



**Guidelines for Horse Related Development
Supplementary Planning Document**

New Forest National Park Authority

Adopted September 2011

GUIDELINES FOR HORSE-RELATED DEVELOPMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 These guidelines are aimed at horse owners and land managers who keep horses at grass or manage land for equestrian pursuits within the New Forest National Park. Horse riding has a long history within the New Forest. It is an important and highly valued activity that makes a valuable contribution to the local economy. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide advice to assist in combating the common problems and challenges you may encounter linked to the special requirements of being in a National Park. The guidelines seek to achieve a balance that makes everyone comfortable with equestrian activity in the New Forest.
- 1.2 National Parks are protected landscapes recognised to be of the highest national importance for the natural beauty of their landscapes, the value of their wildlife habitats and cultural heritage, and the opportunities they give for many people to enjoy these qualities. The New Forest was formally designated as a National Park in 2005.
- 1.3 There is now considerable economic and recreational pressure on this beautiful landscape and the various plans of the New Forest National Park Authority aim to ensure that the right balance is maintained to conserve and enhance the area whilst maintaining it as a living, working environment. This includes all equestrian activity within its boundaries.

2 PURPOSE AND STATUS OF THE GUIDELINES

- 2.1 Increasing areas of land in the National Park are used for equestrian use, either as grazing, stabling or paddocks including maneges and other forms of enclosure. This change in land use brings with it some more obvious landscape impacts and can reduce the amount of back-up grazing available for commoners. As well as offering supplementary planning guidance, these guidelines also seek to share best practice in land management to ensure that the New Forest landscape is conserved and enhanced.
- 2.2 This guidance is published as a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to supplement the Development Management policies within the adopted Core Strategy. These guidelines will be a material consideration when determining planning applications for horse related development to encourage a consistent approach to new development across the National Park.
- 2.3 The adopted planning policies specifically relating to horse related development and the supporting text within the Core Strategy are attached as Annex 1.

3 THE NEED FOR GUIDELINES

- 3.1 The riding and keeping of horses brings great pleasure to many people. The economic benefit of these activities to the New Forest is also acknowledged but it is essential to ensure that the related development does not have an adverse impact on the special qualities of the National Park.
- 3.2 When it is done well, horse keeping can make a positive contribution to the management of the New Forest and assist farmers and commoners seeking to diversify their activities. But also in the few cases when it is done badly there can be problems associated with overgrazed fields, poor fencing and inappropriate lighting, all of which can lead to a negative impression of horse keeping. There are examples of both within the New Forest.
- 3.3 There is also a need to protect back-up grazing land from competing land uses such as private horse keeping to ensure that sufficient land remains available for commoners' animals.
- 3.4 These guidelines therefore seek to promote good practice and prevent sites getting to the point where harm might be caused to the environment.

4 MAKING SENSE OF PLANNING CONTROLS

- 4.1 The scale of horse related development varies widely from keeping one family pony in a small paddock with a field shelter to a large commercial development such as a riding school, stud or livery yard which will include stables, maneges, hay barns and other associated buildings such as feed storage and tack rooms. Specialist facilities, such as holding pens and foaling boxes, are also required by those engaged in commoning activities. The type of development will determine whether or not a planning application should be made.
- 4.2 Before proceeding with development for which planning permission is needed, approval must be sought from the local planning authority. It may be helpful to discuss proposals informally with a planning officer before submitting an application. It can also help if you talk to your neighbours and the parish council and take any concerns into account when preparing your proposal.
- 4.3 **Grazing**
- 4.4 Simply turning horses out to graze land is not a change of use where the grass in the field is the main source of food. In these cases, the use of land for grazing is considered to be an agricultural use.
- 4.5 However if the grazing is part of a commercial activity, such as livery, or if other activities take place on the land, this will normally require

planning permission. The distinction between grazing and keeping is not always clear and it is very difficult to make 'hard and fast' rules as each case must be assessed on its merits having regard to the particular circumstances of the site and the nature of the use. However, as a general rule and in addition to the considerations outlined below, a judgement can normally be made on the basis of the area of grazing land available per animal. As a guideline, the keeping of horses generally occurs when there is less than 0.5 ha of land per horse¹.

- 4.6 Also if the land is subdivided into paddocks and shelters provided, it is likely to be a material change from agricultural to recreational use, therefore requiring planning permission.
- 4.7 Policy DP21 sets out the criteria against which 'change of use' applications will be considered, one of which is that there should be no resultant loss of back-up grazing land. Back-up grazing land is used by commoners for stock grazing and forage production, and the New Forest Commoning Review 2007 identified the need for further research to help identify the amount, use and nature of back-up grazing land. In terms of applying this particular criterion of Policy DP21, regard will be had to the historic use of the land, its proximity to the perambulation and whether commoning rights are attached to the land.
- 4.8 **When does horse keeping not require planning permission?**
- 4.9 Where horses are kept purely for personal use, planning permission will not normally be required if the horses are simply left to graze in a field. Nor does the occasional supplementary feeding or rugging of horses suggest a change of use. In simple terms, if the land has the appearance of an agricultural field that is being grazed by horses, then the Authority is likely to take the view that there has been no change of use and planning permission will not be required.
- 4.10 In addition, equipment such as schooling rings and horse jumps can very occasionally be put out on land (up to 28 days in any one calendar year) without the need for planning permission. And horses kept on a residential property for the domestic needs or personal enjoyment of the residents of the house will not normally require planning permission.
- 4.11 There is also usually scope to provide buildings or enclosures for horse keeping within the garden or domestic curtilage of a residential property, providing that the horses are kept for purposes "incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling house". These exemptions from planning control are known as "permitted development rights" but they are subject to a number of restrictions. More information about permitted

