

Reference: ROW/3354782

Dear Ian,

I am writing to formally object to the proposal for a public footpath to be routed through Witcombe Livery Yard.

I fully understand the importance of maintaining and improving public access to the countryside, and I appreciate the benefits that safe, well-planned footpaths can provide to riders, walkers and the wider community. However, I strongly believe that routing a public footpath directly through a working livery yard would create significant and avoidable safety risks for members of the public, horses, riders, handlers and staff using the yard.

Safety concerns

A livery yard is an active equestrian environment. Horses are regularly ridden, led, turned out, brought in from fields, loaded and unloaded, and cared for throughout the day. Horses can be unpredictable, particularly when faced with unfamiliar people, dogs, bicycles, vehicles or other horses.

Introducing a public right of way through the centre of this environment would create unavoidable interaction between members of the public and horses that are being handled or ridden.

There is particular concern that some members of the public using the proposed route may have little or no knowledge of horses or how to behave safely around them. A footpath may be used by cyclists, walkers, children and people accompanied by dogs. Unexpected encounters could cause horses to become frightened or spooked, creating a genuine risk of injury to riders, handlers and members of the public.

The risks would be particularly significant when:

- Horses are being led to and from fields or stables.
- Horses are being ridden in or around the yard.
- Horses are being loaded into or unloaded from horseboxes and trailers.
- Young, nervous or inexperienced horses are being handled.
- Horses are being exercised or turned out.
- Veterinary or farrier visits are taking place.
- Machinery, vehicles or deliveries are moving around the yard.

- Dogs accompanying users of the footpath are loose or approach horses.
- Riders using the public footpath encounter horses from the livery yard at close quarters.

These are not occasional activities; they are fundamental to the day-to-day operation of a working livery yard.

Risk of horses being frightened or injured

The welfare of the horses must also be taken into consideration.

Many horses are naturally reactive animals and can be startled by sudden or unexpected movement. The presence of unfamiliar people, dogs, bicycles or other users immediately adjacent to horses could increase the likelihood of horses becoming frightened or attempting to bolt.

This creates a risk not only to the person using the footpath but also to the horse itself and to anyone else nearby.

A horse that becomes frightened in a confined area can cause serious injury to itself or others. The consequences of an accident within a busy livery yard could therefore be considerably more serious than those of an incident occurring on an ordinary rural footpath

Interference with the safe operation of the yard

The proposed route would also have a significant impact on the normal operation of the livery yard.

A working yard needs to be able to move horses, vehicles and equipment safely and efficiently. Staff, owners and visitors need to be able to carry out routine activities without having to account for members of the public passing through the yard at unpredictable times.

The presence of a public right of way would make many ordinary activities more difficult and potentially more dangerous.

For example, a member of staff leading a horse from its stable to a field should not have to stop and manage the additional risk posed by members of the public, cyclists or dogs using the route. Likewise, riders should be able to exercise horses without the unpredictable presence of members of the public immediately alongside them.

There is also the question of privacy and security. A livery yard is not simply a public recreational space; it is a place where privately owned

horses are kept and where owners reasonably expect a degree of security and control over access.

Increased risk of accidents and liability

We are particularly concerned that the proposed route could increase the likelihood of an accident occurring.

If an individual unfamiliar with horses were to behave in a way that caused a horse to react, the resulting accident could have serious consequences. Even where every reasonable precaution is taken by the yard, it would be extremely difficult to eliminate the inherent risk created by routing a public right of way through an active equestrian facility.

Availability of safer alternatives

We believe that public access should, wherever reasonably possible, be provided in a manner that protects the safety and welfare of both the public and the animals affected

Conclusion

We therefore strongly object to the proposed footpath passing through Witcombe Livery Yard.

Our objection is not based on opposition to public access or to footpaths generally. Rather, it is based on the particular circumstances of this site and the fact that the proposed route would pass through a busy, working livery yard where horses are regularly being handled, ridden and moved.

We believe that the proposal creates unnecessary risks to:

- Members of the public using the footpath
- Riders and handlers using the yard;
- The horses kept at the yard;
- Staff and visitors; and
- The safe and efficient operation of the livery yard.

We ask that this letter be formally recorded as an objection to the proposed route and that we are kept informed of any further consultation or decision regarding the proposal.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs Juliet Stallard