

Countryside Alliance, Angling Trust, British Horse Society and the Pony Club – Written evidence (NPS0156)

Summary

The Countryside Alliance is a membership-based organisation that works for everyone who loves the countryside and the rural way of life. We reflect the views and interests of 100,000 members and supporters who come from all walks of life and every part the United Kingdom.

The Countryside Alliance welcomes the House of Lords inquiry into a National Plan for Sport and Recreation. We are fully supportive of the Government's aims of increasing sport and recreation, not simply in terms of traditional sports like football or cricket but as part of a wider agenda to get people outdoors and active. The health benefits, both physical and mental, associated with outdoor activity are generally recognised and understood.

Any national plan should recognise the opportunities for outdoor recreation and 'getting active' associated with traditional pursuits in the countryside, such as riding, fishing/angling and shooting. Whether going for a ride, following a trail hunt, shooting, or sitting by a stream or canal these all make a massive contribution to recreation in the UK. Moreover, riding and shooting sports offer some unique opportunities for those with disabilities, while fishing has been shown to assist with children who find traditional learning in the classroom challenging, and fly fishing has been shown to be good therapy for women recovering from breast cancer.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation's Fishing for Schools (F4S) project, started in 2007, offers short angling courses for schools to aid the education of 10 to 16-year-olds who may not respond to traditional classroom-based learning, but flourish when you get them outside onto the water. To date over 3,000 students have benefited. The courses help pupils re-engage with education, building their confidence and self-esteem, while at the same time helping develop key life skills including team building, leadership, enquiry and thinking skills. The courses engage pupils in key curriculum subjects including engineering, science, geography, cookery, ICT and maths. F4S actively improves academic achievement and enables youngsters to work towards qualifications including: The Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE); BTEC Qualifications; AIM Awards and The Angling Trust's CAST Award. The programme also complements the skills section of the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Awards or the Princes Trust Achieve programme.

A National Sport and Recreation Strategy must be integrated with the National Angling Strategy and take account of the importance of equestrian and shooting activity across the UK. It is, therefore, essential that the Government must consider the impact of its policies on sport and recreation, whether this is the impact of business rates on equestrian businesses, VAT on the hospitality sector, the proper administration of wildlife licensing, or the way in which public goods are rewarded as part of the replacement for the Common Agricultural Policy. For example, the new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMs) must fully

recognise the public benefit from greater access and the provision of recreational facilities.

For a UK-wide strategy to work, it will need to be developed with the devolved administrations, who have devolved responsibilities for payments and environmental and land management policies which need to support and encourage outdoor recreation, and increase public understanding and education. Perhaps uniquely in the area of sport and recreation, those engaged in activities such as game shooting and angling make a positive contribution to the environment and land management. They are also key to delivering the Government's environmental objectives and nature recovery plans.

At present, those managing the environment are facing a rising tide of restrictions, increased conditions in licences and the steady advance of an animal rights agenda that sees wildlife management and those engaged in rural pursuits as a problem, rather than as a key part of delivering environmental solutions.

In making this submission the Alliance has sought information from the British Horse Society, Pony Club and the Angling Trust. Their responses have been included below. The British Horse Society responded in detail on the basis of the Committee's original questions in its Call for Evidence and this response has been provided in full.

SHOOTING

1. How important is sport and recreation to the rural economy and how do businesses and landowners deliver and/or support outdoor activities?

Sport and recreation, and in particular shooting, is vital to the rural economy. Indeed, for many isolated and rural areas, shooting can be the lynch pin that ensures the community economically survives for 12 months of the year.

Shooting is worth £2 billion to the UK economy each year and supports 74,000 FTE jobs¹. Importantly, the vast majority of this spend and these jobs are located in rural areas. There are some compelling examples, spanning the breadth of the UK, that demonstrate just how critical shooting is to rural economy. In Exmoor for example, shooting makes up 95% of winter tourism to the area, contributing more than £30 million annually². This is more valuable than the combined contribution of agricultural subsidies to the area. This tourism is critical in ensuring that a myriad of services, from pubs and hotels to schools and post offices, are not just reliant on a Summer season, but can continue to survive year-round.