¹ Defra Consultation on Code of Practice for the Welfare of Equines November 2008 reports that as a general rule, a horse will require a minimum of 0.4 to 0.6 hectares (one to one and a half acres) of good grazing if no supplementary feeding is being provided.

development rights can be found on the Planning Portal website www.planningportal.gov.uk

- 4.12 Mobile field shelters do not require planning permission providing that they are genuinely portable structures and do not take on any degree of permanence. Planning permission will be required if the shelter is constructed on or secured to the ground and/or remains in the same location for any length of time. Consent is also needed if the effect of placing a mobile shelter on the land changes the use of that land.
- 4.13 If you are in any doubt about the need for planning permission, the golden rule is to always ask the planning department whether or not you need to make a planning application. This advice is provided free of charge and usually no prior appointment is necessary.

5 STABLING, FIELD SHELTERS AND ANCILLARY BUILDINGS

5.1 Siting

5.2 Within the National Park it is essential that new development is sensitively sited. Where possible, existing buildings should be used and new stables and other structures kept to a minimum. If new buildings are required then they should be as inconspicuous as possible to minimise their impact on the landscape - careful siting can greatly reduce the impact.

5.3 Generally new buildings should be related to existing features and respect the lie of the land. Elevated or skyline sites should be avoided. The use of earth mounding and cutting into the ground should also be avoided unless it merges with the landscape. Planting can usually help screen development but again this should complement existing tree and hedge cover rather than producing unnatural features in the landscape. All new planting should consist of a mixture of native trees and shrubs appropriate to the New Forest. For further advice please ask the planning department

5.4 Size

5.5 Basic guidelines for the size of a stable is that it should be large enough for a horse or pony to stand up with at least 0.9m (3') clearance above its head, and with sufficient space to lie down, stand up and turn around without difficulty. A rule of thumb recommended by the British Horse Society (BHS) is that a pony would need a 3m x 3.7m (10' x 12') floor area, and a horse 3.7m x 3.7m (12' x 12'). The height should be between 2.7m and 3.4m (9' & 11'), with stable doors a minimum 1.2m (4') wide, and 2.3m (7'6") high, with the bottom door being 1.2m (4') high.

5.6 These dimensions will be kept under review in light of any subsequent new guidance from the BHS.

- 5.7 The Authority will normally seek to limit the amount of stables and field shelters to what is appropriate in size and scale to the fields concerned.
- 5.8 **Design and materials**
- 5.9 The design of ready made stables is fairly standard and in less sensitive areas is likely to be acceptable if appropriately sited and constructed of timber, preferably treated with a dark stained preservative/finish. In view of their often temporary nature and the small size of most stables, a dark coloured felt is often the least intrusive roof covering.
- 5.10 The use of more permanent materials such as rendered concrete block and tiles should be resisted as they are more visually intrusive, often do not weather well and can give rise to problems of after use when the original use is no longer required.
- 5.11 Floors should be designed to give good drainage but if an external dry or hard surfaced area is required, for example to provide a working area for visiting vets and farriers, then consideration should be given to the use of grass-crete or some other form of permeable matting.
- 5.12 Wherever possible existing field gates should be utilised to gain access to stables and paddocks to avoid hedgerow removal, making use of existing access arrangements. New accesses and roadways are unlikely to be permitted as such features normally detract from the landscape and have an undesirable urbanising effect. However, a well thought out design might allow for the roadway to be screened from view by boundary hedges of mixed native plant species.

6 GRAZING, EXERCISING AND ENCLOSURE OF LAND

6.1 Pasture management

- 6.2 Whilst it is not possible to control the use of a paddock for the grazing of a horse, the proliferation of paddocks, poor pasture management and the introduction of ancillary structures can have a significant impact on the landscape quality of the National Park.
- 6.3 The enclosure of paddocks is of particular concern because they tend to be much smaller than the traditional fields of the New Forest thereby eroding the landscape pattern of the locality. The use of unsuitable materials to form both boundary and internal enclosures should be avoided where it is not possible to use or reinforce existing hedgerows.
- 6.4 Pastures should be carefully managed and of sufficient size to avoid overgrazing and the loss of species diversity. If necessary, a pasture management plan should be produced by a knowledgeable person.

