



The Byways and Bridleways Trust



How public access can be improved post Brexit

Proposals from the British Horse Society, Byways and Bridleways Trust, Open Spaces Society and Ramblers for the redirection of agricultural funds to give public benefit, October 2017

- 1 The United Kingdom's departure from the EU provides an opportunity to model funding schemes for agriculture to ensure that public money achieves maximum public benefit and promotes public wellbeing.
- 2 Public benefit should include public access, whether by paths or open access to land (freedom to roam), because such assets support local economies, and improve people's health, wellbeing and safety. Public access also helps to connect those who use paths for whatever reason (non-motorised transport, for health reasons and for recreation) and those who own and manage the land. Naturally we advocate the public exercise its rights and freedoms responsibly and with respect for landowners, land managers and other users.
- 3 Any new scheme should include financial support for landowners who provide additional access or improvements to existing access.

Proposal 1. Additional access

- 4 Payments should be available for the provision of new access, either along defined paths or as freedom to roam, or both. It should be well publicised. It should be targeted and selective, with bids from farmers and land managers assessed against criteria, such as public demand, achievement of the objectives of the rights of way improvement plan, linking up existing routes, or improvement of safety (for example, enabling walkers and riders to avoid using roads, especially those which are busy, or have limited visibility).

- 5 Encouragement should be given for creating bridleways or restricted byways so that maximum public benefit is provided. The provision of circular off-road routes is of particular benefit for equestrians as they limit the amount of riding on roads. In the case of access land, there could be an increased number of access points, or additional access points provided across boundaries within the access area, and the provision of higher rights access on access land.
- 6 Providing higher rights on existing rights of way (the difference in subsidy between footpaths and bridleways or restricted byways should be substantial to encourage upgrades where it is appropriate for all users).
- 7 Ideally the new access will be permanent, consisting of definitive rights of way, or land dedicated for access under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 or as a village green under section 15(8) of the Commons Act 2006. Additional spreading room adjacent to the coastal path in England could be rewarded. However, long-term permissive access is often better than no access at all.

Proposal 2. Enhancing existing access

- 8 There should be rewards for enhancing existing access. For example, this could include:
 - improvement in path widths,
 - regularly mowing a headland path and preventing encroachment by vegetation,
 - mowing and marking a path across grass leys,
 - mowing, regrading and rolling green lanes,
 - improving the accessibility of gates and stiles,
 - additional or improved waymarking and signposting,
- 9 Enhancements of existing access would be optional extras which farmers and land managers could elect to adopt. They would be applied to existing public rights of way and access land, and the farmer would receive standard annual payments per length of path adopted. Because the enhancements would be applied to existing public rights of way and access land, farmers could opt into the scheme without prior negotiation, and the scheme would have low administration costs.

Proposal 3. Cross compliance

- 10 It is important that those who receive grants and have existing rights of way on their land should ensure that all legislation is complied with, keeping paths clear of obstruction, reinstating them after ploughing etc.
- 11 It will be necessary to work out a cross-compliance regime that is fair to both land managers and the public, once the future is clearer.

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British Horse Society, Abbey Park, Stareton, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2XZ
Byways and Bridleways Trust, c/o 57 Bowers Mill, Branch Road, Barkisland HX4 0AD
Open Spaces Society, 25a Bell Street, Henley-on-Thames RG9 2BA
Ramblers, 2nd Floor Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW