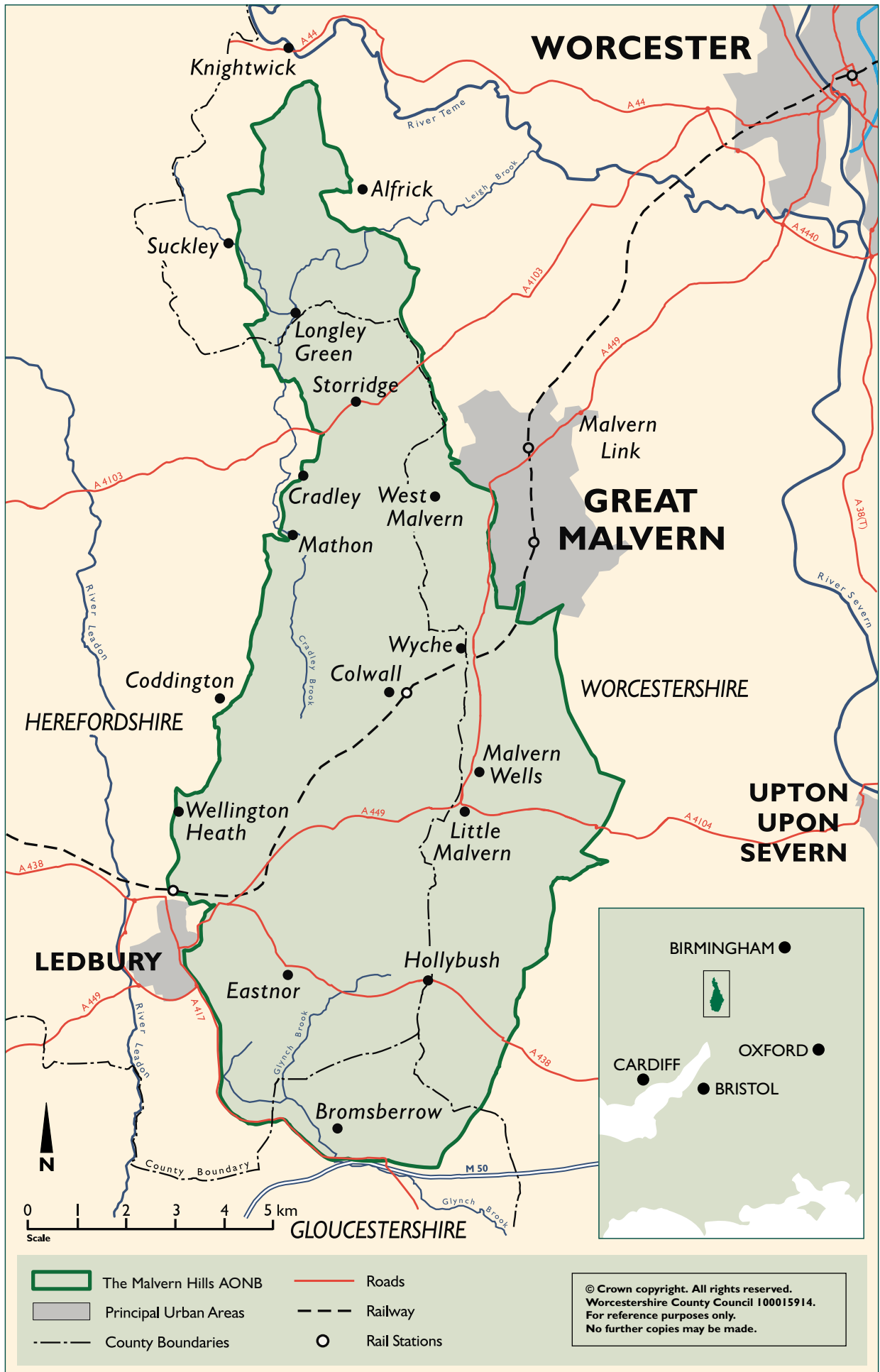


Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Guidance on Keeping Horses
in the Landscape





Outline map of the Malvern Hills AONB

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Introduction

Today around one and a half million horses are kept in the UK for leisure purposes. Keeping horses can be very rewarding and many people find that riding is an enjoyable way to stay fit and healthy. The horse industry is also a very important and valuable industry. It is the second largest employer in rural areas and generates a gross output of £3.4 billion¹.

