

British Horse Society – Access Update

British Horse Council Meeting 9th December 2022

Project 2026

[Project 2026](#) is the BHS campaign to record and protect bridleways and byways missing from the Definitive Map – the legal record of public rights of way. In February this year, we received the excellent news that the government intends to repeal the “cut-off date” in 2026 when routes which hadn’t been recorded would have been lost. The repeal does require primary legislation and we’re still awaiting news on when this might happen but regardless, it has not altered our aims and objectives for the project as we remain convinced that the best protection for routes from obstruction, development or simple neglect is to have them recorded on the Definitive Map.

The first phase of Project 2026 came to an end on 31 March and saw the submission of 2514 Definitive Map Modification Order applications to highway authorities across England. We have since secured further funding from Sport England for Phase 2 of the Project which will run up to 31 March 2026.

We still need more volunteers to help with the project, and it would be appreciated if all the organisations represented here today could put a call out to their members. We provide full training and support so no prior experience is necessary but having an interest in local history and landscape is a real bonus!

Ride out Fund / Ride Out UK

This year, the BHS’ [Ride Out Fund](#) has approved seven bridleway improvement projects across the country providing financial support of £32K but that leverages in further significant funds from other sources – LAs, other grant giving bodies, land managers and so on. It is very important that we keep raising money for this fund as the improvement works benefit all equestrians. Most of the funding is raised through our [Ride Out UK](#) campaign and events of rides across the country. Again, we’d be grateful if organisations can advertise our rides to their members and also whether any of their members can provide venues for rides.

Investment in Access

Over the last two to three years the BHS Board has invested hugely in our access objective. We now have a full time Access Field Officer covering every region of Great Britain. That in turn has enabled us increase the volume of day-to-day work we do to keep the bridleway network open through support, training and advice to our volunteers and with more ability to directly liaise and negotiate with local authorities, landowners and other stakeholders. It also means that we are better placed to recruit and empower more volunteers across the country to support our work.

Campaigning and litigation

As local authority finances continue to be squeezed we are moving to stage where we are frequently having to threaten the use of litigation to local authorities and Government to ensure that equestrian routes are protected.

Working with Cycling UK, we recently took action against Defra in respect of the new Coast to Coast National Trail. This is to run from St Bees Head in Cumbria to Robin Hoods Bay in Yorkshire and was announced as a route for walkers only. We secured a commitment from Defra and Natural England to work productively with us, and they will now consult with us on the Coast To Coast Path and revisit the decision in light of those discussions.

With the other user groups, we continue to lobby government to ensure that access is considered in their plans wherever possible. This has been particularly taxing with the political merry go round that has taken place this year!

Nonetheless as mentioned earlier, we have been able to secure the government's commitment to repeal the 2026 cut-off date, and this month, working with the BMC, British Canoeing, Open Spaces Society and the Ramblers, we submitted a briefing note to Barry Gardiner MP of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee to ask Therese Coffey, Defra Secretary of State, who was being questioned by the committee on the Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMS), as to why public access is not included, despite repeated assurances having been given that it would be.

Dunlop

Finally, some of you may have seen correspondence circulating about the need to challenge the so-called Dunlop judgement. For those not familiar with this, it relates to the correct legal interpretation of the term "Private Carriage Road" which was frequently used in 18th and 19th century Inclosure Awards when new roads and highways were being set out. It is not just of historical interest though, as it impacts on hundreds, possibly thousands, of routes across England & Wales. The BHS is working very closely with the Ramblers and Open Spaces Society on this issue. It is essential that the right test case is chosen and the correct preparatory work undertaken; an adverse decision made it would be even harder to then overturn it subsequently.

Will Steel
Head of Access
British Horse Society