

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 18 June 2025
11th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2154: Ensure planning consideration for equestrian accessibility

Introduction

Petitioner Jasmine Bisset

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review and update planning policies to make it mandatory for new urban developments to give consideration to equestrian usage, and ensure suitable access and signage is included as part of this consideration.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2154>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 7 April 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 259 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
June 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2154: Ensure planning consideration for equestrian accessibility

Petitioner

Jasmine Bisset

Date Lodged

7 April 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review and update planning policies to make it mandatory for new urban developments to give consideration to equestrian usage, and ensure suitable access and signage is included as part of this consideration.

Background information

It is incredibly upsetting for the everyday equestrian to watch as their already limited opportunities to ride are being paved over and greenspace being designed without equestrian usage in mind. Urban development is knowingly being approved without respecting the nearby community and is reducing or severing links to important greenspace and off-road opportunities.

New residents to these developments may have limited or no experience living in rural areas or for when encountering equestrians both on road and in shared paths and greenspace. We are made to feel unwelcome on both because our presence in the area has not been designed for, advertised, or protected.

Urban development must include access pathways and signage for all. New greenspace should include horse access either as full access or as a link to further equestrian-friendly spaces or places of interest, such as other equestrian facilities or local riding spots like local monuments, parks, beaches and woodland.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2154



Briefing for petition PE2154: Ensure planning consideration for equestrian accessibility, lodged by Jasmine Bisset

The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review and update planning policies to make it mandatory for new urban developments to give consideration to equestrian usage, and ensure suitable access and signage is included as part of this consideration.

Consideration of access in planning policy

Decisions on planning applications must be made in accordance with the development plan, unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise. The development plan for a given area in Scotland consists of the [fourth National Planning Framework \(NPF4\)](#) and the relevant local development plan (LDP).

Whilst NPF4 does not include policies directly relating to equestrian access, there are a range of planning policies across green infrastructure, active travel networks, access and amenity which could be relevant to how proposed developments are assessed in this regard, notably including:

- Policy 20 (Blue and green infrastructure): Sets out an overall policy principle to protect and enhance blue and green infrastructure and their networks. Under this principle, LDPs should identify and protect blue and green infrastructure and networks and seek to enhance existing provision and consider connectivity. This policy sets out that **LDPs should safeguard access rights and core paths, including active travel routes**, and encourage new opportunities for access. Development proposals that result in fragmentation of blue and green infrastructure will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would not result in or exacerbate a deficit in blue or green infrastructure provision, and the overall integrity of the network will be maintained
- Policy 15 (Local living): development proposals should include consideration of the quality of interconnectivity with the surrounding area, including local access to safe, high quality active travel networks, parks, green streets and spaces

- Policy 14 (Design, quality and place): LDPs should follow place-making principles taking account of the local context, characteristics and connectivity of the area
- Policy 6 (Forestry, woodland and trees): LDPs should identify and protect existing woodland and avoid habitat fragmentation
- Policy 13 (Sustainable transport) development proposals, where they generate transport requirements, should incorporate safety measures e.g. safe crossings.

NPF4 also refers to the importance of the **local authority's Open Space Strategy** in supporting the delivery of certain planning policies e.g. on blue and green infrastructure. Planning authorities are required to publish an Open Space Strategy by [the Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#), in order to set out a strategic framework of the planning authority's policies and proposals as to the development, maintenance and use of green infrastructure in their district, including open spaces and green networks. An open space strategy must contain an audit of open space provision and assessment of current and future requirements. The Act defines key terms as follows:

- Green infrastructure means features of natural and built environments and the connections between them that provide a range of ecosystem and social benefits
- Green networks are connected areas of green infrastructure and open space
- Open space is the space within and on the edge of settlements comprising green infrastructure or civic areas such as squares, market places and other paved or hard landscaped areas with a civic function.

Access rights and guidance

As set out above, planning authorities are required by NPF4 to consider the need to safeguard access rights in developing LDPs. The [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#) ('the 2003 Act') established a statutory framework of public access rights to most land and inland water. Local authorities have a legal duty under the 2003 Act to "assert, protect and keep open and free from obstruction or encroachment any route, waterway or other means by which access rights may reasonably be exercised".

Local authorities and National Park Authorities are access authorities in their areas, and [have a statutory duty to produce a Core Paths Plan](#), a plan for a system of paths "sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area". The 2003 Act (section 17) specifies that such a system of paths may include, amongst other things, "rights of way by foot, horseback, pedal cycle or any combination of those".

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (a statutory Code under the 2003 Act) sets out further guidance on access rights and [this Code sets out that access rights extend to horse riding](#), with guidance around responsible access and behaviour by the public and land managers. NatureScot has published a range of further guidance and resources on equestrian access in partnership with other organisations, [available on the Outdoor Access Scotland website](#).

Alexa Morrison, Senior Researcher

13 May 2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C: Written submissions

Scottish Government written submission, 2 May 2025

PE2154/A: Ensure planning consideration for equestrian accessibility

Q. Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

The Scottish Government considers that existing national planning policies set out in National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) do not need to be updated to address the matters raised in the petition.

There is a statutory structure for making decisions on planning applications. The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the statutory development plan, unless material planning considerations justify a departure from that plan. The development plan consists of NPF4 and the relevant local development plan covering the area in question. NPF4 contains a comprehensive set of national planning policies, which should be read as a whole.

NPF4 Policy 20 (Blue and green infrastructure) sets out to protect and enhance blue and green infrastructure and networks, so that communities benefit from accessible and high quality green spaces. It expects local development plans (LDPs) to identify and protect green infrastructure assets and networks, enhance and expand existing provision. It also sets out that LDPs should safeguard access rights and core paths and encourage new and enhanced opportunities for access linked to wider networks.

The policy states that development proposals that result in fragmentation or net loss of existing blue and green infrastructure will only be supported (by that policy) where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would not result in or exacerbate a deficit in blue or green infrastructure provision and the overall integrity of the network would be maintained. The policy also provides support in principle to development proposals for, or incorporating, new or enhanced green infrastructure.

NPF4 Policy 14 (Design, quality and place) promotes and facilitates well-designed development that makes sustainable places by taking a design-led approach and applying the Place Principle. It expects development proposals to be consistent with the 'six qualities of successful places', which include 'healthy' (including designing for healthy and active lifestyles), 'pleasant' and 'connected' (including designing for active travel and connectivity).

NPF4 Policy 13 (Sustainable transport) sets out expectations for development proposals to be designed to incorporate traffic safety measures, and to consider the transport needs of users.

Planning applications for certain proposed developments, including applications for planning permission for fifty or more houses, have to be accompanied by a design and access statement. These statements should set out how the context of the development has been appraised and how policies relating to design in the development plan have been addressed.

Q. Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee's attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

In response to the provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (the 2003 Act), all Local Authorities and National Park Authorities have a statutory duty to uphold access rights and as such ensure that access provisions are barrier free to enable all types of responsible access use, be that walking, wheeling a pram, buggy or wheelchair, scootering, cycling or riding a horse in places where access rights apply. In an urban context this might include green spaces, parks, woods, paths (both constructed or desire lines), canal tow paths etc. It would also apply to any core paths shown on the access authority core paths plan. Any developer would need to ensure that access rights are un-obstructed in relation to any new path/space provision; and in relation to any existing core paths these are protected and if a developer wants to divert or remove a core path that is a matter for the access authority (section 20A – 20D of the 2003 Act). Core path planning will typically take place either alongside or at least in full consideration of any local authority or national park authority local development plans/ local place plans and vice versa; and consider all types of access including equestrian.

Demand or need for specific horse-related infrastructure in urban developments tends to be rare, in comparison, for example with cycling. Nevertheless, we would expect it to be considered at a local level to ensure suitable provision appropriate to location and use. This might consider opportunities for design features such as bridges with high railings, signage for shared use, tie-up points, dismount blocks, wider path verges for riding on, etc.

Planning policy already takes account of access rights, and therefore the consideration of equestrian use and requirements as appropriate.

Directorate for Planning, Architecture and Regeneration

Petitioner written submission, 3 June 2025

PE2154/B: Ensure planning consideration for equestrian accessibility

This petition was submitted because too often we see equestrian access ignored or left behind as local authorities prioritise more popular modes of transport, and do not seek out or fairly include the opinions and needs of equestrians.

Equestrian access is labelled "where possible" instead of considered from the start. This means current or potential equestrian access is being lost. Local authorities are not meeting their legal responsibilities in creating or upholding equestrian inclusion, safety and access.

These problems are most evident where local authorities focus on expanding transportation and infrastructure on developments encroaching into rural areas or linking smaller communities with active transport links. The majority of these fail to provide or preserve off-road and on-road routes that uphold equestrian access rights. Developments on greenspace or severing links to them are done without seeking to ensure that local equestrian facilities have alternative and sufficient land plus, planned access thereto, for equestrian use within reasonable distances.