Horses can have an extremely positive impact on the landscape and play an increasingly important role in grazing areas where other livestock numbers are dwindling. However, as a result of increasing numbers of horses and changes to agricultural practices, they are often kept more intensively now than in the past. Without due care this can affect the quality and character of the landscape and can impact on wildlife and the environment.

This guidance provides advice to help ensure that the impacts of horse keeping are positive. It contains information about how to incorporate landscape and biodiversity enhancement and to limit the potentially negative impacts of horse keeping on the wider environment. Issues of animal health and well-being are only referred to in this guidance where these have relevance to the management of the wider environment.

This guidance is for horse owners and land managers, whether they keep one or two horses at home or run a small-scale livery yard or equine business. It is also for local planning authorities and other relevant authorities who may wish to use it in relation to decision making.

NOTE: It should be noted that in this guidance the term 'horse/s' encompasses horses, ponies, donkeys and mules.

Acknowledgement

This guidance is based on a two-year study that took place between 2007 and 2009. The aim of the study was to research and promote good practice horse pasture management that allows the economic contribution of the horse industry to be realised without negative impacts on the landscape, wildlife and the environment. The study was funded by the South East England Development Agency as part of its Rural Sector Champions programme. The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership acknowledges this and the work of Frances Clayton. A CD of this study is available on request from the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership office.

¹ British Horse Industry Confederation, 'Strategy for the horse industry in England and Wales', 2005.



Grassland management

Managing grazing for horses is a difficult balance between ensuring that grass intake during the spring and autumn is appropriate and ensuring that there is enough grass cover in the winter months. This is especially difficult if you have a variety of horses with different needs or that undertake different levels of work.

Grazing is by far the healthiest and cheapest form of food for your horse so it is worth managing grass well throughout the year. Good pasture management also has benefits for the landscape and wildlife. It can help ensure that soils do not become poached or compacted and that soil erosion, run-off and pollution do not occur as a result of horse keeping.

The grazing needs of horses

- Horses benefit from a high fibre diet of low to mediocre digestibility. This can be provided by a mixed sward grassland, containing a variety of grasses and other plants.
- Horses are browsing grazers, selecting some species over others at different times of the year. A mixed species sward can encourage them to walk around the land that is available to them, searching for the species they prefer and ensuring that some exercise is taken while at pasture.
- Grass swards rich in vigorous, high yielding varieties of ryegrass species and clover are unsuitable for most types of horse and can contribute to obesity and laminitis in pastured horses.

How many horses per hectare?

- As a general rule, one hectare (2.5 acres) of mixed species grassland per horse (500kg+) is highly desirable and allows for resting and rotation as part of a sustainable land management system. This helps avoid the negative impacts of horse keeping, such as poaching, overgrazing and weed encroachment.
- The appropriate stocking density will be influenced by factors including location, soil type and fertility, climate, and by the size/type of horse, their nutritional requirements, and how they are being used (i.e. for domestic or business use and, if for business, by the type of business).
- You may be able to keep horses on a smaller land area by adapting management practices, such as keeping them for longer in stables and yards and providing



Horses grazing on standing hay

supplementary feed. However, this can result in behavioural problems. Gastric ulcers and lacerations can also result if horses go for more than four hours without some forage².

Grasses for horses

The table below lists some grasses that are suitable for horses³.

Grass species
Cocksfoot (<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>)
Common bent (<i>Agrostis capillaries</i>)
Creeping bent (<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>)
Crested dogtail (<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>)
Meadow fescue (<i>Festuca pratensis</i>)
Red fescue (<i>Festuca rubra</i>)
Rough (-stalked) meadow grass (<i>Poa trivialis</i>)
Sheep's fescue (<i>Festuca ovina</i>)
Timothy, catstail (<i>Phleum pratense</i> and <i>Phleum bertolonii</i>)
Tor grass (<i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i>)
Upright brome (<i>Bromus erecta</i>)

The table below lists some other plants that are suitable for horses³

Other plants
Birdsfoot trefoil (<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>)
Black medick, yellow trefoil (<i>Medicago lupulina</i>)
Ribwort plantain (<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>)
Thistles (<i>Cirsium</i> , <i>Carduus</i> , <i>Carlina</i> spp)
Yarrow (<i>Achillea millefolium</i>)

