

Essex Bridleways Association

Response to Canals and Rivers Trust on towpath use

Essex Bridleways Association wishes to respond to the consultation on towpath use as follows:

The consultation document's initial introduction states that 'we aim to attract more visitors to regularly use and enjoy the waterways and to encourage shared, safe use of towpaths ...with all parties respecting each other's use'. We have for many years supported the idea of shared use by *all* users but unfortunately the equestrian sector is largely ignored and many organisations simply do not appreciate the impact that the equestrian sector has on the local economy, health and wellbeing of a significant section of the population.

Many towpaths in the Essex area already have public footpath status, and the remainder are retained for navigation purposes and generally used by the public on foot. The consultation document generally advocates the use of cycles on them; however very few are designated as bridleways. Under normal circumstances of use of public rights of way, cyclists are entitled to use bridleways, not footpaths, and on the basis that they must give way to horse riders and pedestrians, implying that the horse has a predominant right over the cyclists. However in the case of permissive use by equestrians of the navigable right towpaths it would be reasonable not to expect that predominance.

We feel that the consultation document does not properly reflect the situation as it stands at present and are concerned at the apparent lack of any form of equestrian sector input in this important area, whereas, as is often the case, cyclists appear to be having their access rights increased.

As far as Rights of Way law is concerned, it follows that if cyclists are to be given the general right to use the towpaths then this should mean that towpaths would best be designated as multi-user tracks, which, indeed, as bridleways in reality, are. They can be legally used by walkers, cyclists, riders and people with mobility problems i.e. the sections of society who are recognised as vulnerable road users. From an economic point of view, and particularly taking into account that the towpath land is in public ownership, it would obviously make sense to provide the public with one multi user track rather than seeking to construct a separate provision.

The lack of equestrian provision in the consultation document is at odds with the aims and aspirations for improvement of public access and outdoor recreation by this Government; just recently the Local Access Forum Chairs across the country have received a letter from Mr Dan Rogerson, MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management) and the last paragraph states:

"I encourage you and your members to continue your work advising local highway authorities on the revision of their Rights of Way Improvement Plans. I am particularly keen that you ensure that revised ROWIPS cover access to woodland, as well as other land types, and consider how to provide improved provision for horse-riders"

The timing of this consultation is perfect; what better way to open up access for often-forgotten users such as equestrians than to provide them with many miles of towpath access in accordance with the aims of Central Government.

It is also interesting to note that Mr Richard Benyon MP, former Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries showed his support for multi user tracks in a letter to Anne Main MP in 2011 when he stated:

“Multi-user routes have been shown to be readily adopted and well appreciated by local people. Where they are done well they bolster community cohesion and create a better understanding between users.”

Mr Benyon stated further:

“Horse riders are particularly vulnerable road users, and cycle routes can provide appropriate and important opportunities to avoid busy roads. There is potential for conflict in any situation where people share a public space, but the possibility of conflict is not reason enough to disregard ridden access; actual conflict could be resolved and any misplaced concerns reduced over time”

The creation of cycle ways in isolation normally depends upon a considerable standard of surfacing, whereas the same level of legality of access for cyclists upon what would otherwise only be a footpath, and especially because of the inherent removal of landowner liability which comes with such status, may be achieved without such standards being met by adopting the policy of creation at bridleway status.

Horse riding is commonly perceived to be an elitist activity. This is a profound misconception. Horse riders are evenly distributed across all social groups; *[The State of the Countryside 2001, page 69 and also quoted in 'Making ways for Horses' by the Equestrian Access Forum]* - you do not need to own a horse to enjoy equestrian sport. Many people do not want the commitment of horse ownership and either share a horse or ride at a local riding school or riding group.

The equestrian industry makes one of the largest financial contributions towards the local economy of any sport. It makes no demands for a built environment to be provided at taxpayers' expense, unlike swimmers, footballers, gymnasts etc. All horse riders need are safe off road tracks that form part of a network of bridleways that they can enjoy with their horse, whilst viewing the countryside and participating in invigorating exercise. One of the main benefits of bridleways is that they can be used and enjoyed not only by horse riders but also by walkers, cyclists and the disabled.

The British Horse Industry Confederation (BHIC) report in 2009 stated:

The equestrian sector is the largest sporting employer in the UK. Racing and riding together provide 70,000 full time jobs with indirect employment comprising an additional 220,000 – 270,000 people;

Horse owners, carers and riders in Britain spend more than seven billion pounds a year in gross output terms;

In 2008 the North Lancashire Bridleways Society undertook a survey to assess the economic input of horse ownership into the economy of the Lancaster District and to establish the importance of horses to the economic health of the area. A full copy of their report is available on line: http://www.nlbs.org.uk/NLBS_Survey_Report2009.pdf

The key findings of this report were:

(i) *The cost of horse ownership is £4,752 per year, the main cost of which is accommodation;*

(ii) *The geographical source of services and goods is mainly based within a twenty mile radius of the horse's accommodation, the details of which are presented in the analysis of the report;*

(iii) *The Economic input of horse ownership into the local economy is £7,603,200 per year. A detailed breakdown of costs is presented in the conclusion of the report.*

(It is reasonable to consider these costs as an under-estimate of current expenditure due to inflation and the north/south regional cost difference).

Horses are predominantly kept in a rural environment and it is therefore the rural areas that will benefit from an increase in the number of horses and equestrian facilities. The following statistics give an idea of the extent of the public interest and potential demand generally for equestrian facilities [*figures supplied by The British Trade Association (BETA) National Equestrian Survey 2011*]:

- i. 32% of the British population (19.7 million) have engaged in some activity connected to equestrianism;
- ii 3.5 million people have ridden in the previous twelve months (5.69% of the population). The 1999 estimate was 2.4 million, indicating a substantial growth;
- iii. 73% of horse riders are female;
- iv 25% of horse riders are aged under 16;
- iv The majority of riders are women and children;
- v leisure riding is the main equestrian activity, showing an increase of 9% in just over five years;
- vi access to safe off road riding – bridleways – would increase riding opportunities for 46% of people who ride once a week or less.

According to a report undertaken by the Women's Support and Fitness Foundation in March 2011, equestrian is the 6th most popular activity for women and the top outdoor pursuits activity.

Towpath access could also encourage the growth of tourism in an area; horse riders, cyclists and walkers are always attracted to an area that offers good scenery, good facilities and, above all, safe off road tracks on which to enjoy the benefits of the area. Many riders go on holiday with their horses or have weekend breaks away with them, and a good bridleway network would draw riders to the area.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF HORSE RIDING AND OWNERSHIP

In 2011 the British Horse Society commissioned the University of Brighton in partnership with Plumpton College to research the physical health and the psychological and well-being benefits of recreational horse riding in the UK. A copy of the full report can be downloaded at www.bhs.org.uk/Riding/Health/_Benefits_of_Riding.aspx

The Report confirmed that being involved with horses and equestrian sport has immense physical and psychological benefits for all participants. It also encourages young people to become self sufficient, early risers, capable, caring, active and healthy, to take an interest in the environment, and committed to regular routines.

4.4 The physical and psychological benefits of horse riding for the disabled have also been well documented. Please see: <http://www.rda.org.uk/home/therapy/> where it is stated:

Medical professionals recognise that there are significant therapeutic benefits for the rider. The warmth and three dimensional movement of the horse is transmitted through the rider's body, gradually making it more relaxed and supple, strengthening core stability, reducing spasms and improving balance, posture and co-ordination.

Riding offers an element of risk, often denied to many people, especially those who have been affected by an accident or serious illness and offers them the chance to regain mobility and a sense of achievement. People with congenital disabilities discover a new freedom in movement. Those with progressive diseases can retain mobility and remain active for longer.

The creation of bridleways will therefore help to support and enhance the promotion of health and well being, for all sections of society.

The publication entitled '*The Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales*' (the Consultation) was published in 2005. It was prepared by the British Horse Industry Confederation in partnership with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Welsh Assembly Government. The purpose of the strategy was to foster a robust and sustainable horse industry.