Landowners principally support this recreation by running shoots and employing gamekeepers. Many shoots around the country are high risk businesses, on the margins of profitability. Their downstream effect however is the employment and community contribution mentioned above, which is vital. The positive impact on social well-being and mental health from shooting should not be underestimated, and these of course have knock on impacts on the economy.

The Personal Value of Shooting, BASC Survey, 2016

- 95% of respondents said shooting is important to their personal wellbeing.
- 84% said that shooting is important to their physical wellbeing.
- 91% said they would spend less time outdoors if they could not shoot.
- 88% said shooting gives them moderate to high-intensity exercise.
- 59% take part in picking up, beating or physical conservation work.
- 77% said their social life would suffer without shooting.
- 71% said their levels of physical activity would suffer without shooting.

The full survey, with commentary can be found [here](#).

The Value of Shooting (PACEC), 2014. A survey of 16,000 shooters

- 97% said shooting was a major contributor to their wellbeing.
- 87% agreed or strongly agreed that shooting contributes to the social fabric of the local area.

The full report can be seen [here](#), although it mostly focuses on the economic and conservation benefits of shooting. The social element can be found on p. 18.

¹ PACEC

² Greater Exmoor Shoot Association data

It is difficult to always extrapolate the economic benefit of these social benefits, but a recent PhD study - Understanding the Social Impact of Participation in Driven Game Shooting in the UK, Northampton University PhD by Dr Tracey Latham-Green, 2020 - suggested that the financial benefit to society of the exercise undertaken by beaters and pickers up involved in just driven grouse shooting (DGS) is estimated at £547million per year.³

- DGS has a moderate to large positive impact on the health and wellbeing of participants, engendering:
 - Strong social support networks
 - Decreased loneliness
 - Strong cultural heritage ties
 - Time spent outside and amongst nature
 - Regular physical exercise
 - A sense of purpose
- All of the above are particularly pronounced on syndicate shoots.
- 98% of beaters and pickers up felt a particularly strong sense of purpose, their actions contributing to the success of the day.
- There is a particular positive affect on ageing rural populations, both on their mental and physical wellbeing.
- The financial benefit to society of the exercise undertaken by beaters and pickers up involved in DGS is estimated at £547 million per year.

The PhD summary can be found [here](#). There are also some interesting policy recommendations on p. 17 – 18.

In addition, shooting plays a greater part in maintaining the landscape and biodiversity of the UK than any other activity, with over two thirds of rural land managed in connection with shooting activities. This management allows increased and enhanced interaction with nature for all users. In response to Natural Resources Wales' Shooting Review Consultation 2018, the Countryside Alliance undertook research that showed:

- Shoots provide benefits to all users of woodland, enabling footpaths to be kept clear and wildlife to be more abundant.
- Increased strength, stamina, hand-eye coordination, and fine motor skills are just a few of the physical benefits acquired in shooting sports that apply not only to this sport, but to all of life.
- Shooting is one of the few sports which is accessible to people of all abilities. Organisations such as Help For Heroes have found that because there are no physical barriers to participation, and because it is such a social activity, shooting can help get disabled people outside, in company and into areas of the countryside that might otherwise have been inaccessible.

A further study undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic - What impacts does Integrated Moorland Management, including Grouse Shooting, have on Moorland Communities? A Comparative Study. University of Northampton, Prof. Simon Denny and Dr Tracey Latham-Green, 2020 - compared national data to the data

³ Understanding the Social Impact of Participation in Driven Game Shooting in the UK, Northampton University PhD, Dr Tracey Latham-Green, 2020

from respondents that live in moorland communities. This showed that the latter have a stronger sense of belonging, strong social networks, lower levels of loneliness, greater sense of job security, and a strong sense of identity based on a shared heritage and culture, with those involved in grouse shooting in any role having statistically significantly higher levels of wellbeing. The full study, which includes a summary of social findings and the financial benefit to society of this increased wellbeing, can be found [here](#).

Lastly, we would highlight the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) Wales – Community Spirit report, November 2020. This report aims to help bridge the gap in understanding between the Welsh communities who enjoy shooting through their many diverse roles such as picking up with their working dogs, and those who have no knowledge of shooting. The report brings together 868 unedited testimonies from people of Wales on why shooting is so important in their lives and delivers positive outcomes under the seven Wellbeing of Future Generations Act goals.

2. To what extent do current planning and other regulations help or hinder businesses and landowners engaged in delivering outdoor activities and opportunities?

Public Rights of Way and Planning

We would suggest that land managers need certainty as to rights of way and that the ongoing uncertainty about a cut-off date for recording rights of way is unhelpful. There is also a need to make it easier to adjust rights of way to take account of modern usage both to divert paths away from farmyards and gardens, but also to join up rights of way to create more secure circular routes. We need rights of way that maximise public benefit but respect current land use. We are also supportive of increasing the number of rights of way accessible to horses.

Wildlife Licensing

Much shooting takes place on land with open access, such as within our National Parks. Many of these areas are the remaining strongholds of vulnerable and threatened wildlife. A clear example of this would be the UK's species of highest conservation concern, the curlew, that has been in rapid decline across the country, but is increasing in numbers on land managed for grouse shooting, much of which has open access. The ability for all to see rare wildlife up close is a key public good. However, the management of land is becoming increasingly difficult, and this is in sharpest focus in relation to predator control: the essential activity that allows ground nesting birds such as the curlew to thrive.

The system of wildlife licences that allows control of birds has been the subject of much furore over the last three years. While Defra has taken back control of the General Licences, and they are much improved, the situation with Individual Licences is still grave. Ensuring that licensing is properly administered is not just vital for wildlife but for shooting and the land management associated with it, which in turn supports recreation and outdoor activity.

The Government is currently consulting on an interim licensing scheme for the release of gamebirds on or near European Protected Sites (SPAs & SACs). This has been deemed necessary as a result of a legal challenge by the campaign

group Wild Justice, on the basis that because Defra cannot say for certain that no damage will be caused to these sites by releasing game birds then releasing must be restricted. If there is a possibility of harm, even if there is little, if any evidence, of harm or damage, then an activity may have to cease, even if it is an activity which predates the designation of a site. This is based on the current way in which the precautionary principle is applied, or misapplied.

The proposed interim licensing is in addition to a system of consents, overseen by Natural England, to allow activities such as shooting and game rearing. If shooting and its social and environmental contribution is not to be damaged, the Government must clarify and correct the application of the precautionary principle and ensure that land managers have clarity and certainty which will protect shooting not just as an activity, but also the investment and management that goes with it, which is vital to delivering environmental outcomes.

3. How could Government policy better support businesses and landowners in the countryside to support sustainable and inclusive access to the countryside for sport and recreation purposes?

Agricultural Payments Post Brexit

There is an acceptance that agricultural payments should reflect the principle that public money should be spent for public goods. There will be a variety of schemes across the UK to replace the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). These schemes must recognise and reward the work of land managers in delivering and increasing access, whether for walking, riding, shooting or other activities. We hope that as Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) are delivered that the importance of recreation is fully recognised.

Business Rates

While we welcomed the extension of the business rate holiday announced in the recent budget, as this will help thousands of small rural businesses across England and Wales who are continuing to struggle, the problem with business rates has not gone away. The tax places an unfair and disproportionate burden on businesses with a large footprint such as equestrian businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to highlight the unfairness of this tax and we continue to call for a full-scale review of business rates to ensure we have a system which enables rural businesses to compete fairly with those online. Businesses need long term certainty if they are to be able to invest and plan for the future.

Education

The importance of the countryside to health and well being and the role of land managers in maintaining these landscapes needs to be better understood. We would support greater public education, including as part of the national curriculum, so that the countryside and its management, including the role of country pursuits, is seen as a vital element in helping people get active.

