

COTSWOLDS CONSERVATION BOARD POSITION STATEMENT



THE KEEPING OF HORSES & PONIES

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by the Government for the purpose of ensuring that the special qualities of the finest landscapes in England and Wales are conserved and enhanced. In policy terms they have the same planning status as National Parks.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is the body set up by Parliament to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB and increase the awareness and understanding of the special qualities of the AONB. The Board also has a duty to have regard to the social and economic needs of those who live and work in the Cotswolds.

This position statement addresses the keeping of horses in the Cotswolds and in particular how this can be reconciled with conserving landscape quality and character. It is intended that it will be made use of by a wide range of individuals and organisations, from horse owners and equine businesses to parish councils and other local authorities.

The statement takes forward elements covered in the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2008 - 2013, in particular policy LP1 and key issue DTK6, and expands on issues identified in the Board's Landscape Strategy and Guidelines.¹

Policy LP1: That the unique character, tranquillity and special qualities of the Cotswolds Landscape are conserved and enhanced

Key issues DTK6: Equine related activities provide valuable farm diversification opportunities. Impacts on landscape quality and character, through new buildings, damage to ground flora, hedges and trees, means of enclosure such as post and rail fencing and changes in appearance of areas of land must be sensitively controlled.

DEFINITION

For the purposes of this Position Statement, the definition of horse includes all types of horses, ponies and donkeys

BACKGROUND

It is estimated that within the Cotswolds AONB around 18,000 horses are being kept for a wide range of recreational and business purposes as well as racing. These include casual riding, hunting, pony trekking and polo. The value to the Cotswold economy is at least £54 million based on feed, bedding, farriery and livery charges and the total value could easily be double². With rising prosperity the number of horses being kept has grown considerably. In some cases this is having an undesirable impact on landscape character and quality, as well as on animal welfare.

Climate change predictions for the Cotswolds are for milder, wetter winters and drier warmer summers. Soils will be more prone to winter poaching and grassland more

¹ Available on the Cotswolds Conservation Board website www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

² Mid Cotswold Tracks and Trails Group

susceptible to desiccation in the summer. Consequently, pasture for horses will have to be managed more carefully, monitored and managed.

THE AIMS OF THIS POSITION STATEMENT

The Board wishes to raise awareness of the impacts, both positive and negative, of keeping horses in the Cotswolds. It seeks to identify and promote best practice in horse husbandry in order to achieve optimum standards for the environment, the community and the horse. The Board has identified the following key aims:

- **For the Cotswolds landscape and environment** - To manage the land in such a way that the quality and character of valuable Cotswold landscapes are maintained and enhanced rather than degraded, and that the species diversity of horse pasture is retained.
- **For the local community** - To enable the Cotswold equine industry, which is of considerable economic significance, to thrive and grow in a way that conserves and enhances the AONB.
- **For the horse** - To meet horses' need for space and a healthy diet containing the necessary roughage and nutrients.
- **For planning authorities** - To make planning authorities aware of their powers regarding the keeping of horses, to use those powers and take a consistent approach across the AONB by adopting Supplementary Planning Documents based on best practice.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS

There are a number of potential problems associated with the keeping of horses in sensitive landscapes, many of which are exacerbated where equine activities are over-concentrated.

Landscape degradation - The physical structures and paraphernalia associated with horse keeping can have a detrimental effect on the quality of the landscape. This horseculture clutter may include stabling, field shelters, manéges, fencing, extensive muck heaps, inappropriate tree planting, parking for horse boxes, lighting, schooling rings and jumps. In particular, the increased use of white electric tape to divide paddocks is causing visual intrusion throughout much of the AONB. Many of these physical structures require planning permission and are therefore under the control of a number of different local authorities. Councils often lack the resources to develop coordinated cross-boundary policies.

Environmental damage – Horses are selective feeders and will tend to choose the finer grasses and herbs, creating pastures with some areas of closely-grazed sward and others which are rough and tussocky and in more extreme cases, problems with invasive weeds such as thistle and dock. Without appropriate management this may result in the permanent loss of a number of important species. Damage to pasture may occur in other ways. Some areas may be worn completely bare by horses rolling, fence walking or standing in groups. In wet conditions, horses may damage the sward by trampling or 'poaching' the ground. Residual veterinary pharmaceuticals can also build up in soils where horses regularly congregate, particularly in gateways. All of these problems are likely to be exacerbated in paddocks which are too small for the number of horses they contain.