One of the key findings to emerge from the Consultation was that improvement to an off-road riding and driving network was urgently needed, in order to encourage economic growth, increase tourism and provide a safe environment for learning opportunities.

The Equestrian Access Forum (the Forum) was formed as a result of the findings of the Consultation. The organisations comprised in the Forum are the British Horse Society, the Byways and Bridleways Trust, the British Driving Society and the National Federation of Bridleway Associations.

The Forum published a comprehensive study entitled "Making Ways for Horses – Off-road equestrian access In England". It identified:

(i) *Riding is a growth activity. Between 1999 and 2006 the number of riders in Britain increased by 44% to 4.3 million, which works out to be 7% of the total population. The majority of horses – 1.2 million – are kept for private use. The main reason given by people for keeping a horse is to go leisure riding i.e. riding out on public rights of way.*

(ii) *Despite the up-swell of activity in the 1980's riding out has only increased by 5% since 1999. This is in part due to:*

the increase in speed and volume of traffic;

the disjointed nature of the equestrian rights of way network; and

the lack of safe places to ride.

Approximately 3,000 reported road accidents a year involve horses, often with fatal consequences. Many riders are simply too frightened to ride down a road to reach their nearest bridleway because it is too dangerous. If they are involved in a collision with a car their chances of sustaining serious injury is very high – riders and horses are unprotected. A damaged car can be repaired. A damaged horse or rider often cannot. They are totally vulnerable, yet many car drivers show them no consideration at all.

A great deal of consideration is given in local policies to the provision of safe routes for children – but no one thinks of providing safe *riding* routes for them – these are completely ignored.

In summary, we would submit that these aims can be achieved with forward pro active planning that could result in a comprehensive linked bridleway network that could benefit all residents in, and visitors to these areas. Many of these towpaths could be upgraded at minimal cost and could make a significant difference to the safety and wellbeing of a large sector of the community.

Towpath Funding trends

It is welcomed that funding is available for the improvements of towpaths and it is noted that the consultation document states that ‘...any funding should deliver better towpaths for everyone...’ We request that consideration is given that towpaths are for use by *everyone* – which of course should include equestrians.

Principles

Point 3 confirms that ‘towpaths should be free to access for all users who wish to walk, run, fish cycle etc and who are committed to behave considerately to other users of the towpaths who are slower or more vulnerable than themselves’. This we wholly support and would also support a voluntary code to consider other users who may be more vulnerable; this currently is the case on bridleways and is the basis of the use of our Rights of Way network. We agree with point 4 and are pleased to see that it is intended to improve the route as far as disabled access is concerned. We would point out that in many cases upgrading towpaths to incorporate disabled access would also enable its use by horse riders.

We are at a loss to understand the reasoning behind point 8 in relation to use by horses. It is stated that the use of towpaths by horses is part of the heritage of our waterways, yet the entire consultation is biased against any such use by horses now, except where expressly allowed either by permissive use or bridleway designation. We would welcome any moves to redress the balance so that horses can claim back their historical right to use these old paths; whilst we accept that there will be some cases where it will not be practical for horses to use paths where they are too narrow, we feel that it is only fair that these paths are open to all not just certain users. It is noted in the paragraph detailing the Trust’s intentions that it will endeavour to reclaim the towpath width for shared use and this we welcome, provided that path can then be opened to all users.

We fully support the idea of a Towpath Code and feel that it will encourage responsible behaviour and appreciate that equestrians will need to be very aware of other users and be prepared to consider walkers and the disabled – as should cyclists.

We would comment as follows on your feedback points:

- *Do you experience problems on your local towpath?* There are several miles of towpath within Essex, some of which can be busy but the majority is largely rural and it would be practical to allow horseriders to safely share these rural towpaths, provided riders adhere to the code. Currently cyclists use them, with some riders having permissive access along some of the paths and we as an organisation have not heard of any issues relating to shared use of these.
- *What additional priorities should we address in our code of conduct?* We feel that the equestrian sector has been completely ignored and this should be addressed. In your current proposal there is no provision for horseriders at all.
- *What behaviours should we seek to encourage?* The code of conduct is the basis for considerate behaviour from all users and this is welcomed. Horseriders would need to consider more vulnerable users and accept that towpaths would be a 'walking only' path and have consideration for the state of the surface – for example in extremely wet weather to avoid using the routes so that the surface is not destroyed.
- *How should we encourage better sharing of towpaths?* This would be best achieved by encouraging all users to adopt this code of conduct and use it considerately. By opening the rural towpaths to all users including horseriders will encourage a wider range of users and, quite often, this leads to more consideration between user groups. After all, if you know you may meet a horse when cycling along you are more likely to take more care than if you think there will be no one else using it.
- *Should we adopt the same approach in all areas urban and rural?* It may not be practical to adopt this approach to all areas, especially busy ones, and after all most horse riders prefer the more isolated areas with the more vulnerable users – children, elderly and disabled – being more likely to use the paths near to areas where people can park or access public transport. It would be preferable to look at these areas on a case by case basis and involve the local user groups when making a decision. The question of community involvement is mentioned within the consultation document, and as part of this, Essex Bridleways Association would be very keen to be involved in any user group discussions to enable the safe use of towpaths by all users.
- *How should we balance the needs of busy communities with capacity of the towpaths in those areas?* As far as the equestrian sector is concerned, as mentioned in the previous point horseriders are far more likely to prefer access along the more rural and remote areas which are more likely to be used by less people. It therefore follows that shared access could easily be accommodated along such paths and if horseriders have a reasonable amount of access it would be acceptable to most of them if they are not encouraged to use the more busy areas, provided other safe road access around them is possible. Again, this could be decided on an individual basis and we would be keen to be involved in any discussions relating to this in our area.

In summary, Essex has many miles of towpaths. We are most fortunate in having a definitive bridleway between Heybridge and Langford on the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation which has proven most useful and has shown absolutely no sign of user conflict, demonstrating well how successful such designation would be elsewhere.

Unfortunately most of the towpaths are denied to horseriders despite their historical use and we would welcome the opportunity to be involved in any further discussions which will make it possible to redress this balance.



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28th April 2014

Bishop's Cannings Parish Council (BCPC) Response to the "Sharing Towpaths" Consultation

The parish of Bishop's Cannings has 5.5 kilometres of the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath within its boundary. The canal itself is a key wildlife corridor within the area, linking a number of separate elements of green infrastructure. The towpath also acts as a strategic spine, providing critical connectivity within the local rights-of-way network.

BCPC supports the proposed approach to towpath management and agrees with the principles set-out in the document. It does, however, believe that the Towpath Code should make specific reference to the responsibility of boaters to keep the towpath clear and safe. The issue brought to the council's attention most frequently, is obstruction of the towpath by boaters, particularly the transient 'live-aboard' community. Additionally, BCPC believes that the Towpath Code should be more prescriptive regarding the need for cycle users to be equipped with a bell or other suitable audible warning device.

BCPC welcomes the move to encourage adoption of towpaths by local communities.

EQ A. B.C.P.

