

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate Change,
Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Ymchwiliad i bolisi coedwigaeth a choetiroedd yng Nghymru | Inquiry into Forestry
and woodland policy in Wales

FWP 10

Ymateb gan : Cymdeithas Ceffylau Prydain
Evidence from : The British Horse Society

The Society supports the Government's focus on 'Woodlands for Wales' and in particular the social and economic benefits that they can bring to the people of Wales, and people visiting Wales, by providing access to forests and woodlands.

The Society has restricted itself to commenting on the following Priority Actions:

Priority Action 6: No reference is made to engaging with user groups and involving them in woodland management. Equestrian groups are already providing assistance in maintaining and enhancing routes in forests and woodlands. An audit of such contributions is advised to value that contribution and to encourage more groups to follow suit.

Priority Action 12: It is recommended that the contribution that woodlands make to improving the physical and mental health of the nation is quantified in monetary terms.

Priority Action 13: This action is of most relevance to the Society. Equestrians desperately need safe routes for the same reasons as walkers and cyclists; many roads are no longer safe for them to use due to the speed and volume of traffic on the roads. Research by the British Horse Society (BHS) has shown that there have been over 2,000 road accidents reported to them in the last 5 years, which involved the death of 181 horses and 36 riders.

These days, many equestrian rights of way can only be reached using busy roads. Horse riders currently have access to only 21% of the public rights of way network in Wales and carriage drivers to only 6%.

We know this has an impact on equestrian core market participation, with 44% of those riding once a week or less saying they would ride more frequently if they had access to safe off road riding or bridleways (BETA survey, 2015). This is the most cited reason that would make people ride more frequently.

91% of respondents to a recent survey of 750 horse riders said that spending time outdoors was a very important or important motivation for horse riding and so providing places for people to ride outdoors safely is vital to sustaining the core market.

It is therefore important that equestrians have the same access opportunities to woodlands as walkers and cyclists.

User groups should be consulted when developments are being considered in woodlands so as to prevent the displacement of legitimate activities, such as horse riding, as a result of ill thought out developments; for example, mountain bike trails that cross equestrian, walking and family cycling routes without sufficient and carefully thought out crossing points.

Director of Access – The British Horse Society

The British Horse Society

The British Horse Society (BHS) represents the interests of the 3.4 million people in the UK who ride or who drive horse-drawn vehicles. With its membership of 96,000, the BHS is the largest and most influential equestrian charity in the UK. The BHS is committed to promoting the interests of all equestrians and the welfare of horses and ponies through education and training.

Number of Horse in Wales

The National Equine Database statistics for 2012 state that there were 134,748 passported horses in Wales.

Investment into the Welsh Economy

Based on the British Equestrian Trade Association's finding that horse owners spend £3,600 annually on their horses, this represents an annual investment by horse owners into the Welsh economy of £485 million.

Horse ownership also provides and supports work for many in rural areas where local employment is much needed – such as farriers, vets, petrol stations, timber yards, feed merchants, farmers and the livery yards where many of these horses are kept.

The need for an adequate bridleway system is particularly important on the fringes of urban areas where many horses are kept, and where the motorised traffic on the country lanes is ever increasing.

Health Benefits of Riding

There is an abundance of evidence indicating the physical health, mental health and social benefits of physical activity. In particular, physical activity is associated with reduced risk of coronary heart disease, obesity, type II diabetes, and other chronic diseases and conditions. An increasing body of research points to a positive effect of physical exercise on psychological health, including enhanced self-esteem, improved social networks and reduced anxiety and depression. Horse riding is the ideal physical activity for many to achieve these benefits. Many people who have disabilities are unable to take adequate exercise on their own feet, but are able to once they are on horseback, for instance people with arthritic lower limb joints.

The British Horse Society's report on the Health Benefits of Riding in the UK sets out the health, psychological and social benefits of horse riding

http://www.bhs.org.uk/Riding/Health_Benefits_of_Riding.aspx