Trees can also be damaged and even killed by horses that can develop the habit of 'Crib clutching' resulting in bark being ripped off trees. Some horses can develop a taste for the bark with devastating effects. Recent survey work has shown this to be a particular problem in orchards.

Horse welfare - There is an increasing tendency for horses to be kept in individual paddocks isolated from one another, with pastures split up by electric tape or post and rail fencing. Preventing horses from exhibiting natural social behaviour leads to a reduction in their welfare standards and can result in behavioural problems such as fence walking, where the horse, out of boredom or frustration, continuously walks around the perimeter of the fence or back and forth along the fence wearing a rut in the ground.

BEST PRACTICE

The Board has sought to identify best practice by drawing on the experience of local planning officers, the British Horse Society, horse owners and equine businesses. It will continue to develop best practice guidance in collaboration with others. The Board makes the following recommendations:

For the landscape

- Over-concentration of horse paddocks and associated structures in any one area should be avoided to prevent a cumulative harmful impact on landscape character.
- Where possible, existing buildings should be used and new stables and other structures kept to a minimum and be able to cope with paraphernalia to prevent items being left outside.
- New structures should be carefully sited and designed to minimize their impact on the landscape. Wherever possible they should be located close to existing buildings. They should be constructed from appropriate vernacular materials and should follow the form of the landscape, avoiding prominent skyline sites and slopes.
- Any lighting should be designed to minimise light pollution, e.g. low level and directed downwards.
- Landscape planting should complement any existing trees and hedges. The use of non indigenous tree and shrub species should be avoided.
- Historic field boundaries, such as hedges, walls and fences should be maintained or extended, and new boundaries should match the local vernacular wherever possible.
- In some instances, hedges and dry stone walls may need protection by fencing to prevent damage
- Jumps, fences and other equipment should be well maintained and removed if not needed.
- Existing gates and access points should be retained if possible, and new gates should match the local vernacular.
- Ideally, pastures should not be subdivided into small paddocks, but where this is necessary temporary electric fencing is better than more permanent structures.
- Dark green or brown electric fencing tape is preferable to white, since this is just as visible to the horse and far less intrusive in the landscape. It should be used in conjunction with dark green or brown plastic posts, placed closely enough together to prevent the tape from sagging excessively.
- Historic features, including ridge and furrow, stone troughs and stiles, should be protected from damage by equestrian uses.

For the environment

- Pastures should be carefully managed and of sufficient size to avoid over-grazing and the loss of species diversity. If necessary, a pasture management plan should be produced by a knowledgeable person.
- Additional or follow up grazing with sheep can help 'tidy up' the pasture
- Trees must be guarded to prevent their bark from being browsed by horses which otherwise may cause fatal damage to trees.
- Areas suffering from poaching, or worn bare by horses need to be regularly rotated or rested to allow for pasture recovery.
- Invasive weeds such as creeping thistle, ragwort and dock must be controlled in accordance with environmental legislation.
- Wildlife rich ponds should be fenced to prevent trampling and poaching.
- Management and location of manure heaps must be in accordance with waste management regulations and consideration given to the risk of pollution.

For the community

- Equestrian businesses should be located where they do not cause disruption or inconvenience to the community.
- Direct access to the bridleway network should be provided where possible. Where this does not exist, safe, if possible off-road access to the public rights of way network should be provided from places with a concentration of equestrians, ideally by the creation of new bridleways.
- Riding on busy roads should be discouraged on safety grounds. Where riders do not have a safe alternative to using busy roads, efforts should be made to create safe routes by statutory or common law means.
- Horse riders should be encouraged to use some of the many quiet roads and lanes in the Cotswolds, particularly the old drove roads, which have wide verges. The verges should be made safe and unobstructed. Verge cutting should be in line with the Board's position statement on the Management of Roadside Verges.
- Landowners should be encouraged to provide additional off-road riding opportunities, such as toll rides.
- Local authorities should take into account the needs of horse riders when updating their Rights of Way Improvement Plans and where appropriate include specific proposals for the creation of additional bridleways and restricted byways.