Eric Clark

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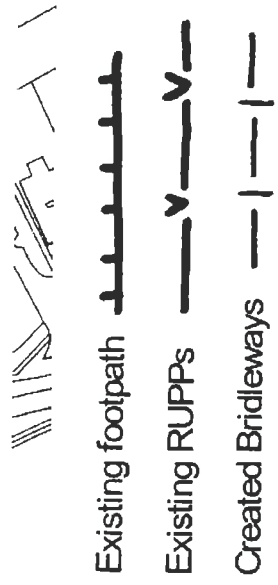
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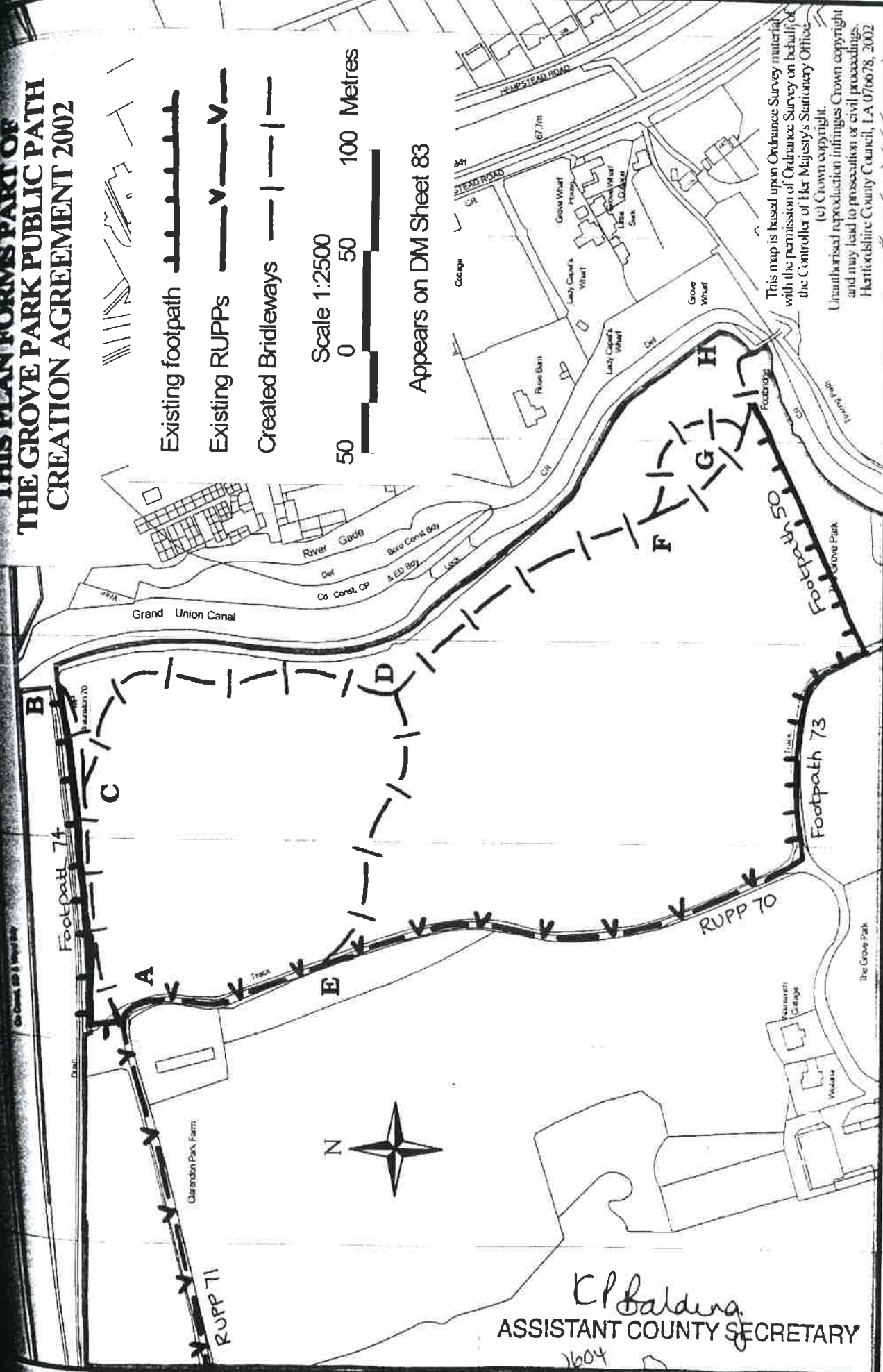
THIS PLAN FORMS PART OF THE GROVE PARK PUBLIC PATH CREATION AGREEMENT 2002



Scale 1:2500



Appears on DM Sheet 83



K.P. Balding
 ASSISTANT COUNTY SECRETARY

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Ramblers' Association, West Riding Area, Footpath Committee

Comments on consultation paper *Sharing Towpaths*, CRT, April 2014

Lee Davidson (Secretary Footpath Committee and CRT User Group representative)

1. Introduction

We welcome this consultation paper. In the last decade, with the growing and changing reputation of the canal and waterway network as a leisure resource, pressures on the towpaths have increased. It is therefore appropriate for all the stakeholders to assist in reviewing CRT policies.

2. Comments on particular sections of the document

2.1. Principles 4

While it is necessary to improve safe visiting to towpaths for all and access for the disabled, this should not be seen as a justification for turning towpaths into hard routes.

2.2. Principles 5

The recognition of towpaths in DfT policy documents appears to be patchy. In the most recent relevant document DfT LTN 1/12 September 2012 *Shared Use Routes for Pedestrians and Cyclists* there is, surprisingly and regrettably, no mention of towpaths or any kind of route by a waterway (perhaps reflecting the absence of towpaths from the Atkins *Shared Use Operational Survey* 2012 with which the LTN is linked). The document with which LTN 1/12 is explicitly linked, DfT LTN 2/08 October 2008 *Cycle Infrastructure Design*, does mention towpaths three times, but as it is concerned mainly with technical aspects of path construction it cannot consider the much broader range of issues which arise with towpaths. The aspects which it does deal with are quite limited. The important matter of widths in various settings (constricted and unconstricted) is not dealt with.

In short, there is an insufficient recognition of the special problems of towpaths in current DfT policy documents which ought to be rectified in order to provide a framework for safety, construction and regulation etc.

We therefore support this principle, but would like to see the wording tightened up to identify the government department(s) and other agencies which need to deal with towpaths but appear to have forgotten them more often than not.

An important question is how to deal with existing views, which may be deeply held by large numbers of towpath users, that at least some towpaths constitute already a distinct class of way, namely that of daily cycle commuter route. If all towpaths are to be (as we believe) “slower space” in the helpfully memorable phrase used a few lines below, then part of the policy must consider how to impose this conception on routes where other ideas may already have become established.

Careful consideration will have to be given to what type of way a towpath might be if there is to be any consideration of penalties for misuse (see below at 2.5). The interaction between cycle track legislation and other highway legislation concerning footpaths, bridleways and byways is complex. How towpaths fit into this typology of ways needs careful attention.

2.3. What the Trust will do bullet 1

Having been involved in the latter stages of the preparation of the Towpath Guidance Document I am pleased to see that it has been cemented into the proposals as the basis for towpath surfacing and related matters.

2.4. What the Trust will do bullet 8

The use of the term “slowest moving users” implies that physical mobility is the most important kind of disability. See further below on the document’s lack of attention to the deaf/hard or hearing (at 3.1).

2.5. “Behaviours expected” section

I am sceptical about the value of existing **signage** which I have seen in my own locality. The signage tends to attract the attention of graffiti vandals, especially in urban and semi-urban locations.

Here are two recently photographed examples of signage at the bridges over the Leeds & Liverpool near Kirkstall Abbey:



The example on the right also shows the graffiti on the bridge stonework (Turner, who painted this bridge, would be pained!)

While there may be a particular need for signs at danger points such as bridge holes, and at the short stretches of sharp gradient beside locks which often tempt descending cyclists to let rip, their use needs to be carefully calculated. Durable and vandal resistant signage is not cheap and, if not tended, will rapidly become shabby.

To cite experience from the footpath network, the effect of signs discouraging cyclists from using footpaths is often nil. It is important to remember that using a cycle on a footpath constitutes the civil wrong of trespass against the landowner. Without a bye-law or Traffic Regulation Order in place *which is enforced* there is no real prospect of using a penalty system to discourage misuse. (This is, of course, in contrast to the act of cycling on a footway beside a carriageway, which does constitute an offence against the Highways Act 1835 s72, though it is sadly rarely enforced.) In the absence of enforceable penalties, the amount of respect given to advisory signage is likely to be low.

A short internet search will reveal a current of opinion which is already challenging the notions of '**pedestrian priority**' (e.g. <http://ukcyclerrules.com/2011/09/21/cyclists-pedestrians-shared-path/>). The notion that cycles are bound to 'give way' to pedestrians has a somewhat uncertain legal basis, and if used as the basis for a towpath policy is

likely to be seen as weak from the start. The law is somewhat clearer on cycling 'considerately', but even then there are no specific penalties and on-the-spot enforcement is not available.

