



# MID COTSWOLD TRACKS & TRAILS GROUP

*Helping to improve our tracks and trails ... from this generation to the next ...*

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1st February 2016

## **GCC LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN (Draft) - Consultation Response**

This response is on behalf of the Mid Cotswold Tracks and Trails Group (MCTTG), a body affiliated to the British Horse Society (BHS). MCTTG is recognised within Gloucestershire's Rights of Way and Countryside Access Improvement Plan 2011-2016.

The [Mid-Cotswold Tracks and Trails Group](#) is a not-for-profit community group that was formed in August 2008. The Group seeks to improve and extend the tracks and trails network available for safe off-road access by horse riders, cyclists and others. The region it covers is the entire southern part of Gloucestershire that lies between the line of the A40 in the north, the River Severn in the west, and the county boundary to the south and east. Any areas adjacent to or outside the above boundaries will be included where necessary in order to benefit from any of the overall aims of the group.

Although there is a large number of tracks and bridleways in Gloucestershire, they are quite fragmented, and it is difficult to find longer or circular routes which do not involve cyclists and horse riders having to ride along busy roads in order to get between one stretch of track and another. There is a strong case for linking up these existing tracks and bridleways with new stretches of off-road track to create a more connected network of multi-user tracks. There are also hazards on existing rights of way such as poorly maintained or overgrown tracks and broken gates and latches.

### **Aims of the Group**

1. To improve and expand the tracks and trails network (bridleways, unsurfaced roads and other off-road routes open to horse riders) to enable horses to be ridden off road in safety.
2. To develop new links and create additional multi-use routes to benefit horse riding.
3. To promote safer conditions for horse riders on roads.
4. To promote use of local riding routes and facilities to promote sustainable tourism. This may include the publication of maps and guides.
5. To establish good relations with local authorities, landowners and other local groups, such as walkers, cyclists, people with disabilities, trail riders and carriage drivers, in order to achieve the above.
6. To provide assistance in maintaining tracks and trails.

### **Core Values**

- Commitment to:
- Democratic and open working
  - Equality of opportunity
  - Collaboration
  - Care for the local environment and its rights of ways

## Membership

Membership of the Group is open to any individuals who are interested in the aims of the Group. In Jan 2016 membership stood at 187 with another 489 non-members linked on Facebook. There were 121 Facebook Trail Buddies in response to a new initiative to enable members to meet up to share local rides.

## The Draft Local Transport Plan

MCTTG welcomes the plan's recognition of "Gloucestershire's iconic landscapes, natural environment, heritage and culture." (3.2) and endorses the objectives set out in **figure C** especially:

### **"Support sustainable economic growth**

Gloucestershire is a place to do business and attract investment

Greater economic activity

A thriving tourist industry which benefits from ease of access to the county's natural, built and historic environmental assets".

*Note: Figures show 23,272 horses registered in Gloucestershire (2009) with an estimated £69,491,000 – nearly 70 million - going into the local economy annually, supporting feed suppliers, farriers, vets, farm diversification via livery yards, saddlers, horse transport, equine tourism and more. There are, for example, 184 registered farriers currently working within 30 miles of Cheltenham, while a quick online survey of livery yards and riding stables in Gloucestershire revealed over 90 establishments, not counting the small DIY liveries, specialist training centres, cross country courses and studs.*

### **"Enable community connectivity**

Individuals benefit from economic prosperity and social benefits".

*Note: See above and also:*

*In October 2014's edition of Cotswold Life, George Barks of Stacks Property Search described the "lifestyle premium", the positive effect of riding facilities on property prices: "Location in relation to competitions and activities has a significant effect on value ... a most important factor is to be able to ride out safely from your yard especially with young children on ponies and to find a suitable network of bridlepaths."*

*According to the General Household Survey (GHS): "Participation in horse riding is dominated by women whose 4 weekly participation rate is nearly 4 times that of men. This finding is replicated when comparing girls with boys. Horse riding is relatively ageless and classless." This accords with MCTTG's awareness of numerous ordinary local women who work hard to keep ponies or horses for themselves and their families. "There is a significant core of disabled people whose participation rate and frequency of participation is equal to that of the population as a whole."(GHS)*

## “Conserve the environment

Transport scheme are designed to reduce the adverse impact of transport on Gloucestershire’s high quality natural, built and historic environments”.

*Note: Our bridleway network should be regarded as a key part of Gloucestershire’s heritage, many going back to Roman usage, and some older than that.*

*The National Planning Policy Framework’s Core Principles stress the need to “Conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.”*

## “Improve community health and well being

A healthy more active population (addressing obesity and associated conditions)”.

