

BHS Manifesto to the new Government

With an individual membership in excess of 60,000, plus 38,000 members of affiliated Riding Clubs and a further 10,500 members of affiliated Bridleway Groups, The British Horse Society is consolidating its position as the largest and most influential single equestrian organisation in the UK. The Society's areas of work encompass access, competitions, education and training, riding clubs, safety, standards in riding and livery establishments and welfare. We also have a strong commitment to encourage social inclusion by bringing the benefits of riding or working with horses to those who might otherwise never come into contact with them.

The BHS has worked successfully with past governments to address many concerns raised within the horse industry. The Society believes that all Parties accept the economic, social and environmental contribution made by the horse industry. We therefore urge the new Government to address the following areas where we believe the horse industry is being held back, or where safety needs to be enhanced.

Training and Education

In order to ensure that those receiving instruction are taught by instructors who are fully competent in all matters including rider safety and child protection, ***the BHS calls on the new Government to require riding instructors and those caring for the paying public to hold a recognised and established qualification.***

Opportunities for All

The BHS is keen to provide opportunities for non-traditional riders to experience the benefits of the sport. It is currently funding projects involving inner city schools and approved riding centres and thereby contributing to the goals of encouraging social inclusion and increasing participation in healthy sporting activities. ***The BHS calls on the new Government to ensure that funding already available for the advancement of education, health and social inclusion is available for providing horse riding and caring activities for socially excluded members of society.***

Insurance for Instructors

Registered instructors are automatically covered by insurance; unqualified instructors are not necessarily insured and therefore represent a potential risk for pupils and clients. ***The BHS calls on the new Government to require those instructing in equestrian sports to be covered by adequate insurance.***

Access to safe off-road riding routes

The rights of walkers to roam have increased significantly in recent years but opportunities for riders and carriage drivers in England and Wales have not kept pace (although riders and drivers in Scotland enjoy far greater rights of access.) In many areas they have decreased. Riding and driving carriages on roads can be dangerous or, at the very least, unpleasant. Volunteers continue to work to discover lost routes and ensure that existing routes remain useable but the size of the task exceeds the resources available to undertake it fully. ***The BHS calls on the new Government to achieve, by 2015, a joined-up network of bridleways/multi-user routes across England and Wales so that walkers, equestrians and cyclists can enjoy open air recreation with minimal contact with traffic. The new Government should look at radical measures for achieving this so that the current lengthy, costly and uncertain administrative and judicial processes can be replaced by spending directly on the quality of recreational paths. Special attention should be given to the protection and enhancement of local networks that can be used by carriage drivers and the disabled.***

Riding & Road Safety

A reduction in horse related accidents is due largely to the co-operation between the BHS and other authorities on the education of drivers to “Think Horse”. ***The BHS calls on the new Government to ensure that the safety of equestrians as road users is considered in all road management and development schemes that could affect them.***

Liability

With the support of government and the co-operation of partners within the equestrian and insurance sectors, the BHS has been working to reduce the risks associated with equestrian pursuits and resist spurious claims for injury to riders. However, we cannot isolate equestrianism from wider society in which there appears to be a predisposition on the part of many to sue for alleged injuries whenever there is even a slight chance of securing financial recompense.

Furthermore, we note that recent court cases (esp. *Mirvahedy v. Henley* and *Wilson v. Donaldson*) have extended the application of strict liability far beyond what we believe Parliament intended. Together, these developments add to the already acute financial pressure on equestrian establishments and horse owners.

The BHS therefore calls on the new Government to introduce legislation which explicitly recognises that horse riding (and other named activities) are inherently risky and that participants may be injured when they take part. In such an event, the injured party should have no redress against any other party.

The BHS further calls upon the new Government to amend the law to restore the position where horse owners or riders are not liable for injury or damage caused by their animals unless negligence can be proved against them.

Welfare

Recent changes in the law now make it very expensive to dispose of horse carcasses. The BHS is concerned that the costs may exceed the ability of some horse owners to pay and that, consequently, horses will not always be humanely destroyed when their health may have deteriorated to a point where they are in a constant state of suffering. Some of these suffering horses may be dumped rather than tended. ***The BHS calls upon the new Government to review the current situation with these welfare considerations in mind and ensure that high costs are not allowed to compromise equine welfare.***

Taxation

The economic, social, health and education benefits of horse-related activity are generally acknowledged. However, elements of the fiscal policies of recent governments have operated perversely in the equestrian industry. For example, riding hats — an essential safety item — attract VAT at the full rate. The cost of riding lessons from reputable establishments is usually increased by VAT, making back-street riding establishments an attractive (or even only) alternative for those on lower incomes. ***The BHS calls upon the new Government to exempt from VAT those products and services which are provided to improve safety for equestrians.***

Rates

Established equine establishments must compete with new establishments set up by farmers, and with publicly-funded colleges, upon whom the rates burden is effectively lifted. This represents a distortion of the market. ***The BHS calls upon the new Government to ensure that all riding establishments are able to compete on equal terms, with no sub-sector enjoying rating advantages not available to the rest.***

Volunteers

Equestrianism depends in many instances on the willingness of volunteers to devote time, energy and often their own money to the greater good of the sport. We are fortunate that so many people are willing to do so. But there are disincentives to volunteering, including a fear amongst volunteers that they will be liable to unreasonable action if something goes wrong. ***The BHS calls upon the new Government (a) to recognise the value of volunteers in equestrian (and other) sports, (b) to take action to reduce the risk to volunteers from claims when accidents occur, and (c) provide a financial incentive to encourage volunteers to obtain relevant training and qualifications to equip them as officials.***

The British Horse Society recognises that the measures advocated above are considerably more complex than a few lines of text might suggest. The Society therefore restates its commitment to work with the new Government to promote the many benefits which participation in equestrian activity can bring to individuals and to society at large.

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