3. The proposed Towpath Code

3.1. Share the space

The code has to give much more prominence to a group of users who are commonly left out of consideration, namely the **deaf and hard of hearing**. Visual and mobility impairments *may* be visible to an approaching cyclist (though often they will not) but the person with hearing loss is bound to be alarmed by cyclists coming from the rear unless they make particular efforts to slow down and overtake very carefully. Bells will not help much. I know from personal experience the likely reaction of cyclists if I point out that the only safe assumption they can make is that *every* pedestrian they approach from behind may be deaf, but somehow this message has to be got over, as the pleasure of walkers with hearing problems is blighted by inconsiderate overtaking from behind.

3.2. Bell ringing

Show positive encouragement for possession and use of a bell. However, some cyclists have a conscientious objection to bells and others take the view that the use of the bell is in itself aggressive. Somehow a greater uniformity of view about the desirability and standard use of bells should be built up, with the help of those cycling organisations which are behind the use of bells

3.3. Pedestrian priority

See last paragraph of 2 above about this. There should be a positive establishment of pedestrian priority.

3.4. Local bye-laws

It is a major task to determine whether any bye-laws are in existence, and often to find out what they say. In recent years Councils have mostly tended to allow bye-laws to fade into the background. If the bye-laws are not clearly published and known to the general public then they will be treated with contempt. More work is necessary to find out how many bye-laws might apply and on which towpath stretches.

3.5. Large groups

It is unclear whether large groups (eg a charity walk or run) have to apply for special permission to use the towpath. They should have to, as their presence (especially that of runners) on a popular towpath could be disturbing to other users. In such cases the organisation should provide stewards to monitor interaction with other users.

The holding of cycling events and the presence of groups of cyclists above a number to be discussed should not be allowed. Websites are already in existence which are encouraging time-trialling on public footpaths and towpaths. It must be quite clear that such activities are forbidden as they are incompatible with use by other groups. Whether a procedure to permit such events, analogous to a temporary Traffic Regulation order for other highways, should be thought about is a matter for consideration.

3.6. Dogs

There are two sorts of problems with dogs, behaviour and mess.

Encouraging dog walkers to abide by a system of ethics will prove as difficult on towpaths as it proves even in areas such as public parks. There is a large group of dog owners who are totally myopic about the effect their dog's **behaviour** may be having on other members of the public. 'Friendly' behaviour such as bouncing up and placing paws on the chest of a child can prove to be very disturbing for the child concerned. The dangers of loose dogs on the same towpath as cyclists are too obvious to need stating.

As for **dog fouling**, the publication *Dog fouling and the law* (<http://kb.keepbritaintidy.org/dogs/publications/guidedog.pdf>) might usefully be used as a starting point to consider what type of enforcement and penalty system might be appropriate. The 'dog-poo fairy' campaign which tried to discourage the practice of discarding bags onto nearby tree branches was a good approach which did not have enough weight behind it to induce a sense of shame in those dog owners who throw bags away.

If it is CRT's policy not to provide bins for any kind of rubbish because of the costs of emptying them, then there is a problem with what to do with dog-poo bags which needs to be considered carefully.

4. Back page

I have addressed most of the bullet points here in the sections above.

On the issue of urban and rural towpaths, there will be differences in the incidence of vandalism and level of usage. Signage will probably have a longer life in a rural environment, though the need for information in urban settings is often very great in order to illuminate the historical context of the waterway.

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National Bargee Travellers Association

Response to CRT Consultation on Shared Use of Towpaths

The National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA) has the following concerns regarding the proposals for the shared use of towpaths.

1. Use of the towpath for navigation

The towpaths were constructed to be used for navigation. It should be made clear to all users in any towpath code that use by boats is the primary purpose of the towpaths. All towpath users should be made aware that the waterways are working navigations and that they should keep clear of boats and their crews when they are using the towpaths, locks, bridges and landing stages to allow them room to manoeuvre and for safety reasons.

2. Use of the towpath for mooring

Users of the towpath should be made aware that navigation includes mooring on the towpath and that they should keep clear of boats that are being moored and respect the needs of boaters on moored boats.

3. The Article 8 rights of boat dwellers

CRT is bound by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights which confers the right to respect for one's home and family life. These rights extend to the environment outside one's home. Users of the towpath should be made aware that for a significant number of boaters, their boat is their permanent or part-time home and that they should respect the homes of boat dwellers and their families. They need to know that activities such as sawing logs, boat maintenance and repairs, use of the towpath by children playing, and simply sitting outside the boat are all legitimate activities.

4. Use of the towpath for angling

Contrary to CRT's consultation document, use of the towpath for fishing is not free of charge to anglers. There is no provision in the British Waterways (Transfer of Functions) Order 2012 for free use of the towpaths for angling. The only requirement set in the Transfer Order is the provision of free access to the towpaths for walking.

Boaters need to know where anglers are permitted to fish, under what conditions and where fishing is not permitted. We would welcome informal advice for boaters about leaving space between moored boats for anglers if and where this is possible. This would be most effective if it was accompanied by information about ad-hoc use by individual anglers and by angling clubs; use of the towpath for fishing matches; the pegging system used for fishing matches and whether passing or mooring boats help or hinder angling.

Anglers should not be permitted to fish from lock and bridge landing stages, facilities moorings and bridge abutments. There should be clear guidance for anglers regarding whether they are permitted to fish from visitor moorings and this should include advice that they must give way to disabled boaters who wish to moor on a visitor mooring. Anglers need to know that obstruction of the towpath with fishing gear is not only inconsiderate, it is an offence under the Byelaw 31 of the British Waterways General Canal Byelaws 1965-1976.

5. Use of the towpath for cycling

There is no obligation in the British Waterways (Transfer of Functions) Order 2012 to maintain

free access to the towpath for cycling. Funding from Sustrans has enabled BW and CRT to upgrade many towpaths but this funding does not appear to include provision for ongoing maintenance of these upgraded cycle routes. If towpaths are to be used as permanent cycle routes then any funding agreement needs to include funds for long-term maintenance of the towpath surface. The surfaces provided for cyclists also make many towpaths suitable for use by people with disabilities; wheelchair users and users of mobility scooters. This means that cyclists should be made aware that the towpath is not suitable for fast cycling because they are sharing the towpath not only with boaters and pedestrians of all ages but also with disabled users and they should limit their speed and give way to other users.

6. Use of the towpath for walking and running

The NBTA agrees that all towpath users should be made aware that they should give way to those who are slower or more vulnerable than themselves, and that runners should give way to slower users.

7. Dogs on the towpath

Since 2012 CRT has heavily promoted the use of the towpaths for dog walking. This has increased the risk to the public from dog faeces. CRT should provide bins for dog waste at frequent intervals in order to minimise the risk and inconvenience to other users.

8. Access to towpaths for people with disabilities

The NBTA welcomes improvements to the towpath that improve access for people with disabilities, including moorings for disabled boaters, provided that such improvements do not also result in greater use for cycling at high speeds. We would encourage CRT to meet its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 regarding the provision of disabled access and to consult fully with disabled users about the installation of specific improvements and of structures such as vehicle barriers, which have hindered access for users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters in some locations.

9. Increasing the space for boats to moor and improving facilities for boaters

Where towpath improvements are carried out, these should also include measures to reduce congestion by increasing the available space for boats to moor for 14 days on the towpath. In some urban areas the towpaths have been concreted over, preventing boats from mooring using mooring pins. In these areas, some of the concrete should be replaced with grass to allow mooring pins to be used, or rings installed. In other areas the bank has been eroded or there is not enough depth of water to moor boats and therefore maintenance should be carried out to make it possible for boats to moor. In many parts of the waterways the number of facilities for boaters is insufficient and facilities are not properly maintained. Improvements to the towpath should also be used as an opportunity to improve facilities for boaters such as installing additional rubbish bins, water taps and sewage disposal facilities.

10. BW Byelaws

Towpath users need to be aware that the British Waterways General Canal Byelaws 1965-1976 regulate the use of the towpath. For example obstruction of the towpath is an offence under Byelaw 31; obstruction to navigation by users of the towpath is an offence under Byelaw 32 and it is an offence under Byelaw 50 to interfere with a lock or bridge.



MID COTSWOLD TRACKS & TRAILS GROUP

Helping to improve our tracks and trails ... from this generation to the next ...

1st May 2014

Canal and River Trust : Response to your consultation document Sharing Towpaths.

Mid Cotswold Tracks and Trails Group is based in Gloucestershire and our aims are:

- 1 To improve and expand the tracks and trails network (bridleways, byways, unsurfaced roads and other off-road routes open to horse riders) to enable horses to be ridden off road in safety.
- 2 To develop new links and create additional multi-use routes to benefit horse riding.
- 3 To promote safer conditions for horse riders on roads.
- 4 To promote use of local riding routes and facilities to promote sustainable tourism. This may include the publication of maps and guides.
- 5 To establish good relations with local authorities, landowners and other user groups, such as walkers, cyclists, disabled, trail riders and carriage drivers, in order to achieve the above.
- 6 To provide assistance in maintaining existing tracks and trails.

The routes available for horse riders in our area that do not involve tracts on fast main roads are diminishing all the time. We feel strongly that any possibility of accessing (and in some areas re-accessing) quieter routes is very important and should be encouraged.

There is a national drive for health and well-being, but in many instances it feels as though the walkers, cyclists and others are being particularly positively targetted, often at the expense of the horse riders. There is a perception among our horse riders that we are subject to "horseist" discrimination, which is galling where no statistics exist to support the inequalities we are subject to.

Some of our members have told us that they used to ride parts of the Gloucester/Sharpness canal in the past but were stopped some years ago. They note that while they, as local people quietly enjoying their own village, have had routes taken away from them, a cycle hire business has been permitted, which they feel is encouraging visitors to use the paths in their place. Whilst tourism and the economy have a role to play, we feel it should not be to the detriment of access for those who live locally.

We are told that parts of the areas they rode were from The Cambridge Arms to Tudor Patch, and on down to Purton and back round a circuit through Gossington lanes. This is no longer available to horse riders. Here are two more comments from local riders "Always

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MID COTSWOLD TRACKS & TRAILS GROUP

Helping to improve our tracks and trails ... from this generation to the next ...

used to ride from Fretherne Bridge to Splatt Bridge. It makes a great loop to then ride back down the green in Frampton on Severn. Also the paths between Fretherne and Saul Bridge were always used by local riders about 10 years ago - was a real shame when they were made inaccessible.” and “I used to ride them years ago - great to get off road & would love to be able to ride along them again in the future - I rode from Frampton to Slimbridge as a teenager to attend the show several years running & the same from Frampton to Castle bridge to attend Hardwicke Show.”

Coincidentally, we have recently been asked by a local rider if it might be possible to re-open this route along the canal from Cambridge Arms to Frampton to access circuits that are only available at the moment if you ride up the A38 ... again, the A38 was ridden in the 1980s but you would need nerves of steel to even think of it now.

Our area also has the Stroudwater canal which is in the process of a massive re-opening and improvement scheme. This will eventually go from the Sharpness canal, through Stonehouse and Stroud and out to Sapperton and right across to Lechlade. There are several areas that would be useful as off road circuit links right across this whole route, and we have a rider from this area who states *“When I was younger I used to ride along Chalford towpaths. They were built for horses back in the day, and they should still be allowed to use them now too”*.

We believe that all user groups should be treated equally in the first instance i.e. all groups should be included unless there is a specific, and statistically provable, reason why they should be excluded. We see few instances where it would be suitable to cycle but not suitable to ride a horse. If cyclists, walkers, and anglers are expected to co-exist at the moment, why should horse riders not be invited to enjoy their local canal too ?

The discriminatory attitude to horses has been prevalent in other areas in the past. Horse riders have had to fight to be offered the same access rights as other groups on Forestry Commission land, and we are also still fighting for equal access to many ex-railway lines and “cycle” routes across the country.

The Trails Trust in their report on Multi-user Trails say:

“Results of all the research and experience are consistent and show that:

- Public perception of risk of accident or conflict on multi-user paths is rarely based upon facts.*
- Risk of accident or conflict on multi-user paths is minimal and statistically insignificant.*
- The main (although minimal) cause of conflict/accident is cyclists speeding too fast and close to walkers.*

Such issues can be addressed by:

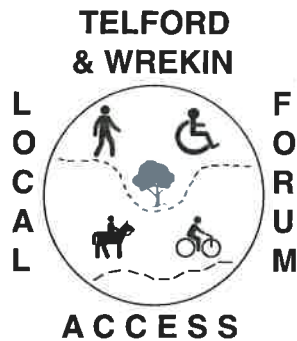
- Choice of surface – e.g. avoiding tarmac which encourages speeding cyclists*
- Education – A Code of Use alerting the public to other users’ needs.”*

It is our riders’ experience that horses on a trail can actually slow the speed of cyclists to the advantage of walkers or disabled users.

For all the above reasons of equality of opportunity and access; benefits for general health and well being; preservation or restoration of ancient rights; and proven practicality; we would wish to see the majority of towpaths opened to horse use - with restrictions only where particularly necessary, for example where a path is too narrow for two horses to pass or very low bridges.

Pat Harris (MCTTG Chair)

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The Canal and Rivers Trust – Consultation

Re. Please consider all users including horse riders

18th March 2014

Dear Sir or Madam

I am pleased to hear about this important consultation.

It appears that a lot of what is in it is clear, well thought out, and sensible. Towpaths are a wonderful form of recreation, have inherent health benefits, and provide important sustainable transport links that are safe and off-road. They are invaluable for these purposes. The presence of tow paths is, as we know, and as the name suggests, for horses but this use has long since been lost in all but a few cases.

I would like to strongly support the use of these again for recreational riding. There are all too few routes for off road access for quiet, hacking riders, and those with children on horseback. As with all 'shared surfaces' and multiuser routes a clear set of guide lines should be in place and the 'tow path code' that you have proposed is excellent. I am particularly pleased that you are keen to address those who wear headphones (horse riders never would!), as I believe their use is very dangerous on all rights of way. I would hope that you could look to opening up as many parts of the towpath network to horse riders as possible. I know that many walkers who are with families love to see the ponies going by on other routes too.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further help or if you need me to make more comments on this proposal. It could be very exciting for all involved and the greatest change we have seen to access especially for equestrians for many years. Their future is very much in your hands.

Kind regards,

Anthony Francis-Jones
LAF Chairman
British Horse Society District Access Officer
Telford Bridleways Association Chairman

The telford and Wrekin Local Access Forum is a statutory body under s94 CROW Act 2000. 'To advise as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area'

Ramblers' response to Sharing Towpaths: A consultation on towpath use for the Canal & River Trust

The Ramblers helps everyone, everywhere, enjoy walking and protects the places we all love to walk. We are the only charity dedicated to looking after paths and green spaces, leading walks, opening up access to the outdoors and encouraging everyone to get outside and discover how walking boosts your health and your happiness. We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Canal and River Trust's consultation paper on Sharing Towpaths.

1. Ramblers welcome the opening up of towpaths and the associated publicity to draw attention to this and bring more people onto the towpath and into contact with the canal and river system. A number of our members have completed the survey and we have been represented at a number of meetings where the consultation has been discussed. We consider that the draft document is very useful and sets out all the main issues but as has been discussed at the meetings needs some fine tuning. We know that some suggestions have already been well received and we apologise for repeating some of these.
2. We consider that the main message should be that 'You are all welcome on our towpaths please be aware of all the other people using the towpath and the waterway and give way if necessary'. The concept of ENJOYMENT and everyone sharing towpaths in harmony should be stressed as much as possible.
 - 2.1. Although we may appear to have concentrated on the downside of some towpath users we fully understand that those that don't comply with the rules are a minute percentage and occur in all groups of users but they do cause trouble for other users. There is an important job for CRT volunteers to persuade them of the difficulties they are causing.
3. **Purpose** We agree with this and have no comment to make.
4. **Towpath Funding Trends** We welcome the trend in recent years to accept funding from outside bodies although note that this is likely to reduce for sometime due to the cuts in local authority funding. We are concerned that in the past outside funders have imposed their views on the surface to be provided, particularly in rural areas, and this has not always fitted into the canal setting or the Towpath Design Guidelines. We know that in some cases CRT/BW have managed to get funders to agree to something more environmentally friendly and hope this will continue in accordance with the last paragraph in this section. We are aware that new surface types have come onto the market since the Guidelines were written and understand the document will be regularly updated to take account of these.
5. **The Trust's Approach** We are pleased that the Trust will be proactive in providing leadership on policies and practice relating to 'shared use'. Shared use is becoming a major issue in rights of way work and we would like to tap into your experience when dealing with local authorities on these issues.
6. **Principles** We see these as separate to the Code of Practice although the code obviously follows from them. Overall they need to be tighter and there is some repetition so perhaps some could be combined.
 - 6.1. a Insert 'and lock sides' after Towpaths.

b Insert 'cycling' in the list of activities and delete the rest of the sentence.

