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From Dan Rogerson MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management

JD

Thank you for your letter of 22 February to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituent, Pamela Allen of 3 Ings View, Kirklands Road, Shipley, about the provision of bridleways. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I am very keen to support the horse industry. I believe it is essential to both the rural economy and rural communities. I am also aware that the existing public rights of way network does not serve horse riders particularly well and I accept rural traffic is increasing. Consequently, all horse riders need safe off-road routes to ride. Local highway authorities were tasked with 'thinking horse' and specifically considering the needs of vulnerable horse riders in preparing their statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plans. These are now at various stages of implementation and review.

The Paths for Communities (P4C) scheme, administered by Natural England, will create 42.26km of new bridleway. More information can be found on Natural England's website and in the P4C newsletter.

I also believe however that equestrians themselves should look for opportunities to increase off-road access wherever they can. Relying solely on the creation of public rights of way by local highway authorities is unlikely to deliver the type or volume of routes that horse riders need. Express dedication, for example, is a good means of adding a bridleway to the definitive map, and requires a willing landowner rather than the lengthier process of going through the highway authority.

The Deregulation Bill was introduced into Parliament in January. The Bill will implement a rights of ways reforms package fundamentally the same as that set out in the Defra consultation paper *Improvements to the policy and legal framework for public rights of way* published in May 2012. The consultation proposals themselves were based on a package of recommendations agreed by a 15 person Stakeholder Working Group. The group represented a full range of rights of way experts including horse representatives such as the British Horse Society and the Byways and Bridleways Trust.



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The reform package includes the introduction of the 2026 cut-off date as well as a provision for recourse to the Magistrates' Court in prescribed circumstances. We plan to introduce all the measures in that package either through primary or secondary legislation on the same commencement date.

It is right to point out that, in addition to not having completed the definitive map and statement (their record of public rights of way) some local authorities have not yet satisfactorily completed their other highways records.

We will be implementing the Stakeholder Working Group proposal that recommends that a stakeholder review panel should be constituted after implementation of the Group's proposals to review progress with recording or protecting useful or potentially useful pre-1949 rights of way before the 2026 cut-off date. Also, in line with the Group's proposals, we need to make regulations to ensure that useful public rights of way are not lost unnecessarily at the cut-off date.

However, these measures do not require changes to primary legislation. Our first objective is to put in place the primary legislation needed to give effect to the rights of way reforms package. Once that is in place we can turn to implementing the other measures such as those that are of concern to Ms Allen.



DAN ROGERSON MP