Trees should be guarded to prevent their bark from being browsed by horses, which otherwise may cause fatal damage to trees.

- 6.5 Areas suffering from poaching, or worn bare by horses should be regularly rotated or rested to allow for pasture recovery. Invasive weeds such as creeping thistle, ragwort and dock must be controlled in accordance with environmental legislation. The proliferation of ragwort has become a particular problem and DEFRA have produced information giving guidance to farmers and landowners².
- 6.6 Management of the muckheap is also an important issue for horses and ponies, their owners and keepers and their neighbours. The muckheap must be sited where it will not contaminate watercourses such as rivers, streams and ditches, as well as groundwater. It must not be sited where it will cause a nuisance, such as to houses and users of public rights of way. And it should be sited where it can be conveniently accessed from both the stables and the road if it is to be collected for disposal. It should not be too close to the stables as to cause a nuisance to horses and ponies from flies.
- 6.7 Further detailed guidance on Pasture Management for horse owners is available from the New Forest Equine Forum (www.nfed.co.uk/nfef) and the New Forest Land Advice Service (www.nflandadvice.org.uk).
- 6.8 **Fencing**
- 6.9 It is recognised that owners of straying livestock are liable for any damage caused and most owners will require robust and adequate barriers to contain their animals.
- 6.10 There are two main fence types to consider, permanent and temporary. Boundary fences are generally permanent whilst fencing used to sub divide paddocks for a variety of reasons, such as for hay making, grass land restoration or to restrict the grazing available to ponies that might suffer from laminitis, can be temporary or moveable. Planning permission will be required for fencing in some instances. The basic rule is that fencing over 1 metre in height adjacent to a highway (which includes public rights of way) will require permission. Elsewhere, fencing over 2 metres in height will require planning permission. In some parts of the New Forest additional planning controls, such as restrictive planning conditions or 'Article 4 Directions'³, may require permission to be obtained for all fencing, irrespective of height. It is therefore worth checking with the planning department before any fencing work is undertaken.

² Defra Code of Practice on How to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort

³ Article 4 Directions are orders made by local planning authorities that remove 'permitted development rights'.

- 6.11 The most common form of enclosure used is post and rail fencing which will often not reflect local boundary types but the impact can be considerably softened by the use of suitable accompanying planting of native species prevalent in the locality. Post and rail fencing should not be painted white, or any other bright colour. Gates should be traditional wooden or metal farm gates and the introduction of more suburban forms of gates and gate piers should be avoided.
- 6.12 Ideally, pastures should not be subdivided into small paddocks, but where this is necessary temporary electric fencing is better than more permanent structures. Electric fencing can be made up of either strands of electric wire or tape, electric mesh or even 'poly™' rope. Whilst the fence supplier can advise on the most effective fence for a given purpose, brown or green tape has the least visual impact on the landscape, yet is highly visible to grazing horses. White tape only serves to attract attention to itself, particularly when it is loose and flapping in the wind.
- 6.13 Any fencing carried out should try to reflect and, where possible, to benefit the local landscape and environment. In all cases, care must be taken to ensure that any new fencing does not encroach on a public right of way.
- 6.14 **Maneges**
- 6.15 Maneges are all-weather riding arenas used for the schooling of animals and the training of riders. While the availability of maneges may reduce the use of the open Forest, particularly by riding schools, there are concerns about the physical impact of their development on the New Forest landscape and ecology. In order to minimise the environmental impact of these proposals maneges are only likely to be acceptable where they are contained within or closely related to an existing group of buildings and make use of materials that blend in well with the New Forest landscape.
- 6.16 The standard manege normally measures 20m x 40m and comprises a level surfaced area enclosed by a kickboard and post and rail fencing. The choice of surface materials is important but a number do exist which can be sympathetic to the landscape, such as rubber or bark. As a flat surface is needed for a manege it is essential to choose a location where the re-grading of the land surface is not necessary. Requests for lighting for maneges will be resisted as this represents unacceptable light pollution in a designated landscape area.

Annex 1 – New Forest National Park Core Strategy & Development Management Policies DPD

Policy DP21: Recreational Horse Keeping

Permission will be granted for recreational horse keeping provided that the proposal does not:

- (a) Have an adverse impact on the landscape or any nature conservation interests;
- (b) Harmfully increase riding pressures on the Open Forest; or
- (c) Result in the loss of back up grazing land.

Policy DP22: Field Shelters and Stables

Permission will be granted for field shelters provided that the building is:

- (a) Sensitively sited to be unobtrusive in the landscape; and
- (b) Simple in appearance and modest in scale; and
- (c) Constructed or appropriate materials.

The same considerations apply to stables although these should be located close to existing buildings.

Policy DP23: Maneges

The development of outdoor maneges will be permitted provided that:

- (a) They do not result in any detrimental impact on the landscape and ecology of the New Forest; and
- (b) They do not involve the installation of lighting.

The development of indoor maneges will not be permitted other than in accordance with Policy DP19 (Re-use of Buildings).