets, farriers, feed merchants, hay and bedding suppliers, etc.)

Social Value Recent studies have demonstrated the **social value** of horses to the UK to be **£1.2 billion^[iv]**

Safety Statistics collated for 2025 indicate that

- **2,810** road incidents involving horses have been logged with British Horse Society
- **59** horses have died, and 82 have been injured
- **86** people have been injured
- **22% of riders were victims to road rage or abuse**
- **78% of incidents occurred because a driver passed by too closely to the horse**
- **83% of incidents occurred because a driver passed by too quickly**

The % of those passing too quickly has risen from 81% in 2024 to 83% in 2025 — this is the highest percentage recorded since 2017.

These figures are significantly lower than the real situation as NHS statistics indicate that in the year **2023/2024 there were 2493 admissions for "Animal-rider or occupant of animal-drawn vehicle injured in transport accident"**^[vi]

Highway Code hierarchy of road users Horses are recognised as being as vulnerable as cyclists on the road and should be afforded the same protection.



Health & Wellbeing A new piece of work^[vi] has been released by British Equestrian (BE) which is directly aligned with the government's Get Active: A strategy for the future of sport and physical activity document, which calls for sport and physical activity to support public health, tackle inequality and boost community resilience.

BE's research supports this vision by providing robust monetised evidence of how equestrianism contributes to:

- Preventative healthcare and reduced NHS demand
- Inclusive access for women, older adults, disabled people and underserved communities
- Community wellbeing through volunteering and engagement
- Cross-sector integration with health, education and care.

Equestrianism is ideally positioned to be **part of the Government's sport and physical activity ambitions**, as it is an industry with already measurable impact and additional untapped potential.

People with a physical disability are 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., a fact which is quite unique amongst other sports.^[vii]

As a result of being involved with horses, Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) reports^[viii]

- 90% of participants feel more confident in themselves
- 82% feel more connected to others
- 72% are better able to regulate their emotions
- 71% have improved their motor skills.

Equestrian activity is recognised by available literature as a **contributor to personal growth and development, especially among young people**. Reported outcomes include increased self-esteem, confidence, improved behaviour, and stronger social skills. Equine-assisted learning and therapeutic programs also show positive effects on job readiness and employability—particularly among males.^[ix]

Natural England has said 'design a route for horses and the disabled and you have designed a route for everyone'.

Government recognises that the mode of active travel is inclusive – on foot, by bike, by horse.

"The more people (walkers, cyclists, horse riders etc) who use Active Travel, the fitter and healthier they will be, and the more their communities will benefit from lower congestion and better air quality, among a host of other benefits" (Government Response to Call for Evidence Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy: Safety Review 2018)

Environment Currently many horse riders use a horsebox to transport their horse from the place where they are kept to the place where they are to ride. Including horses on road-side or off-road paths for walkers and cyclists would reduce or eliminate this need.

DEFRA Circular 1/09 Rights of Way^[i]

7.1 Proposals for the development of land affecting public rights of way give rise to two matters of particular concern: the need for adequate consideration of the rights of way before the decision on the planning application is taken...

7.2 The effect of development on a public rights of way is a material consideration in the determination of applications for planning permission and local planning authorities should ensure that the potential consequences are taken into account whenever such applications are considered.

National Planning Policy Framework

96. *Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:*

c) enable and support healthy lives, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs and reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities [...]

105. *Planning policies and decisions should **protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, [...]***

125. *Planning policies and decisions should:*

*a) encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or **improve public access to the countryside;***

British Horse Society would welcome the opportunity to work with Surrey Heath, and future developers, in ensuring that equestrians within and close to the Borough might equally benefit from the provisions currently proposed for walkers and cyclists.

Yours faithfully

Sarah Rayfield (Mrs.)
Access Field Officer – London & South East

[viii] <https://rda.org.uk/impact/>

[ii] DEFRA FoI December 2024

[iii] BETA 2023

[iv] The Power of Horses: Equestrianism's Social Value October 2025

[v] <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2023-24#>

[vi] The Power of Horses: Equestrianism's Social Value October 2025

[vii] <https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/gannghxh/health-benefits-of-riding-in-the-uk-full-report.pdf>

[viii] <https://rda.org.uk/impact/>

[ix] <https://doras.dcu.ie/21394/>

[i] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rights-of-way-circular-1-09>