For the horse

- The horse is a herd animal and should be kept in social groups. Horses kept on their own can adopt undesirable behaviour, such as walking up and down fence lines which results in damage to the pasture as well as to their own well-being.
- Horses have evolved to live under extensive grazing systems where low quality, high fibre forage is abundant. They are 'trickle' feeders, naturally grazing for up to 16 hours per day, providing a fairly continuous flow of feed through the gut. To make best use of this feed, horses have a digestive system designed to process small, frequent, high fibre based meals, which pass relatively rapidly through the gastrointestinal tract, allowing the throughput of large quantities of feed. Consequently, ideal forage for horses is provided by unfertilised species-rich pasture, containing a wide range of grasses and herb species rich both in fibre and minerals.
- Adequate space for animals to feed and exercise should be provided. A minimum area of 1 hectare per full sized horse (500kg) is highly desirable.
- Pastures should be kept clear of noxious plants such as ragwort and yew.

- Most horses require rugging or shelter in extreme weather conditions. Shelter can be either naturally occurring or purpose built. Some hardy breeds, such as native ponies, are capable of living outdoors all year round.

PLANNING REGULATIONS

In most circumstances planning permission will be required for the keeping of horses and for the provision of associated stables and other necessary structures. The only exceptions are the keeping horses for use in agriculture (working horses), for grazing land and in some cases where the keeping of horses is incidental to farming use.

There have been a number of court cases, including *Sykes v the Department of the Environment* (1981), and appeal decisions which have upheld the view that simply turning horses out to graze land is not a change of use. However, if the horses receive supplementary feeding on the land, i.e. their needs cannot be met by grazing alone, there has been a change of use to the keeping of horses on the land and therefore planning permission is required for this change of use. Whether the horses reside in permanent stables on the land itself is not a material consideration as to whether they are being “kept”.

National planning policy guidance supports the use of land for horse riding and other equestrian activities as popular forms of recreation that can fit well with farming activities and help to diversify rural economies. PPS 7, para 32 says “Local Planning Authorities should set out in LDDs their policies for supporting equine enterprises that maintain environmental quality and countryside character.”

The Board encourages local planning authorities to provide more detailed information about development involving horses by producing Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), and to use their powers regarding the keeping of horses. The Board can offer advice and guidance to councils in the preparation of SPDs.

The Board also encourages the local planning authorities to make full use of their powers to control inappropriate development to prevent negative impacts on landscape character and quality

SINGLE FARM PAYMENT

With the introduction of the Single Farm Payment (SFP) many equine establishments entered the scheme and activated entitlements. While this brings a small income to the claimant it also brings responsibilities in that where SFP is claimed on a holding the entire holding is subject to ‘Cross Compliance’. This consists of a series of specific European legal requirements, known as Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs), as well as various domestic legal requirements requiring land be kept in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) These include controlling certain invasive weeds and preventing poaching (or rectifying any damage within the following year). Further details about the SFP and Cross Compliance can be obtained from Defra (www.defra.gov.uk).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, 2004, DCLG
Managing Grass for Horses: The Responsible Owner's Guide. Elizabeth O'Beirne
Ranelagh, J.A Allen, Equestrian Publishers
British Horse Society website
Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales, 2005. British Horse Industry
Confederation. Defra
EPIC website- (Exmoor Ponies In Conservation)
Defra website, for information on the Single Farm Payment and Cross Compliance
Horse Pasture Management – Frances Clayton publication
Code of Practice for Welfare of Equines (in preparation)
IGER Innovations Publication 6, Health Foods for Horses, 2002. University of Aberystwyth
Gloucestershire Orchards Group www.gloucestershireorchardgroup.org.uk
Mid Cotswold Tracks and Trails Group

NOTES

The Cotswolds Conservation Board has the statutory duty to pursue the following two purposes:

- a) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and
- b) to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB.

In fulfilling these roles, the Board shall seek to foster the economic and social well-being of people living in the AONB.

This is one of a series of position statements published by the Board which help to expand on the Board's policies within the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan or explain the Board's approach to new and emerging issues such as renewable energy, affordable housing, tranquillity, and energy crops. All position statements can be found on the Board's website at: <http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/?page=positionstatements>

The Board is comprised of members appointed by the local authorities, elected parish council representatives and individuals appointed by the Secretary of State. The Board, formed in December 2004, is the only organisation that looks after the AONB as a whole.

The Cotswolds AONB was designated in 1966 and extended in area in 1990. It is one of 40 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty across England and Wales. It is the largest AONB, covering 790 sq.miles (2038 sq.km). It is a landscape of equal importance to National Parks such as Snowdonia and the Lake District.

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