Education would also help those using the countryside to understand about their responsibilities, especially responsible dog ownership. Out of control dogs are risk to their owners, to livestock and disturb ground nesting birds. There is widespread ignorance of the law in this area.

The following is evidence provided by those with a direct interest in angling and equestrian organisations

ANGLING

The following was provided by the Angling Trust:

Contribution

Angling already makes a significant contribution to national strategic objectives in sport, the environment and the economy. It engages huge numbers of people – estimated to involve around 900,000 fishing in freshwater in England and Wales and around 750,000 people who fish in the sea every year in the UK.

It has significant economic impact: Sea angling had a total economic impact of £1.2bn, supporting 23,600 jobs in 2012; and freshwater angling in England in 2015 contributed £1.46 billion to the economy and supported 27,000 full-time equivalent jobs.

The National Angling Survey in 2018 found that:

- 72% of respondents said that it helped to keep them healthy, 62% saying angling was one of their ways of being physically active and 25% saying it was their main way of being active.
- 70% said that angling helped them de-stress.
- 58% of respondents would access nature less often or not at all if they did not go angling, 70% would visit rural areas less often and 22% would visit coastal areas less often.
- 57% of those surveyed had been involved in environmental improvement volunteering, 24% of them at least once a month.

Challenges

The circumstances for the delivery of the strategy are challenging. There has been a decline in fishing licence sales since 2010 and government restrictions have meant a decline in marketing and other funding of the sport. The previous national angling strategy, *Fishing for Life*, was not properly implemented, funded or assessed.

The Angling Trust has secured, for the next two years, £1.15m a year from the Environment Agency and £670,000 from Sport England to help angling's development. However, delivery of *this* strategy, over five years, will require considerable additional resources.

There is a very uncertain economic and political context; high levels of inactivity amongst some sections of the population; decline in club membership; and an ageing population. However, the pandemic has seen a resurgence in angling during this pandemic. Thanks largely to the Angling Trust's *When We Fish Again* campaign and the effective dialogue with government departments. There has been a 20% increase in rod licence sales, reversing the long-term trend noted above. Any future strategy for sport and recreation should support this upward trend.

Angling is susceptible to environmental challenges more than other sports. It relies on a natural resource and infrastructure to take place and needs public

sector support for this. Angling is, and must be, a key part of the post pandemic recovery the Government is implementing. As the sport continues to grow it will continue to make an economic contribution to many rural and coastal communities. It also directly supports the Government's stated ambitions of supporting people's ability to reconnect with nature, and it is a key component of supporting the mental health impacts of the pandemic (and others causes), whether that is through existing programmes with veterans suffering from PTSD (alongside those with physical injuries), via the casting for recovery programme to support women recovering from breast cancer, Icarp for helping people with mental health issues, or increasingly offering angling as part of a social prescribing programme.

EQUESTRIAN ACTIVITIES

Hunting

We would draw the Committee's attention to the important role that hunts play within the fabric of rural communities.

- There are over 200 registered packs of foxhounds, harriers and beagles.
- Hunts conduct over 12,000 days of lawful hunting activities each year – this includes the mounted packs and those that follow on foot.
- In addition, hounds and the hunt staff participate in daily hound exercise.
- There are approx. 40,000 people who are active hunt supporters.

British Equestrian Trade Survey 2019

We would also direct the Committee to the economic value of equestrian activity set out in the most recent survey of the British Equestrian Trade Association (BETA) – The National Equestrian Survey 2019.

Key findings include:

- The economic value of the equestrian sector stands at £4.7 billion of consumer spending across a wide range of goods and services each year. This has increased from £4.3 billion in 2015.
- There are 27 million people in Britain with an interest in the equestrian industry.
- There has been an increase in the number of people who have ridden at least once in the past 12 months, to 3 million from 2.7 million in 2015.
- The number of regular riders – those who have ridden at least once a month for the past 12 months – has risen from 1.3 million in 2015 to 1.8 million.
- There are 374,000 horse-owning households in Britain – a drop from the 446,000 in 2015.
- The estimated horse population in Britain stands at 847,000.
- Lack of access to horses and riding facilities is a barrier for 22% of lapsed riders returning to the sport.
- The average frequency of riding – with an average riding time of 52 minutes – is 3.5 times a week.

Pony Club Submission to the House of Lords Select Committee National Plan for Sport and Recreation

The Pony Club's charitable purpose is to:

1. To promote and advance the education and understanding of the public and particularly children and young people, in all matters relating to horsemanship and the horse.
2. To encourage the development of sportsmanship, unlocking potential by building resilience, confidence, teamwork and leadership skills.
3. To support and develop the volunteering network to strengthen the Pony Club community and sustain lifelong engagement with equestrianism.

The Pony Club achieves its purpose in the UK through a geographically dispersed network of some 330 Branches (for children who own their own pony or horse) and 480 Centres (affiliated Riding Schools and Livery Yards who cater for children who do not own their own pony but hire from the Riding School or Livery Yard), which between them attract a membership of some 30,000 children and young people.

Pony Club Branches are run entirely by a network of volunteers, organising training, camps, and competitions for all their members. Members may remain with the Pony Club until they are 25 years old. The Pony Club supports nine different equestrian sports – dressage, show jumping, eventing, mounted games, tetrathlon, polocrosse, endurance, pony racing and polo. Many members make life-long friendships through their time in the Pony Club, many graduate to compete at the highest levels in their chosen sports and many return as parents of Pony Club children and form the backbone of the volunteering body, thereby perpetuating equestrianism for future generations.

The Pony Club relies enormously on the goodwill of landowners which is demonstrated in many different ways and the relationship between landowner and Pony Club branch varies on a case-by-case basis. However, we will endeavour to address the questions posed below from a broad Pony Club perspective and attempt to assess the pressures facing many of the landowners from whom The Pony Club receives such generous support.

1. How important is sport and recreation to the rural economy and how do businesses and landowners deliver and/or support outdoor activities?

The Pony Club is not well placed to answer this question impartially. It has a limited perspective and is a poor source of balanced opinion! What can be said is that The Pony Club frequently shares land and facilities with other sports such as cricket, football, rugby, with running clubs, hunts, point to points, shoots and other recreational events. The legal and financial arrangements between landowner and this list of users is many and varied, as is the contribution that each of them makes to the local economy.

Approximately 20,000 of the Pony Club's total membership are Branch members. The Pony Club accounts for 2019 indicate that aggregate annual expenditure by members/parents through their Branches was just in excess of £11m. The largest items of expenditure were:

	<u>£000</u>
Pony Club Camps	2,985
Rallies & Instruction	2,447
Competitions	2,325
Office Costs	1,071

Much of the above expenditure would be to meet the costs of freelance instructors who teach members and support them at camps and when competing. The Office Costs element is largely to fund the full-time administrative staff employed in the Pony Club Office at Stoneleigh.

In addition to this expenditure, members will be paying for a farrier, veterinary surgeon, horse food and bedding supplies, tack shop, horse transport, the purchase of horses and ponies, entry fees for competitions not organised by the Pony Club and a range of other costs incidental to horse or pony ownership. This probably totals a sum similar to the £11m expended through the Pony Club, so it is reasonable to conclude that the Pony Club's 20,000 Branch members are contributing in excess of £20m to the UK economy per annum.

Aggregated figures are not available for expenditure by Pony Club Centre Members, who expend much of their money on the hire of ponies and horses from Riding Centres, on instructors employed by the Riding Centres and on competitions and excursions arranged by these Riding Centres. Suffice it to say that the 10,000 Pony Club Centre members are an important component of Riding Centre activities, contribute significantly to the financial viability of these Riding Centres and thereby to the UK economy.

2. To what extent do current planning and other regulations help or hinder businesses and landowners engaged in delivering outdoor activities and opportunities?

