



## **EQUESTRIAN DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

### **OUR POSITION**

The South Downs National Park provides an ideal location for recreational horse riding.

The South Downs Way was the first long distance bridleway to be established by the former Countryside Commission, and activities such as racing, eventing, showjumping, dressage, driving, endurance riding and polo, including for the disabled, may prove acceptable in planning terms as well as enjoyable activities.

Looking after horses supports local businesses such as saddlers, carriage makers, farriers, vets, equine dentists, retailers of horse and rider equipment, and tourism. Farmers may let their land to horse owners for grazing, so supplementing their agricultural income, and owners of stables provide livery for other owners of horses and ponies.

Planning permission is not needed for the use of land for grazing horses – where the horse can gain enough sustenance from the land alone for the majority of the year. A rule of thumb is approximately 0.5 hectare of grazing pasture per horse. As well as not needing planning permission, such a density or less (i.e. more than 0.5 hectare per horse) will help to avoid overgrazing and poaching, protecting the biodiversity of the grassland, and reduces the need for extra hay being imported by road.

A higher density than this may be interpreted as the “keeping” of horses, especially if associated with commercial activity like livery – a change of use requiring planning permission. Planning permission may also be required for the subdivision of a field into horse paddocks or its use for horse-related recreational purposes e.g. jumping, depending on the intensity of the use and the number of days’ activity during the year. Permission will be required for any permanent built facilities such as stables, maneges (indoor and outdoor), hardstandings etc, and possibly for fencing (depending on height, location and permanence), but will not normally be needed for mobile field shelters.

While the keeping, training and riding of horses gives pleasure and income to many, there is no doubt that some associated activity – such as the construction and operation of indoor and outdoor facilities, traffic, lighting – can cause problems for neighbours and have adverse environmental impact. Each planning application, or unauthorised activity, needs to be considered on its merits. The proposed activity should be seen to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the South Downs National Park and its quiet enjoyment – that is, the statutory purposes of national park designation.

The Society will support initiatives that promote horse riding in the national park provided any environmental disbenefits from the activity, including impacts on other recreation users, do not outweigh the perceived benefits.



## HOW WILL WE HELP TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

With the aim that provision for equestrian activity in the national park is properly planned and managed we will:

1. Seek to influence the local plan for the national park, the local plans for adjoining areas and neighbourhood plans with a view to ensuring that provision is made for horse riding in the park, subject to adequate and appropriate safeguards to protect its special qualities.
2. Respond to planning applications for equestrian development, recognising the contribution that may be made to quiet enjoyment of the national park and to the economic and social wellbeing of the park communities, while seeking to protect the park's special qualities and their quiet enjoyment by residents, visitors and other recreational users.
3. Query possible unauthorised development and support appropriate enforcement.

In carrying out 1 to 3 above the following considerations may apply:

- ***Buildings and equipment***

**Stables** are best established as a block, near the dwelling, to improve security and keep the “footprint” compact. The materials used should be in keeping with local buildings. If a metal roof is proposed, attention should be paid to reducing its “shine” in the sun. **Floodlights, security and roof lights** may contribute to light pollution, reducing “dark skies” and tranquillity.

**Stable effluent** may be disposed of through a **cesspit or septic tank** which will need regular emptying and this may put strain on the rural highway network.

In isolated locations **field shelters** (normally open-fronted with a roof and rear wall) may be erected. They do not require foundations, and if they are mobile this may mean that no planning permission is required, which reduces the scope for control. They may be best located next to established vegetation e.g. hedgerows or woodland, or if that isn't possible, where planting can be provided in keeping with the landscape character of the area. Stables or shelters on open downland are unlikely to be acceptable.



Use of **maneges or arenas** may reduce the pressure on highways and bridleways by providing an alternative -- important during the winter when riding might cause significant damage to paths. Darker surfaces such as rubber crumb or bark chippings are preferable to sand as they are less visually intrusive. Maneges/arenas are not suited to an open countryside location; they should fit into the existing landscape, not cut across it, avoiding the need for significant regrading to provide a level surface. Indoor **maneges or arenas**, due to their size, are likely to be intrusive features in the landscape.

**Field boundaries:** division by electric tape fences into “pony paddocks” may help the owner to control grazing but it can be unsightly, and avoiding this sub-division may help to promote lower grazing densities and so maintain the biodiversity of the grassland.

**Screening of buildings and equipment** with native hedging and trees may reduce the impact on the landscape.

- **Bridleways**

Horses can be legally ridden on **bridleways and byways** so proximity to them may be an advantage for an equestrian development, especially if there is direct access other than along roads. Horses cannot be ridden on **footpaths**, unless with the landowner’s permission. If there is high equine population density in the area the pressure may be high on routes, contributing to erosion. If a part of the bridleway network is already subject to high usage from existing equestrian establishments, it may be appropriate to resist further developments of this type in the area.

- **Highways and traffic**

Equestrian facilities generate vehicular activity – both **cars** (owners, staff, riders, parents) and **large vehicles** such as feed and bedding supply lorries -- which may lead to difficulties on the local road network. Single track roads require passing places for lorries to reduce the need for reversing; vehicles may access and damage highway verges and vegetation when passing.

**Manure heaps** are not encouraged, nor is the burning of manure permitted, so **skip removal** of manure may take place, with potential impact on the local route network.

Livery yards may offer lorry and trailer **parking** as well as car parking to the horse owners. A large area of **hardstanding** may prove an eyesore.



- **Amenity value and conservation**

Riding tuition may impact on local **tranquillity** and the quiet enjoyment of the national park by others. Noise, traffic and the visual impact of equestrian development may affect users of local **rights of way**.

Change from agricultural to equestrian use may damage **biodiversity or landscape character**.

**Archaeological and historical features** may be compromised.

NB

The draft “Preferred Options” Local Plan for the national park currently (August 2015) contains the draft policy below. This will be subject to public consultation as one element of the draft Local Plan during September and October 2015:

*“Development Management Policy: SD50 Equestrian Uses*

*1. Development proposals for equestrian development will be permitted provided that they comply with other relevant policies and they: a) have a scale and/or an intensity of equestrian use which would be compatible with the landscape and its special qualities; b) demonstrate good design which responds to local character and distinctiveness including location and siting, any subdivision of field(s) and earthworks; c) have a location which satisfactorily relates to existing infrastructure, where necessary, which includes vehicular and field accesses, tracks and bridleways; d) re-use existing buildings wherever practicable and viable; e) locate new buildings, stables, yard areas and facilities adjacent to existing buildings provided they respect the amenities of surrounding properties and uses; f) provide new or supplementary planting, hard landscape features and boundary treatments consistent with local character, where appropriate; and g) are compatible with other users of the countryside.*

*2. Development proposals for equestrian development that would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the special qualities of the National Park will be refused.”*