6.2. Possibly 'havens of peace' is what they should be although this may be hard to achieve.

6.3. This can be made positive and pithier by adding 'are' after Towpaths and deleting the list of activities so it reads 'Towpaths are free to access by (all) users who are committed to behave considerately to all other users of the towpath and waterway.'

6.4. Again more positivity 'Towpaths will be improved and maintained etc

6.4.1. As in 7.3 the improvement for 'disabled access' has to be considered in more detail and whether it can be achieved. The Equality Act would suggest that access for all is the goal but this cannot be achieved i.e. many motorised wheelchairs would find it impossible to use bridge holes on canals as would mobile people with other problems. There is no point in providing a 1:12 access ramp if the people who it is provided for can only access a hundred metres of towpath although in saying that we are aware that many people would find such a ramp with a seat nearby a real improvement. This needs discussing with organisations that specialise in these access problems.

6.5. We agree. Towpaths should be seen as a National Towpath Network not a cycle track. Where organisations such as Sustrans use them their signing should be as small and unobtrusive as possible and the standard towpath signing used where necessary.

6.6. Delete 'will continue' and insert 'need'. Possibly also add 'and need to give way other users.'

6.7. We agree that towpaths should be marketed (not branded) in their historic names and retain their original character as is now being done with the waterways themselves. For Trust name recognition they should be: CRT Trent and Mersey Canal Towpath although these will lead to some interesting arguments as to whether the original name should be retained i.e. Warwick and Birmingham or the later name after amalgamation

6.8. This is difficult we agree with the sentiment and would echo the proposal that riding horses should only be allowed on approved stretches of towpath although this will not apply where a towpath is on the definitive map as a bridleway.

6.9. We approve of this and would see the faster traffic being rerouted first.

6.10. We consider that any towpath closure should normally have an alternative route signed and displayed on the CRT closure website. We understand that this will be put into the Customer Service Standards but think that this document is an appropriate place for it as well as part of CRT's commitment to towpath users.

7. **What the Trust Will Do**

We fully agree with the aims of this section. Comments:

7.1. Bullet point 1 Our members have commented that they would prefer a grass surface in rural areas although we accept that if the traffic becomes too heavy action has to be taken to provide a harder surface – but not tarmac and some of the newer materials provide a softer surface which slows down cyclists. We have also had comments about cycle use causing a muddy rut down the centre of the towpath which causes problems for pedestrians. Possibly this can be helped by putting a hard surface below and relaying a grass surface.

7.2. Bullet point 2 the reference to risk reviews should include and add amenity and ambience.

7.3. Bullet point 3 See reference to mobility vehicles at 8.4.1.

7.4. Bullet point 8 >1 Suggest 'act to protect the slowest and most vulnerable users first'

- 7.5. Bullet point 8 >3 Introduce more signage. We agree most access points should be signposted with destination and distances on the towpath goes and where the access to the real world goes. However we are concerned that more signage is not applied to the system itself. Originally our thoughts were that 'give way blind bridge' etc. signs were needed at all pinch points. Our present view is that as few signs as possible should be used – this is a historic environment.
- 7.5.1. Access points should have CRT green signs – pedestrian priority/thanks for slowing down in each direction of travel but after that is it necessary to have further signs? Either they will be obeyed or ignored or additional signs will make very little difference to this and destroy the ambience. As many structures are historic and listed it is better to paint signs on a hard towpath rather than place them on or adjacent to historic structures.
- 7.5.2. We look forward to CRT completing the survey of access points and making the details easily available to the public.
- 7.6. Bullet point 7 We fully support this as can be seen from other comments. Rural towpaths should be upgraded as little as possible dependant on their use and a grass surface should always be preferred even if on top of a harder surface.
- 7.7. Bullet point 8 >4 This is good as long as it is seen as a welcoming and not a gate keeping or instruction exercise.
- 7.8. Bullet point 8 >5 Physical barriers were originally introduced to prevent motor vehicle use and we supported this. It appears that it is no longer a major problem and we would like to see existing barriers removed where possible. Apart from mobility vehicles we, like CRT, object to use of the towpath by any other motor vehicles, unless being used for maintenance etc.
- 8. We Will be Clear on Behaviours Expected of those Using the Towpath**
We agree with this section.
- 9. Work with Partners to Enhance the Towpath Environment**
Our only comment is bullet point 3 which we have already commented on in 7.9.
- 10. What Visitors Can Do**
This is probably redundant as it will be covered in the Towpath Code.
- 11. The Proposed Code**
A lot of discussion has already gone into this and we are aware that some of the original proposals are likely to be amended or combined. A proposal was made for mini guides for each group gently setting out do's and don'ts. We think this is a good idea as long as it strikes the right note. It would be preferable if it formed one document as then it could be seen that it applies to all groups and not just your particular group being singled out.
- 11.1. Share the Space) Share the Space delete the first sentence as superfluous.
- 11.2. Drop Your Pace) these are both good slogans.
- 11.3. Pedestrians have Priority Yes!
- 11.4. Be courteous to Others Yes
- 11.5. Follow Signs – delete reference to local bylaws. 'Restricted Areas' would this be better referred to as pinch points or where towpath width is restricted?
- 11.6. Give Way Necessary but should it be combined with 5?
- 11.7. Give Way Necessary but should it be combined with 5?

- 11.8. Headphones Probably a lost cause but should be stressed and the reasons given.
- 11.9. Dog Fouling Fully agree with this but there should be disposal bins at convenient access points.

11.9.1. If people are made to carry plastic bags over distances they will either not pick up or will hang the bag on a convenient tree for the 'good fairy' to pick up. We appreciate that there are problems getting local authorities to empty other organisations disposal bins but there must be a way of negotiating this.

11.10. Children We agree with this fully on busy towpaths but would suggest they should be allowed to wander unrestrained on less busy ones – they are the vulnerable who other users are being asked to give way to. The towpaths are a good place for them to be wild but in parental view.

12. Gaps

12.1. It needs to be pointed out that boats are in effect a working environment and that danger can be caused by bystanders getting in the way of lock working.

12.2. Anglers using roach poles should avoid putting them across the towpath – this should probably be in a mini guide.

12.3. Blind bridges are also a danger and should be mentioned in mini guides and other literature but if the other guidance is followed they should not be a problem.

12.4. Bells on cycles are a topic frequently raised. The CRT should do what it can, through advice and encouragement, to ensure that bells are used.

13. When we circulated the consultation to our members we were surprised by the number who said they had had problems with cyclists – usually excessive speed and not being prepared to slow and/or swearing and gesturing. It is not clear whether this is well remembered past behaviour or is still a current problem and whether it is wider than London as most comments referred to London.

Patron Her Majesty The Queen
The British Horse Society
 Abbey Park,
 Stareton,
 Kenilworth,
 Warwickshire CV8 2XZ

Fulfilling your passion
 for horses

Email enquiry@bhs.org.uk
 Website www.bhs.org.uk
 Tel 0844 848 1666
 Tel 02476 840500
 Fax 02476 840501



The
 British
 Horse
 Society

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 Crawley
 West Sussex, RH 10 7QY
 Tel: 01293 886446
 Email: tricia.butcher@gmail.com

Sent by email to:
 sharingtowpaths@canalrivertrust.org.uk

11th April 2014

Dear Sir

The British Horse Society (BHS) is the UK's largest equine charity and equestrian membership organisation, and the governing body for recreational riding. Its charitable objects include the promotion of equestrian safety, particularly on roads, and equestrian access to bridleways and other off-road riding for the public benefit. On behalf of the Society I would like to submit the following comments:

Sharing Towpaths - A consultation on towpath use for the Canal & River Trust

The Trust's proposed approach to towpath management is welcome and shows an appreciation of the issues that can arise from shared use, along with a desire to retain the calm and peaceful ambience associated with towpaths.

