

Briefing for petition PE2154: Ensure planning consideration for equestrian accessibility, lodged by Jasmine Bisset

The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review and update planning policies to make it mandatory for new urban developments to give consideration to equestrian usage, and ensure suitable access and signage is included as part of this consideration.

Consideration of access in planning policy

Decisions on planning applications must be made in accordance with the development plan, unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise. The development plan for a given area in Scotland consists of the [fourth National Planning Framework \(NPF4\)](#) and the relevant local development plan (LDP).

Whilst NPF4 does not include policies directly relating to equestrian access, there are a range of planning policies across green infrastructure, active travel networks, access and amenity which could be relevant to how proposed developments are assessed in this regard, notably including:

- Policy 20 (Blue and green infrastructure): Sets out an overall policy principle to protect and enhance blue and green infrastructure and their networks. Under this principle, LDPs should identify and protect blue and green infrastructure and networks and seek to enhance existing provision and consider connectivity. This policy sets out that **LDPs should safeguard access rights and core paths, including active travel routes**, and encourage new opportunities for access. Development proposals that result in fragmentation of blue and green infrastructure will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would not result in or exacerbate a deficit in blue or green infrastructure provision, and the overall integrity of the network will be maintained
- Policy 15 (Local living): development proposals should include consideration of the quality of interconnectivity with the surrounding area, including local access to safe, high quality active travel networks, parks, green streets and spaces

- Policy 14 (Design, quality and place): LDPs should follow place-making principles taking account of the local context, characteristics and connectivity of the area
- Policy 6 (Forestry, woodland and trees): LDPs should identify and protect existing woodland and avoid habitat fragmentation
- Policy 13 (Sustainable transport) development proposals, where they generate transport requirements, should incorporate safety measures e.g. safe crossings.

NPF4 also refers to the importance of the **local authority's Open Space Strategy** in supporting the delivery of certain planning policies e.g. on blue and green infrastructure. Planning authorities are required to publish an Open Space Strategy by [the Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#), in order to set out a strategic framework of the planning authority's policies and proposals as to the development, maintenance and use of green infrastructure in their district, including open spaces and green networks. An open space strategy must contain an audit of open space provision and assessment of current and future requirements. The Act defines key terms as follows:

- Green infrastructure means features of natural and built environments and the connections between them that provide a range of ecosystem and social benefits
- Green networks are connected areas of green infrastructure and open space
- Open space is the space within and on the edge of settlements comprising green infrastructure or civic areas such as squares, market places and other paved or hard landscaped areas with a civic function.

Access rights and guidance

As set out above, planning authorities are required by NPF4 to consider the need to safeguard access rights in developing LDPs. The [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#) ('the 2003 Act') established a statutory framework of public access rights to most land and inland water. Local authorities have a legal duty under the 2003 Act to "assert, protect and keep open and free from obstruction or encroachment any route, waterway or other means by which access rights may reasonably be exercised".

Local authorities and National Park Authorities are access authorities in their areas, and [have a statutory duty to produce a Core Paths Plan](#), a plan for a system of paths "sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area". The 2003 Act (section 17) specifies that such a system of paths may include, amongst other things, "rights of way by foot, horseback, pedal cycle or any combination of those".

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (a statutory Code under the 2003 Act) sets out further guidance on access rights and [this Code sets out that access rights extend to horse riding](#), with guidance around responsible access and

behaviour by the public and land managers. NatureScot has published a range of further guidance and resources on equestrian access in partnership with other organisations, [available on the Outdoor Access Scotland website](#).

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13 May 2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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