This reflects one of the Core Principles of the National Planning Policy Framework namely : “Take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.”

*Note: University of Essex, Green Exercise in the UK countryside: Effects on Health and Psychological Well being and Implications for Policy and Planning.*

*British Horse Society: The Health Benefits of Horse Riding in the UK, 2011.*

*The National Institute for Health and Care excellence, Public Health Guidance 8, which offers the “first national evidence-based recommendations on how to improve the physical environment to encourage physical activity”.*

*Stroud District Council’s Health and Well Being Plan 2013-17 gives one local example of the need for this: “Each year, inactivity in the Stroud district costs the NHS approximately £1.4 million.” It records that Stroud is worse than average for “Physical activity amongst 5-16 year olds.”*

Despite our endorsement of the above objectives, we deplore the lack of reference to the role, needs and benefits of the equestrian community in achieving them. There is a similar paucity of consideration of the needs of those with disabilities as vulnerable road users. It would be helpful if the plan recognised the existence of horse riders and carriage drivers beyond the merest reference in your Glossary of Terms (**section 6**).

Almost every reference to provision for cyclists could, and should, include reference to horse riders, and, indeed, mobility scooter users. Horse riding should be included in all the references to the health benefits of outdoor activity and to rural tourism and economy (e.g. **fig D**). In **figure E** the cycle policies should be extended to include reference to horse riding. Your delivery priorities (**section 4**) should include reference to horse crossings and multi-user tracks in **4.2**.

**Figures H and I** similarly neglect to include the conversion of any cycle tracks to multi-user routes as encouraged by the government since June 2011 (ref letter Richard Benyon, Minister for Natural Environment letter dated 14th June 2011 circulated to all Local Access Forums and County Councils) even where some of the tracks named are already used by horse riders. Your monitoring indicators in **figure L** do not include any reference to horse-related incidents. There is also, curiously, no mention of proactive

measures designed to reduce the potential for highway casualties - either for the drivers or for the vulnerable road users involved.

*Note: The Richard Benyon letter: "I would urge all local authorities to allow horse riders to use cycle trails, routes and any other ways where it is in their power to do so, and to encourage that permission or dedication to happen where it is not in their power. Unless there are good and specific reasons not to expressly allow horse riders to use such routes, local authorities should take steps to accommodate them. Local authorities should be making the most their off-road networks though integration of use. Multi user routes have been shown to be readily adopted and well appreciated by local people. Where they are done well they bolster community cohesion and create a better understanding between users.*

*Horse riders are particularly vulnerable road users, and cycle routes can provide appropriate and important opportunities to avoid busy roads".*

*· The BHS considers horse related traffic accidents to be significantly under reported.*

*· There have been 2035 road incidents reported on the BHS website [www.horseaccidents.org.uk](http://www.horseaccidents.org.uk) since the website first launched in November 2010, 54 of which occurred in Gloucestershire.*

*· Out of the 54 road incidents reported in Gloucestershire, four of these resulted in a horse fatality, with four horses sustaining severe injuries. Three riders also sustained severe injuries.*

*· Out of the 2035 road incidents in total, 203 resulted in a horse fatality, with 85 horses sustaining severe injuries. There were also 38 rider fatalities, and 150 riders sustained severe injuries.*

*· There were 183 Road Traffic Incidents reported on [www.horseaccidents.org.uk](http://www.horseaccidents.org.uk) in 2012. These included 2 rider fatalities; 12 severe rider injuries; 14 horse fatalities; and 3 severe horse injuries.*

*This view is supported by the Hospital Episode Statistics Online.*

*The recently published Health and Social Care Information Centre's "Admitted Patient Care, England – 2014/15: External causes" table shows "Animal-rider or occupant of animal-drawn vehicle injured in transport accident"*

*The data shows: Finished consultant episodes 4,081: Admissions 4,054: Male 602: Female 3,477: Emergency 3,667: FCE bed days 8578.*

*There were 104 horse rider casualties recorded by the police in Great Britain in 2014. This includes one adult horse rider who was killed and 23 who were seriously injured. One child horse rider was also seriously injured.*

We hope that the range of examples we have cited in this response demonstrates the importance of including horse riders and people with disabilities on a par with walkers and cyclists in this strategic plan.

We are conscious that we have far more information available, and we should be happy to contribute further in any way that would be helpful at any time.

Pat Harris (MCTTG Chair)