Landowners have a short-term fear that the relatively new Localism Act has led, and will continue to lead, to areas lent to cricket clubs, football clubs, The Pony Club and other sporting entities being declared 'assets of community value'. Once declared, restrictions are placed on the landowner in terms of his ability to sell the asset, which serves as a disincentive to lend it in the first place. Longer term, there is a fear that the landowner's generosity may well result in the user being granted permanent security of tenure or a right to compulsorily purchase the land it utilises. There is no doubt that these threats discourage philanthropic acts and make it harder for many Pony Club branches to secure land on which to conduct their affairs.

The propensity to designate sports/recreation grounds in Local Plans means that such areas cannot easily be developed once designated. Many decisions to lend cricket pitches and other sporting and recreational sites to the local community were made many years ago, but a landowner's enthusiasm to lend new land to similar schemes is significantly diminished by the adverse consequences of past generosity.

3. How could Government policy better support businesses and landowners in the countryside to support sustainable and inclusive access to the countryside for sport and recreation purposes?

The Localism Act, as mentioned above, provides a clear disincentive to landowners contemplating supporting sustainable and inclusive access to the countryside for sport and recreation.

Many public rights of way are historic rather than of practical value to today's rural community and could give the public far greater enjoyment of the countryside if re-routed. The landowner is normally perceived as having ulterior motives and is therefore low in the decision-making pecking order when promoting better access proposals. The Ramblers Association have become the most influential, with a loud, well exercised voice, but they have proved to be hostile to compromise, determined to retain all historic accessibility whilst simultaneously seeking increased access via new routes, which leads to a longstanding stalemate which has not benefitted the majority of countryside users. There are many examples of land that would be suitable for Pony Club use that is rendered unsuitable because of public rights of way that history and the Ramblers Association stipulate cannot be re-routed.

Counter intuitively, we perceive that strengthening the laws on trespass would also encourage landowners to engage more freely with communities regarding access arrangements on defined routes or to defined areas in a way that they cannot currently contemplate. Trespass is a civil offence rather than a criminal one and is a constant source of friction between landowners and their local community, particularly as the ability to prove prolonged trespass without challenge from the landowner can result in the creation of a new right of way, granting the trespasser and the public access in perpetuity. Given the legal status of trespass, landowners receive no enforcement support from the police and are left to find their own ways of minimising trespass, the solution often being to refuse permission for activities which entail granting access to land, which they would embrace if the consequences were less unpalatable and troublesome. If effective deterrents to trespass were in place, supported by police action where necessary, many areas of land not currently offered by landowners to users such as The Pony Club could be released for their benefit and that of other community bodies.

Lastly, we would like to suggest that a drive to create and incentivise the provision of off-road routes for riding would be beneficial. The accident count involving horses on roads is too high and unlikely to reduce without a new approach. We would encourage incentives to landowners which are guaranteed not to result in future rights of way being created, thereby maximising take up by landowners.

Response of The British Horse Society

The Response from the British Horse Society to the Committee's question in its call for evidence is given below:

The Committee's call for evidence asks the following questions:

- 1. How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?**

Sadly, the equestrian sector struggles to receive funding from most local and county partnerships and committees. Most are focussed on traditional urban activity, such as team sport, athletics, gymnastics, swimming and gyms as an example. The equestrian sector, where there is sadly a perception of wealth is often not understood or considered. County Sports Partnerships and Local Authority Sports Teams sadly don't always know the size of the sector. That we have over 3 million participants on an annual basis and over 1.3m regular riders (riding at least once a week). The professional nature of coaches, clubs and centre often precludes them from accessing needed funds for the growth and development of the sector. Much more needs to be done to open up access to non- tradition, rural and less well-known sports. Greater consideration also needs to be made on how commercial sport can be grown rather than voluntary activity- this is rarely considered unless under the Local Authority umbrella e.g. gyms and swimming.

