

# COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE BOARD POSITION STATEMENT



## THE KEEPING OF HORSES & PONIES

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**The Cotswolds National Landscape 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.
- Internal storage should be provided for equestrian 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 to be fenced off to prevent damage.
- Jumps, fences and other equipment should be well maintained and removed if not in use.
- 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.

### **For the environment**

- A pasture management plan should be produced (by a knowledgeable person). Pastures should be carefully managed and of sufficient size to avoid over-grazing and the loss of species diversity.
- Management of the pastures should be such that stale areas are avoided, by removing heavily mucked areas and if necessary topping these areas.
- 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.
- It is recommended that invasive weeds such as creeping thistle, ragwort and dock are controlled.
- Wildlife rich ponds should be protected 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.
- If lighting is necessary, low level, downward pointing lighting is recommended to minimise the detrimental effects on species such as bats.

### **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, they should 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, low sugar based meals, which pass relatively rapidly through the gastrointestinal tract, allowing the

throughput of large quantities of forage. 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 recommended.
- 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.

## **BACKGROUND**

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), including the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL), are areas whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is the nation's interest to safeguard them. The statutory purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. In policy terms they have the same planning status as National Parks.

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 2023 – 2025, in particular policy CE1: Landscape, and expands on issues identified in the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines.<sup>1</sup>

### **Policy CE1: Landscape**

- 1. Proposals that are likely to impact on, or create change in, the landscape of the Cotswolds National Landscape, should have regard to, be compatible with and reinforce the landscape character of the location, as described by the Cotswolds Conservation Board's Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Strategy and Guidelines. There should be a presumption against the loss of key characteristics identified in the landscape character assessment.*
- 2. Proposals that are likely to impact on, or create change in, the landscape of the Cotswolds National Landscape, should have regard to the scenic quality of the location and its setting and ensure that views – including those into and out of the National landscape – and visual amenity are conserved and enhanced.*

## **DEFINITION**

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

It is estimated that within the Cotswolds National Landscape around 16,500<sup>2</sup> 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 £76 million

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/our-landscape/landscape-strategy-guidelines/>

<sup>2</sup> Farming, Forestry and the Equine Sector in the Cotswolds AONB, 2015

based on feed, bedding, farriery, riding lessons, and livery charges etc<sup>3</sup>. Over recent years 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 are forecast to be more prone to winter poaching and grassland more susceptible to desiccation in the summer. Consequently, pasture for horses will have to be monitored and managed more carefully to protect soils, water, biodiversity and provide healthy grazing and appropriate shelter for horses.

## 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 or enhanced.
- **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, and to ensure that those powers are used consistently 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 horsiculture clutter may include stabling, field shelters, manèges, 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 Cotswolds National Landscape. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Farming, Forestry and the Equine Sector in the Cotswolds AONB, 2015

**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. In more extreme cases, this leads to problems with invasive weeds such as thistle and dock. Without appropriate management horse grazing 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 or killed by horses due to root compaction when horses gather frequently beneath a tree and also due to those that develop the habit of ‘crib clutching’ resulting in bark being ripped off trees. Some horses develop a taste for tree 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. It is recommended that whenever possible horses are not kept individually, but have at least one companion.

## **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 of 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 planning appeals 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”.

**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 local planning authorities to make full use of their powers to control inappropriate development to prevent negative impacts on landscape character and quality.**

## BASIC PAYMENT SCHEME

With the introduction of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)<sup>4</sup> 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 BPS is claimed on a holding the entire holding is subject to 'Cross Compliance'<sup>5</sup>. This consists of a series of specific 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).

As part of the Agricultural Transition Plan, BPS is being phased out and will cease at the end of 2023 when payments are delinked<sup>6</sup> from area of land owned. Payment will continue, decreasing progressively each year until 2027. At the end of 2023 new regulations to replace cross compliance are expected to come into force.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

*Managing Grass for Horses: The Responsible Owner's Guide.* Elizabeth O'Beirne Ranelagh, J.A Allen, Equestrian Publishers

British Horse Society website: <https://www.bhs.org.uk/>

*Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales*, 2011. British Horse Industry Confederation. Defra <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-for-the-horse-industry-in-england-and-wales>

Code of Practice for Welfare of Equines <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-horses-ponies-donkeys-and-their-hybrids>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/basic-payment-scheme>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cross-compliance-2023/cross-compliance-2023>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/Delinked%20paymentselinked-payments-replacing-the-basic-payment-scheme#cross-compliance>

## NOTES

The Cotswolds National Landscape 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 has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of people living in the AONB.

### **Purpose of the Board's Position Statements**

The primary purpose of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) Board's position statements is to expand on relevant policies in the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan. They provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to specific policies and associated issues. They are not intended to create new policies.

The Board's position statements are also intended to help local authorities, developers and other relevant stakeholders:

- to have regard to – and positively contribute to - the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the CNL;
- to ensure that the purpose of AONB designation is not compromised by development and that the natural beauty of the CNL is conserved and enhanced;
- to fulfil the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance (or, where relevant, National Policy Statements) with regards to AONBs and the factors that contribute to their natural beauty;
- to take account of relevant case law;
- to have regard to and be consistent with the CNL Management Plan and guidance published by the Board;
- to emulate best practice in the CNL and other protected landscapes;
- to develop a consistent and coordinated approach to relevant issues across the whole of the Cotswolds National Landscape and its setting.

website: [www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk).