

Dear Mr Aston,

I am writing to formally register my objection to the proposed public footpath running through Witcombe Farm where I currently **keep my horse on livery**. While I fully support public access to the countryside where appropriate, routing a public right of way directly through an active equine facility presents severe, unmanageable health and safety risks to both members of the public and the horses stabled here.

As a livery client, I am on-site daily to care for and exercise my horse. I have first-hand experience with the daily operations of the yard and the inherent unpredictability of handling large animals in this environment. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) regularly publishes strict guidelines regarding public safety on agricultural and equestrian land, which this proposed path directly compromises. I urge the Inspectorate to consider the following critical hazards:

1. Unpredictable Equine Behaviour and Flight Instincts

The proposed route intersects areas where I and other liveries turn out, graze, handle, and ride our horses daily.

- **HSE Guidance Context:** The HSE notes that horses are large, powerful flight animals with a strong instinct to flee or defend themselves when startled by unfamiliar sights or sounds.
- **Specific Hazard:** Members of the public carrying umbrellas, wearing rustling waterproof clothing, pushing pushchairs, or walking with dogs can easily spook a horse. A startled horse poses an immediate trampling danger to walkers and a severe throwing/fall hazard to riders mounted on, or leading, their horses through the yard.

2. Dog Interactions and Livestock Worrying

The proposed path will inevitably bring members of the public walking dogs directly into the horses' environment.

- **HSE Guidance Context:** The HSE and agricultural guidelines heavily emphasise the dangers of dogs around livestock, which legally includes horses.
- **Specific Hazard:** Even well-behaved dogs on leads can trigger a defensive flight-or-fight response in horses. Loose or poorly controlled dogs barking or chasing horses in fields or arenas can cause severe panic, leading to horses colliding with fencing or sustaining career-ending injuries. This also puts the dog handlers at high risk of being kicked.

3. Biosecurity, Disease Transmission, and Unauthorised Feeding

As a horse owner, I am highly concerned about the biosecurity and health risks introduced by an uncontrolled public path.

- **HSE Guidance Context:** The HSE highlights the necessity of controlling public access to protect animal welfare and prevent the accidental spread of disease.
- **Specific Hazard:** Public foot traffic increases the risk of unauthorised people petting or feeding the horses. This presents a high risk of finger-biting injuries to the public. Furthermore, many horses on this yard suffer from strict dietary conditions (such as

laminitis or severe allergies); unauthorised feeding of grass clippings or treats can be fatal to them. People moving between different equestrian sites also risk vectoring highly contagious diseases like Strangles.

4. Conflict with Heavy Yard Maintenance and Machinery

Caring for horses requires constant movement of heavy forage, feed, and waste by the yard staff and liveryes.

- **HSE Guidance Context:** Workplace transport remains a leading cause of fatal accidents in agricultural and rural workplaces.
- **Specific Hazard:** The path crosses directly through working yard zones where tractors and quad bikes are moving heavy hay bales, clearing muck heaps, or delivering feed. Mixing distracted public walkers with large machinery and horses in confined stable corridors significantly escalates the risk of a serious collision.

Conclusion

Introducing this footpath creates an irreconcilable conflict between public access and the safe, daily handling of horses. The unique hazards of an equine environment cannot be reasonably mitigated by signage alone, and fencing off routes within a tight yard structure would compromise horse welfare and safety during daily turnout and handling. Therefore, I request that the Planning Inspectorate reject the current proposed route.

Thank you for considering these serious safety and animal welfare concerns from a horse owner's perspective.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Joanne Dunford