In West Sussex there are a number of towpaths that are designated as bridleways, and these are highly valued by equestrians providing safe off-road links, especially in rural areas. The public rights of way network is very fragmented, for cyclists and equestrians particularly, and many paths can only be linked by the use of busy and dangerous roads. It is important that the bigger picture of the safety benefits that can be achieved is looked at when considering user access to towpaths, and identification of how a towpath fits in to the local network of paths is essential..

It is also important that where a towpath is a bridleway, any development for boating facilities (e.g. ticket offices, visitor centres), does not impede legitimate users quiet, informal, recreational use of the path, or cause the displacement of such users concerned for their own safety. I am aware this situation has arisen on at least one towpath in the county.

Towpaths are valued as, and should be, peaceful, tranquil and safe places for users to enjoy, the commitment to protecting the slowest moving users is very welcome, as is liaising with key interest groups which should include Local Access Forums. The Proposed Towpath Code is well written and very much supported.

Yours faithfully
 Mrs Patricia Butcher
 County Access & Bridleways Officer (West Sussex)

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Sharing Towpaths

A consultation on towpath use for the Canal and River Trust

Response of The British Horse Society

The Canal and River Trust (CRT) rightly recognise that so many more people could benefit from the calm that the water brings with 50% of the population of England and Wales living within 5 miles of a Trust waterway, and the British Horse Society maintains that towpaths should provide access for horse riders, as many already do without any problem. Statutory access for equestrians exists on canal towpaths in Scotland.

Horses were the primary users of canal towpaths in the past and should not be excluded now. CRT correctly states that towpaths should be free to access for all users who wish to walk, run, fish, cycle etc – the British Horse Society (The Society) maintains that the 'etc' needs to include horse riders.

Richard Benyon MP, Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries wrote to Anne Main MP in June 2011 concerning Alban Way, questioning why horse riders are not permitted to use it.

He urged all local authorities to allow horse riders to use cycle trails, routes and any other ways where it is in their power to do so, and to encourage that permission or dedication to happen where it is not in their power. In the Government's view, *"Unless there are good and specific reasons not to expressly allow horse riders to use such routes, local authorities should take steps to accommodate them. Local authorities should be making the most of their off-road networks through integration of use. Multi user routes have been shown to be readily adopted and well appreciated by local people. Where they are done well they bolster community cohesion and create a better understanding between users."*

Mr Benyon stated further that, *"Horseriders are particularly vulnerable road users, and cycle routes can provide appropriate and important opportunities to avoid busy roads. There is potential for conflict in any situation where people share a public space, but the possibility of conflict is not reason enough to disregard ridden access; actual conflict could be resolved and any misplaced concerns reduced over time."*

The Society maintains that the same principle should apply to towpaths.

The Society recognises that not every towpath may be suitable for horse riders but the majority are, and do not currently provide access for horse riders.

The Society is unaware of CRT, or its predecessor, ever contacting the Society concerning any issue of conflict. Report of study by University of Surrey on conflict on shared use routes [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) published by the

Countryside Agency. Although the report focuses on walkers and cyclists, riders are mentioned. The conclusion of the report is very useful to bear in mind:

Conclusion

'The results of the behavioural observation demonstrate that actual conflict is a rare occurrence. The questionnaire survey supported this and found that perceived conflict too was extremely low. Even when people recalled their route experience later, it was not seen as conflictual, although perceived conflict was recalled as higher than when in the route environment. It is only when people talk about conflict that the incidence, or assumed incidence of conflict escalates and appears to be more serious. Therefore, in the scenarios and focus groups, conflict emerged as a serious issue, although it was not considered a serious problem. We conclude, therefore, that the discussion and focussing of attention on conflict serves to escalate its perceived existence.'

There are many existing towpaths that are currently definitive bridleways or which are used by horse riders without any difficulty being caused to other users. Attached to this response are details of a number of towpaths that are currently used by horse riders.

The length of the public right of way network in England currently amounts to 188,700km, consisting of 146,600km of footpaths, 32,400km of bridleways, 3,700km of byways and 6,000km of restricted byways. Horse riders therefore, currently have access to only 22% of public rights of way and horse-drawn vehicle drivers to only 5%. Many rights of way are now disconnected from each other because the roads that should connect them are no longer safe for equestrians to use because of the speed and volume of motorised traffic on them. This leaves many equestrians without a safe local route to use.

As many rights of way are now disconnected from each other equestrians are forced to use roads to connect them. However many are inaccessible because the roads that link them are no longer safe for equestrians to use because of the speed and volume of motorised traffic on them. This leaves many equestrians without a safe local route to use. Many towpaths could provide the necessary links to link up disjointed equestrian public rights of way.

The proposed Towpath Code needs to include reference to horse riders.

The Society is willing to work with CRT to assess the suitability of individual towpaths for horse riders so that access can be provided for them.

Some comments we have received from our members are:-

'The people we meet along the towpath includes boaters, walkers, families and cyclists - in the last 3 years no one has ever complained to me and if anything the comments are how nice it is to see the horses.'

'My friends and I often ride the Ashby de la Zouch Canal towpath from Conkers Waterside to the Donisthorpe basin. This is a very short stretch, about a mile, as it is not connected to the rest of the canal yet. It provides a circular route around Donisthorpe Woodland Park which connects to the Ashby Woulds multi-user Trail. OS Explorer 245 The National Forest.'

'I ride regularly on the canal towpaths in and around Rushall, Walsall. There is little off road riding in this area and the majority of roads are 'main' roads, therefore it is not pleasurable taking horse out but they need to be exercised. I have rarely had a problem with other users on the towpath, indeed, many people seem to enjoy seeing a horse close up. I always stop or ensure I am going slowly for pedestrians, and give them rights of way on narrower sections. Fishermen, on the whole, are very obliging in keeping their rods still whilst riding past, and are always thanked and pass the time of day with them. It would be tragic to lose this option as it is our only bit of 'riding in the countryside' in this area.'

Examples of Current Towpath Access for Horse Riders

Milton Keynes

There are quite a few rideable towpaths in the Milton Keynes area - under the A5 where access is limited by the enormous overbridge and alongside The Black Horse pub in Linford area and at Woolstone

Leeds to Liverpool

The Leeds to Liverpool canal which was opened up as a multi use track and has a large section which is a bridleway

Sussex

BW 806 + 809 Loxwood, West Sussex runs along the towpath of the Wey and Arun canal in Loxwood. Some 5+Km.

Surrey

Wey Navigation - BW 132 Dodds Lane goes over the bridge and the BW continues on the Tow path. BW 352 at Elmbridge which for some reason turns into FP393 south of Elmbridge. BW280a south of Utworth bridge runs alongside the canal at Garson to Mill bridge. South of Fastbridge BW 400 continues alongside the canal. The canal disappears through Firtree copse and when it appears again FP547 runs along side and then disappears past the old lock house when it crosses Rosemary lane BW 417 runs on the line of the tow path.

Essex

On the Chelmer and Blackwater Canal in Essex. there is a section from Heybridge to Maldon that is a definitive bridleway over the towpath.

Burnley

Definitive bridleway on a tow path in Burnley

Kent

Public Bridleway HB83 at Hythe in Kent runs along the towpath of the Royal Military Canal, between the golf course and the canal. It was dedicated when the public bridleway along the Royal Military Road beyond the bank on the other side of the canal was given a firm surface for the benefit of cyclists, so that horse riders would still have a stretch to use which was soft.

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/KCC.ExploreKent.Web.Sites.Public/Default.aspx?&lyrs=16&xmin=615908&xmax=618622&ymin=133905&ymax=135542> .

Manchester/Cheshire

Peak Forest Canal between Ashton Under Lyne and Whalley Bridge in the Manchester area and also the Macclesfield Canal from Marple through Disley and Adlington which is part of the Cheshire Ring.

The Bridgewater canal -a branch of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

Somerset

The tow paths on the Bridgewater and Taunton Canal. A stretch of the Tone from Ham to Creech St Michael.

Yorkshire

The canal [between Slaithwaite and Marsden](#) in West Yorkshire makes a useful link between the Pennine bridleway (Marsden to Wessenden Head) and the bridleways between Meltham and Slaithwaite (a route of about 13 miles round I think).

Shropshire

Adderley and Audlem - the Shropshire Union Canal.

The Llangollen Canal in the Ellesmere and Whitchurch areas.

The Shropshire Union canal from Hyde Mill Lane, up to the wharf.

The canal tow path from Trevor to Llangollen.

Leicestershire/Warwickshire

Market Bosworth, Leics/Warks –access to towpath at Shenton Station which is situated below Bosworth Battlefield.

Leicestershire/Derbyshire

Ashby Woulds Trail, Measham to Spring Cottage – access to towpath obtained at a few places along the Ashby Woulds Trail, particularly at Donisthorpe.

Cloud Trail – access to towpath obtained directly off Cloud Trail at Swarkestone, Derbys.

Leicestershire

Ashby de la Zouch Canal towpath from Conkers Waterside to the Donisthorpe basin.

Walsall

Canal towpaths in and around Rushall, Walsall.

Lancashire

Brookside, Bay Horse, Lancaster at grid ref:OL 41: 488528

The British Horse Society

1. The British Horse Society represents the interests of the 3.4 million people in the UK who ride or who drive horse-drawn vehicles. With the membership of its Affiliated Riding Clubs and Bridleway Groups, the BHS is the largest and most influential equestrian charity in the UK.

2. The equine industry is estimated to be worth £7 billion to the UK economy and to employ 220,000 – 270,000 people.

3. The Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales, published in December 2005, was prepared by the British Horse Industry Confederation in partnership with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Welsh Assembly Government¹.

4. The Strategy includes the following aim:

Aim 5 'Increase access to off-road riding and carriage driving', including the encouragement and improvement of urban and suburban riding and carriage driving.

Dated 29 April 2014

¹ <http://www.bhic.co.uk/downloads/full-strategy-report.pdf>

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West Sussex Local Access Forum



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Sent by email to:

sharingtowpaths@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Dear Sir

The West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF) is an independent advisory body established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to give access advice to local authorities, statutory organisations and non-government organisations. In giving that advice, the Forum's main objective is to ensure the existing network of public rights of way (prows), as well as the wider access network, is protected and where possible enhanced. The Forum has a balanced membership of knowledgeable and experienced users (walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers), landowners and other interests (including conservation, disabled access, landscape).

Sharing Towpaths

A consultation on towpath use for the Canal & River Trust

Thank you for giving WSLAF the opportunity to comment on this consultation. The Forum is very supportive of efforts to encourage people to get out and use the countryside. Canal towpaths provide an ideal conduit for users to be able to achieve that aim and we welcome C&RT efforts towards this end.

Towpaths can be both part of a route to other destinations or they can be a destination in themselves, providing an important historical record of our industrial past. This needs to be preserved, and yet towpaths also need to provide relevance for today's population who may wish to use them for recreation, or sit beside them at a local pub.

Canals pass through a variety of landscapes, both urban where the towpaths tend to be heavily engineered to accommodate heavy usage, and rural where the towpaths are often wet, muddy, heavily poached and impassable without suitable footwear. The width and surfacing of a towpath needs to be in keeping and suitable for the expected usage and the environment.

A great deal has been achieved by volunteers who willingly give up their time to restore and renovate old canals and bring them back into a condition that visitors can safely enjoy today. Some canals will have taken on a completely different use, becoming a haven for wildlife, including endangered species such as the water vole. Sensitive treatment of towpaths in these areas is required so that banks are still porous for the creatures that live and nest there.

Principles

In general WSLAF is supportive of the Principles, but would like to make the following specific comments:

Principle 1 – There is often a conflict between people who are moving along the canal and people who are stationary such as anglers and boat owners. Anglers tend to use one-piece long poles and do not cast in the traditional sense. These can cause an obstruction to a cyclist or runner as they tend to be pulled back across the towpath when a water craft passes. In addition moored crafts often have ropes across the towpath which are not always obvious to the partially sighted or in poor light. These need to be highlighted in the Code.

We would like to see towpaths go further in connecting not only to places along the canal, but also to the wider prowl network, so providing circular as well as linear routes. WSLAF is looking to promote and provide local access into the countryside. We see the towpath as a conduit that can perform that function. We recognise that the enjoyment of gaining access into the countryside is enhanced if it can connect to other existing prowl, enabling the user to reach attractions away from but adjacent to the canal. This can help support and promote local rural economies.

Principle 2

We welcome the commitment to ensure canal and river environments are safeguarded as havens for people and wildlife. We would like to see evidence that these words are converted into tangible success stories.

Principle 3

WSLAF supports the principle of free access to towpaths for all users, and especially the need for all to be considerate to other users who are slower or more vulnerable than themselves.

Many Members have extensive experience of canal and towpath use, and believe behaviour is generally more considerate in rural areas, and rather less so in urban areas, so we welcome the Trust highlighting the issue. WSLAF feels that the Trust could go further in providing more mooring facilities, particularly with mooring rings where the need for ropes running across the towpath, and therefore the trip hazard, is reduced.

Principle 4

Members support towpath improvements to accommodate the increase in demand for recreational activities. In addition we support the widening of the groups who are able to use the facility. WSLAF tries, wherever possible, to gain access for all non-motorised users into the countryside. A number of towpaths are also bridleways and every effort should be made to help provide connectivity to other bridleways in the area. We would emphasise the need to view towpaths as part of a wider network.

Where the route moves away from the traditional cut onto rivers the towpath is often lost. Every effort should be taken to encourage landowners to provide paths that follow the river so that the watercourse could be enjoyed by many more.

Principle 5

The cut and the towpaths vary in design throughout the canal system and therefore WSLAF feels that it would be difficult to provide design standards that would suit all eventualities. General principles are useful, but each situation needs to be considered on its own merit, particularly regarding width and material. Members would like to see a more relaxed attitude, as it would be a shame if an opportunity to gain access was denied because a particular standard could not be achieved.

Principle 6

Members feel that good design of facilities is key here. An emphasis on a considerate attitude to other users is the important factor in ensuring every one's enjoyment.

Principle 7

WSLAF sees some advantages in branding historic waterways, and would like to see this carried over into information boards, which can enhance enjoyment and provide an opportunity to educate people in the relevance of these monuments to past heritage.

Principle 8

Members recognise that not every towpath will be suitable for horse riders, but there are many existing towpaths that are currently definitive bridleways without any difficulty being caused to other users. As stated previously, where a towpath can provide a much needed off-road link in the bridleway network, WSLAF would encourage the Trust to consider allowing access to horse riders on safety grounds.

Proposed Towpath Code

WSLAF welcomes the idea of a towpath code rather like the countryside code. This could have the benefit of helping to make people aware of the implications of their actions and the need to act considerately.

The proposed Code in the document is generally supported. Paragraph 5 talks about common sense in busy or restricted areas, Members feel emphasis needs to highlight the dangers of locks, and the need to provide boat users room to work the locks. Also the need to be quiet and respectful when passing occupied boats.

The Code would need to be displayed prominently along the towpath. Members have also raised concerns about how the Code would be enforced. WSLAF would strongly encourage the Trust to deter towpaths from being used for mass organised events. Off-road cyclists, especially, can number many hundreds at an event and this tends to dominate the route to the detriment of other users; Members have experience of conflict arising on other paths concerning this.

Thank you for considering WSLAF's comments. Members look forward to being updated on progress on this matter, and would welcome being consulted in the future on any similar matters that may impact on access.

Yours sincerely



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West Sussex Local Access Forum

Copy for information to: All WSLAF members