Not all sports and recreational activities are included in local initiatives run by a collaboration of organisations. More detailed information about alternative activities is needed, including the abolishment of stereotypes associated with some sports. A list of sports and recreational providers, incorporating the more alternative provisions i.e. horse riding, should be developed to encourage bodies to consider a wider range of providers. Some activities are more costly to run due to the specialist facilities and equipment needed, and this is often what makes them overlooked from a budgetary perspective. However, the benefits of these alternative activities, such as horse riding should be fully considered as they can often appeal to individuals to whom more mainstream sports are not attractive. Local funding can be hard to access without the relevant knowledge and experience, and support with this would be helpful, especially for the recreation sector.

- 2. How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.**

The equine sector provides massive opportunity for young people to participate, our challenge and pony star programmes provides structured pathways for youth engagement and development. Our Changing Lives programmes provides

alternative education provision to engage young people at risk of exclusion or disadvantaged to education support through equestrian centre and activity.

The equine sector attracts a huge percentage of young female participant (92%), often those individuals who are not interested in traditional sport. Over 90% of equine sector is non competitive and therefore provide sports access to those who are not competitively minded, those who would rather take a hack (walk) across fields and bridle ways.

The BHS Changing Lives Through Horses programme offers the opportunity for young people, who are not engaged in education/training or employment or have been identified at risk from becoming so, to develop where other forms of education may not have been successful. The programme offers a safe, inclusive environment set in a riding centre with trained and skilled coaches and of course the horses. The riding centre offers many opportunities for developing life skills, from giving the young person the chance to take responsibility, to build positive relationships and to improve their communication skills - after all horses cannot speak but partnerships are made through good communication, in this case its body language and tone. The young people enrolled on the programme are from a variety of backgrounds, some struggle with anxiety and/or depression (to the degree several participants have previously had suicide attempts), some struggle with learning in a classroom with large group sizes - not confident enough to ask for help for fear of looking dumb in front of their peers. Horses don't judge, and the young people quickly realise that and form positive bonds with them, boosting their confidence and their engagement as they wish to do more with the horses.

One young boy, who's friend committed suicide, found himself not wanting to leave his room, having panic attacks at school and unable to concentrate. He enrolled on the Changing lives programme and in a year he has progressed through the programme, started taking his BHS qualifications (stage 1) and has found an apprenticeship. Quote - 'It has improved my confidence drastically and has focused my mind elsewhere as well as getting me out of the house and out of the sticky situation I was getting myself into.'

Another example: two teenage girls, both with previous suicide attempts, enrolled at the same centre. Neither thought life was worth living and that they would not have positive opportunities in their lives. Referred through part of the NHS to encourage them to be active and get involved, one is now still volunteering at the centre to help others, as well as keep helping herself, and the other has gone on to a course at an equine college with the prospect of a career in the equine industry.

Challenges for the programme lie in funding not covering enough sessions for these young people, often only small pots are secured so they cannot continue long term. Many would benefit from being able to remain on the programme longer term. Funding in itself can be a battle to access, as school budgets struggle to provide for alternative programmes. Others find that the care system means that young people are moved around frequently, so they stop attending due to being shipped out of the area.

The recognition, or lack thereof, from local authorities that these centres are providing an essential service to these young people has meant that over the last 12 months, due to the covid-19 pandemic, that only a small fraction of young people have been able to access regular sessions at their centre. Currently 55% of participants enrolled on the programme are not able to access their sessions as the riding schools were directed to close even though the education sector for vulnerable young people remained open. We are already receiving reports of participants struggling to come back as they have regressed and their anxieties returned.

Having access to the public rights of way network provides people with a free at point of entry resource for sport and recreation. Sadly only 22% of the public rights of way network is available to those who want to horse ride and cycle on it. Urgent steps need to be taken to substantially increase this percentage.

3. How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

The equine sector is open to all, our partner organisation the RDA, provides tens of thousands of disabled riders a therapeutic sports activity. Our centres are open to all participants with many centres having female only times.

We are open to all but our demographics tends to attract more females (92%). We also have a higher than society average of homosexual male and female participants.

It is one of very few sports (possibly the only) where male and females compete equally at all levels of competition.