We are asking the Scottish Government to provide safeguards to ensure that equestrian accessibility is promoted and enforced correctly and fairly within local authorities.

The British Horse Society (BHS) reported that “having safe places to ride and carriage drive is particularly important for equestrians as horse riders have access to only 22% of the public rights of way network and carriage drivers to just 5%. With the increasing volume and speed of traffic on our roads they are often not safe places for equestrians to be, so bridleways, byways and other multi-user routes, that equestrians can access, are more vital to enable equestrians to get off the roads.

Being outdoors and in contact with nature is an important motivation for the vast majority of horse riders. With ever increasing rates of obesity, stress and declining mental health in the UK, we are uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to improving the wellbeing of two hard to reach groups when it comes to exercise namely younger and older females.”

According to the statistics from the BHS, Indoor Carriage Driving UK, and Cycling UK, equestrians are 80-90% female with carriage drivers being 45% aged 55 and older and include less mobile and disabled people. Cyclists are 70-75% male.

All statistics from the British Horse Society shown below are from 01.01.2024 – 31.12.2024.

- 3,118 road incidents involving horses have been recorded with The British Horse Society
- 58 horses have died and 97 have been injured
- 80 people have been injured because of road incidents
- 81% of incidents occurred because a driver passed by too closely or too quickly

The written submission by the Scottish Government states, “Local Development Plans should safeguard access rights and core paths and encourage new and enhanced opportunities for access linked to wider networks.”

A recent survey by Stirling Council and Sustrans (survey.natcen.ac.uk/travel/) was posted through the letterbox of residents, asking for active transport and recreational transport needs within the local and neighbouring communities. The answers to questions in the survey were premade and mentioned nothing of equestrian needs.

Equestrian access is a legal obligation for local authorities to include and provide for equestrian participation regardless of the level of demand in an area. What is concerning, is that Stirlingshire has a vast equestrian community, some of which are within a 15 minute drive from the city centre.

The method of distribution and wording of this survey excluding equine use are detrimental to equestrian access requirements and set a dangerous precedent of us not being adequately represented within the general population and when encroaching into rural communities.

Sustrans also recently signed a memorandum of understanding in August of 2024 (<https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/gwkcqdke/bhs-and-sustrans-mou-202408.pdf>). The stated aims for both parties are to be found on page 5 titled Areas of Collaboration.

Though the Memorandum of Understanding is not legally binding, the fact that we have been omitted from such information gathering by both a local authority and a charity, with great influence over many urban transport links within expanding cities, is concerning. This goes directly against Scottish values of accessibility for all.

The National Planning Framework states that “Planning requires great responsibility - decisions about development will impact generations to come.” The state of equestrian accessibility is in need of better implementation and security if these aims are to be achieved.

The Impact of Active Travel Plans and LTN 1/20 on Equestrians, published May 2025 (<https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/Octbwapd/202505-the-impact-of-active-travel-plans-and-ltn-120-on-equestrians-british-horse-society.pdf>) by the British Horse Society, has reported on the many instances when equestrian access and safety have been excluded from Active Travel Plans in England. We find that they reflect similar issues within Active Travel Plans in Scotland. Scottish Core Access and Land Use Act (2003) should be helping to pioneer these projects to a better standard and to not discriminate against equestrian users from safe and enjoyable access.

I contacted the Scottish Government regarding my concerns about the lack of equestrian inclusion. The response highlighted that many of the Scottish Great Trails (SGT) were designed solely for pedestrian usage and that catch up has been needed to open suitable areas of the trails for other uses.

I had also contacted my Local Access Forum when I became aware of the lack of equestrian inclusion in my local area and raised my concerns that signage and current core access lacked proper advertisement of horse use. Their response on this matter was:

“Regarding signage, while it might seem like a straightforward solution, the reality is more complex. Since the core path network was established in 2009, the signage has not been replaced or updated. Replacing even a single sign would consume one-eighth of my annual budget. This budget must cover the maintenance of 623 signs, 403 gates, 125 bridges, and 356 km of core paths, including the West Highland Way. The network is under significant strain due to limited funding and the impacts of climate change, so my budget is primarily used to keep routes clear of obstructions and to replace aging assets like bridges and gates.”

With many established and new core access routes proposed alongside Active Travel Plans focusing specifically on cyclists and pedestrians, the British Horse Society report shows the dangers of allowing planning to go ahead without correctly budgeting for, or consulting on equestrian needs.