

HAMPSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

ACTIVE TRAVEL

Introduction

This paper explains the role and status of the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (HCAF) and its concerns relating to Active Travel (AT) in rural areas.

As a statutory Local Access Forum, HCAF is an independent body that advises the County Council and other organisations on improving opportunities to enjoy Hampshire's countryside and coast. It encourages and assists access provision and gives strategic advice on local issues including:

- Policies for the management and maintenance of rights of way, and
- Development and delivery of the [Hampshire Countryside Access Plan](#) (CAP).

Under section 94 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000, local Highway Authorities and other so-called 'section 94(4) Bodies' are required to "have regard, in carrying out their functions, to any relevant advice given to them" by a Local Access Forum. This means that, although not bound to follow such advice, section 94(4) bodies are legally required to take account of it in carrying out their functions.

HCAF comprises local members of the public with a wealth of experience in countryside recreation and rights of way. Members are volunteers, who represent an interest rather than a specific organisation, but also have a wide reach through their knowledge and contacts. They are balanced between those who use Public Rights of Way (PRoW) (walkers, horse-riders, horse drawn vehicles, cyclists, disabled users and motor vehicle users), those who provide access (farmers, land managers, etc.) and other relevant interests such as conservation and education. This wide range of representation enables HCAF to provide balanced advice which is based on consensus among its members.

HCAF's area includes the existing unitary authorities (Southampton City Council and Portsmouth City Council) plus the area of Hampshire outside the two National Parks (South Downs National Park and New Forest National Park). The national parks have their own access forums.

HCAF is generally supportive of policies and schemes which encourage active travel and would like to assist HCC to develop and implement its AT Agenda. It is keen to engage with the HCC AT Team as it shares many of the same goals.

N.B. Active Travel England is preparing detailed Rural Design Guidance (similar in scope to LTN 1/20 but tailored to the rural environment). HCAF advises that active travel schemes in Hampshire should comply with this guidance when published.

Section 1

This Section sets out HCAF's views on AT.

1. The Hampshire Countryside Access Plan (CAP) and AT in rural areas

The [CAP 2025-35](#) provides a framework for the County Council, its partners, and the communities of Hampshire to safely maintain and enhance the access network over the next ten years. Given the significant development proposed within Hampshire over this time, a key area of focus within the CAP is **Planning and transport systems**. One of the CAP's two Guiding Principles within this area is:

“Pursue enhancements to countryside access including improving interconnectivity and accessibility of the network, reflecting the changing patterns of existing and new residents’ needs, and the evidenced public health benefits of access to nature and landscape.”

There is much common ground here between the CAP and Hampshire’s AT agenda, which seeks both to improve access along existing vehicle-free routes such as PRow and to provide new access to interconnect those routes. HCAF is therefore keen to support any initiative that will meet the objectives of both areas of the Council’s work.

2. Definition of Active Travel:

AT is not legally defined, but HCAF understands it to mean the following in the rural context:

- a) Journeys made by walking, cycling (including E-bikes), wheeling (using a wheelchair or mobility aid or scooter) for purposeful journeys, such as journeys to school, work, shops and other local facilities.
- b) Journeys by means that are fully or partially people-powered for any other purpose, primarily walking, cycling, wheeling, horse riding and carriage driving for recreation or health.

3. Vulnerability of users

The Highway Code, which applies equally to urban and rural contexts, sets out a **Hierarchy of Road Users**, which places those road users most at risk in the event of a collision at the top of the hierarchy.:

- 1) Walkers
- 2) Cyclists, horse riders and drivers of horse drawn vehicles
- 3) Motorcyclists
- 4) Drivers of other motorised vehicles

The Highway Code states: “The road users most at risk from road traffic are pedestrians, in particular children, older adults and disabled people, cyclists, horse riders and motorcyclists” and goes on to say that in any interaction between road users, those who can cause the greatest harm have the greatest responsibility to reduce the danger or threat they pose to others.

On PRow, cyclists are required by law to give way to horse riders when using bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic.

The PRow network is a fragmented one, and the road network is crucially important to users connecting between paths and ways. This is especially true for horse-riders and cyclists who can use only 20% of PRow. (Horse drawn vehicles may use just 5%). All non-motorised PRow users are vulnerable compared to other road users. They are particularly and increasingly at risk as roads generally become busier and faster. Major roads are particularly hazardous where there is no footway or highway verge.