It's also a life-long participation sport meaning we have large number of participant who are aged 40, including large numbers of regular participant 70 and 80+

Helping to signpost people from different cultural and physical ability to different sports that would suit their lifestyle and their personal goals would be beneficial. Could perhaps schools help to signpost children to a wider variety of sports? Engaging with under-represented groups using charities and clubs already set up is also a great way to showcase different sports and what opportunities there are in someone's local area.

Two examples are St James' Farm, Gloucestershire and Summerfield Stables, Birmingham with their brilliant community links. Within the BHS Changing Lives Through Horses programme some centres have taken on participants in the 18-21 age range. Some of these are people that have disabilities whereby they cannot live independently or did not receive a full education whilst in the school system. The opportunity to get outdoors and engaging in physical activity has not only given them a purpose its is providing an opportunity for them to develop soft skills – communication, confidence, team work skills – where they would otherwise be at home or in the care facility where they reside. The riding

centre setting is one of community and team work, and so lends itself to providing a safe but inclusive environment where one can meet new people and work alongside others to care for the horses and ponies that live there. One such young man, aged 21, has managed to complete the Changing Lives Achieve Awards and is now moving on to the other BHS recreational awards, known as the Challenge Awards – the sense of achievement for him was immeasurable as with each award comes a certificate. His coach commented that it was not the physical aspects of the tasks included that he struggled with but the soft skills of communication and team work that he had to develop to make the achievements.

4. Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

We are happy with these priorities but do have concerns about the geographical spread of the delivery. It is important that rural areas are also considered in its delivery rather than urban environment which seems to have been prioritised over the last ten years. We are especially glad to see economic development and hope that will mean more support to commercial organisational which we see as essential for growth of sport.

Please see our Health Benefits of Riding research, which outlines the very real health and mental benefits of horse riding [Health Benefits of Riding in the UK Full Report.pdf](#)

5. Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?

It needs to be recognised that a lot of people who ride do not necessarily recognise themselves as participating in a sport. In respect of recreation, the definitions need to be revised to include a wider range of recreational activities, such as riding school lessons and horse owners who ride out regularly but not as part of any organised activity. A large proportion of grassroots equestrian sport is run in club or riding school environments, and even more participation will be taking place by individuals themselves with no governing body overseeing that activity. More recognition should be given to these areas of recreation that do not fall into the traditional model of organised sport.

6. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

Training and awareness raising is key in all these areas. Across Equestrian sport there is a lack of awareness and a well-developed training and implementation plan would be beneficial. Organisations like the Ann Craft Trust and Gendered Intelligence do a great job to support NGBs in this matter

7. What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation actives at all levels?

All BEF member bodies have worked hard over the last 10 years to implement the CPSU Safeguarding Standards. However we have a very large proportion of the market that are not represented by the BEF and therefore fairly unregulated. Safeguarding standards need to be part of the licensing of Riding Schools and ideally the licensing of livery yards. BHS has implemented safeguarding criteria for all of its BHS Approved Centres, Affiliated Coaches and Riding Clubs. Each is required to have a safeguarding policy, attend appropriate safeguarding training and also implement criminal record checks.

8. What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable? For example, accountability for representing and protecting their membership, promoting their sport and maximising participation.

As we are not elite, I feel the Olympic disciplines or BEF would be better placed to answer this.

9. What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

10. Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

Yes. Well established sports clubs and affiliated bodies are part of a governance structure which enables support and funding opportunities. However, the more recreational activities often do not have this dedicated support structure. This can result in wider issues which will affect those recreation activities not being fully understood or related. For example, the effect business rates has on riding schools is huge and this then has an adverse effect on the grassroots offering for equestrianism by making running a riding school an unviable business. There is also currently too much regional variance in how entities such as Local Authorities interpret or enforce legislation, resulting in an unfair or unclear approach. A national plan would enable some of these regional anomalies to be worked on as well as giving recognition to the true recreational activities and the necessary support and promotion that would be beneficial to increase participation.

31 March 2021