4. Speed on single track roads

Whether on foot, cycling, on horseback or in a horse drawn vehicle, people are increasingly apprehensive about using the country lanes that link PRow. There is growing evidence that, as dash displays in modern vehicles and satnavs inform drivers that they could be doing 60 mph, some drivers think this means they SHOULD proceed at 60 mph, regardless of conditions or who else might be on the road. Indeed, in rural areas even car drivers report aggression from drivers behind them when driving at a speed less than the national speed limit on narrow winding lanes which they know are used by vulnerable road users.

In small towns and villages, 20mph is the preferred speed limit. In Oxfordshire the highway authority offers 20mph zones to villages and small towns, and over 300 settlements have adopted these zones. As well as the direct safety benefits, reduced speeds mean other road users are less likely to be splashed in wet weather. In rural areas a higher limit could be appropriate. Since the New Forest introduced a blanket 40 mph speed limit both animal and human casualties have reduced.

5. Surfaces

Different users have different requirements: bound surfaces are preferred by pedestrians, cyclists and those wheeling for utility journeys.

In contrast, equestrians prefer unbound surfaces as tarmac can harm horses' joints (although most would prefer an off-road, tarmacked path to using a road). Similarly, off-road cyclists and walkers generally prefer an unbound surface. Where width allows, there should ideally be a separate unbound or grassed strip for these users.

In 2025 HCAF provided guidance to HCC Countryside Services regarding the use of appropriate surfaces for different situations (<https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/countryside/hcaf#step-5>).

6. Equality and Inclusion

Compared with people living in urban areas, people living in rural areas generally have lower levels of accessibility to service locations. Being less able to access certain services is inconvenient and can restrict opportunities. For example, if someone living in a rural area lives near only one further education college they could be restricted in their choice of courses to study.

Wherever possible, schemes developed in rural areas should be accessible to all users at levels 1 – 3 above. HCAF accepts that given the nature of funding available, it is likely that many AT schemes will be designed primarily for walking, cycling and wheeling, but it is important that the needs of disabled users (whether or not they use mobility aids) and of equestrians are considered. Detailed information is available in the Local Government Association's "The Path to Inclusive Footways":

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/path-inclusive-footways>,

and in HCAF's guidance document "Equestrians in Hampshire":

<https://documents.hants.gov.uk/countryside/Equestrians-in-Hampshire.pdf>.

Disabled users could particularly benefit from better information on potential barriers such as steps, stiles and kissing gates, so that they could decide for themselves whether a route is likely to be practicable. The issue of equestrians is dealt with in greater detail in Section 2 of this document.

Section 2: Equestrians as vulnerable road users

This Section relates to equestrians as HCAF is particularly concerned that their needs may not be adequately considered in AT schemes.

1. Equestrians and Active Travel

The Parliamentary perspective: in the Transport Committee report to the House of Commons dated 23 July 2019 on Active Travel clearly states "Active Travel covers any journey that is made by physically active means, and covers such diverse activities as horse-riding, skateboarding, roller skating".

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmtrans/1487/148704.htm>

At a local level, the Hampshire CAP (page 38) clearly identifies horse riding as an active mode of travel.

HCAF considers therefore that it is essential that the needs of equestrians are taken into consideration:

- a) when changing existing PRoW (bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic) that are already shared by walkers, equestrians and cyclists, and
- b) when creating new shared routes, particularly those that fill gaps in the off-road network of PRoW.

Hampshire is one of the most densely horse-populated counties in England and Wales: Defra's records indicate 51,000 registered horses, contributing an estimated £328m to the local economy.

Equestrians are arguably the most risk-averse of all vulnerable road users, mainly because of:

- 1) the horse's capacity for independent action, especially when startled, and
- 2) the far-reaching consequences of any mishap, from costly injury to fatal consequences for both horse and rider.

Many, therefore, elect either to exercise their horses when they are least likely to meet traffic, or not to take them out at all – so that they become increasingly 'invisible' to the public and local authorities.

Nonetheless, many people who keep horses in Hampshire are desperately in need of a better connected, useable network. Horses must be exercised regularly for the health, wellbeing and safety (e.g. avoidance of injury due to lack of fitness or training) of both horse and handler. Many equestrians do not have access to a manège or privately-owned land to exercise their horses and maintain their training.

As indicated in Section 1, inclusivity is an important principle and HCAF urges HCC to consider and wherever possible provide for equestrians in its active travel schemes. Often this can be achieved at little or no additional cost.

2. Guidance relating to equestrians

Active Travel England (ATE): ATE states that it encourages local authorities and funding parties, such as the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans), to consider safety improvements for horse riders during the design and implementation of new or upgraded AT projects. The ATE Route Check User Manual includes horse riders as AT users emphasising the importance of safety for ALL vulnerable road users.

In December 2025, ATE published its draft "Rural Design Guidance" which will provide guidance specific to rural authorities seeking to increase active travel. It is noted that horse riders and horse drawn vehicles are included in the document in particular the statement on Page 3/Introduction/Status which says:

"Although this guidance is not a comprehensive manual for designing equestrian routes, it recommends that, wherever possible, routes should be made accessible for horse riders."

ATE also encourages and expects local authorities to consult with equestrians as part of their stakeholder engagement. Where they have access the needs of equestrians should be taken into account, e.g. regarding the width of off-carriageway routes, design of road crossings and surfacing.

LTN/120: Within this primary guidance used by Highway Authorities when designing cycle infrastructure, the British Horse Society has identified twelve issues that are of concern to equestrians. The recommendations relating to these are summarized in the document 'The Impact of Active Travel Plans and LTN/120 on Equestrians'.

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/qlxjdf3r/202505-summary-of-the-impact-of-active-travel-plans-and-ltn-120-on-equestrians-british-horse-society.pdf>.

Bearing in mind the above, HCAF is seeking reassurance that equestrian needs will be considered in HCC's AT schemes when

- a) bridleways are used for AT routes, especially (though not exclusively) in rural areas;
- b) when creating new routes;
- c) verges are used to create roadside footways or cycleways - equestrians should not be forced to use the carriageway because if a cyclist passes a horse on the inside, there is a high risk that the horse will shy into the path of traffic passing on the outside;
- d) considering surfaces: tarmac can have an impact on horses' joints, but equestrians would still rather use tarmac off-road than on-road, especially as a connection between PRoW. In 2025 HCAF provided guidance to HCC Countryside Services regarding appropriate surfacing.

(<https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/countryside/hcaf#step-5>).

When developing AT recreational routes, it is worth noting:

- that most equestrians are 'leisure' users so generally choose to avoid rush-hour traffic;

- the potential for additional funding e.g. BHS Ride Out Fund¹; and
- there are shared-use initiatives between BHS and Cycling UK to promote responsible/considerate use;

Other HCC guidance: HCC Highways is committed to applying Technical Guidance Note TG19 – Walking, Cycling and Horse-Riding Assessment and Review (WCHAR).

Also, LTP4 supports equestrians:

- Policy RT2: Sustainable access to the countryside.
- Policy C1 – Movement and Place (see graphic and text on page 59 of LTP4)
- Policy C3 – Transport Strategies and Schemes (see page 68 of LTP4)

Horse riders are included in these policy documents, but “Hampshire Rural Active Travel Guidance” and “Transport Strategy and Scheme Development Programme” do not refer to horse riders or horse drawn vehicles.

Policies of other local authorities: At the time of writing, nearby counties Berkshire, Oxfordshire and West Sussex include equestrians in their AT agendas.

Transport for the South East Transport Strategy and its Active Travel Plan was formally approved in October 2025 by the Partnership Board which includes Hampshire County Council. The definition for Active Travel includes horse riding – see the link below:

<https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/active-travel/>

To Conclude:

1. HCAF is well-placed to advise and support the development of AT in rural areas. At this stage, the Forum wishes to discuss further with the AT Team: **How HCAF can most effectively engage now and in future with the AT team to support the implementation of AT in rural areas.**

And

2. **Regarding equestrians specifically**, HCAF would like to explore with the AT Team:
 - a) What risk analysis is applied when considering shared routes/updating PROW;
 - b) how equestrians fit into the Active Travel agenda in Hampshire and the policies mentioned;
 - c) what consideration is given to the rights of equestrians and their inclusion in Active Travel provision/infrastructure (WCHAR and ATE’s Route Check Tool);
 - d) how equestrians can be included in Hampshire’s AT Agenda in line with ATE’s Rural Design Guidance – this does not mean seeking additional expenditure for equestrians.

Date: February 2026

¹ Note that Improvements to the Kingsley/Binstead bridleway and Bighton Restricted Byway 718 were made when equestrians accessed community funding.