² Clare Mcleod, 'The truth about feeding your horse', 2008

³ Elizabeth O'Beirne Ranelagh, 'Managing grass for horses', 2005

Top tips for managing grassland

- A well planned rotation programme will help prevent damage to the land. Rotation programmes should include resting enough land over the summer so that some fields have longer grass for grazing in the wettest months. To create a longer grass sward for the winter months (foggage/standing hay), rest land from August to mid-November, or after a hay cut or summer grazing rotation. Alternatively you could rest land for the entire growing season (April to November); this allows the grassland to set seed so supports species diversity.
- When it is particularly wet, be prepared to take horses off the land if facilities allow (using barns, stables or yards). Considerable damage can take place in these conditions in a very short time.
- Grazing horses on a mixed species grassland of around 8cm or longer during the winter can help to reduce poaching, maintain the visual quality of the landscape, protect watercourses from run-off, provide forage and material for browsing, and reduce the time horses spend standing around gateways. It also provides a wonderful habitat for wildlife.
- Avoid consistent grazing of grassland to below 2.5cm in height. Such over-grazing can lead to welfare problems in horses, soil erosion and compaction, and the emergence of weed species.
- Where re-seeding is necessary you should opt for a seed mix with little or no ryegrass.
- Grazing often needs to be restricted during the peak growing seasons (May and September). Keeping horses on a yard or stabling and grazing at night when the sugar levels in the grass are lower is preferable to using starvation paddocks which can seriously damage grassland.
- Grazing with sheep or cattle is an effective way to reduce the amount of grass intake for horses, especially during the peak growing seasons. This can be done either by allowing sheep or cattle to graze the land before horses or by grazing them together. Sheep in particular will tidy up latrine areas and control weeds such as ragwort and buttercup. Grazing by other livestock can also help to break the parasite cycle in horse pasture.

Top tips for managing gateways

- Consider using drainage and/or some type of surfacing such as grass matting, wood chip or gravel at gateways. This helps reduce impacts on the landscape by preventing these areas from becoming muddy and poached.



Over-grazed gateway



Grass matting can help to reduce poaching around gateways

- You should provide enough land area over the wettest months and feed in different places. This will also help prevent poaching and reduce the likelihood of associated welfare issues such as mud fever and foot problems.
- Avoid small pastures and the habit of horses frequently coming into stables. This can lead to 'fence walking' which also causes land damage and can become visually intrusive. Consider whether horses can live out all of the time, perhaps with a rug in winter. Further advice is available at www.bluecross.org.uk

Top tips for managing weeds

- Poisonous weeds such as ragwort should be removed. Ideally this should be done by pulling them out by hand (wearing gloves), followed immediately by burning. Ragwort is more palatable, and therefore more dangerous, when it is dry so take particular care not to leave any within reach of horses.



Weed encroachment into pasture

- Other invasive plants such as docks, thistles and nettles can be controlled by cutting or mowing to stop them seeding and spreading, or by digging up or spot treating them with a herbicide such as glyphosate ('Roundup').
- Consider leaving a patch of nettles or thistles somewhere on the land holding for wildlife, particularly butterflies.
- Take a close look at your grassland. How many of the species that you consider to be weeds are actually herbs that are beneficial and palatable to your horses? Try to encourage a mixed sward – this will benefit your horses and wildlife (see page 4).

Top tips for using fertilisers

- Take care when using fertilisers as they increase the fertility of the soil to the detriment of the many plant and sensitive grass species that prefer nutrient poor soils. Applying fertiliser to existing flower rich grassland can be extremely damaging.
- Fertilisers encourage vigorous growth of ryegrass species that have been developed to rely on them; these may increase the risk of obesity and related problems in horses.
- If you feel that fertilising is necessary you should test the pH of the soil first. A FACTS qualified agent aware of the requirements of horses and the benefits of species rich grassland will be able to provide advice.
- If you regularly make hay from the field you may need to apply well-rotted manure every three to five years,

to replace nutrients that are removed in the hay crop. You should not apply more than 20 tonnes per hectare (2.5 acres). Alternatively put sheep on the pasture for a few months to add nutrients to the land through their dung.

Top tips on rolling, harrowing and mowing

- Harrowing helps draw out dead grass so that air, water and nutrients can get to new grass. Bare patches should be sowed with a selective seed mix after harrowing. It can be difficult to decide when to undertake harrowing. The ground is often too wet in mid-winter and if you have ground nesting birds and early flowering plants on your land you will need to avoid the time when they are most vulnerable (late winter to mid-July). Harrowing in hot, dry weather may help kill any parasitic larvae in the grassland.
- Rolling in early spring can level the surface and promote early grass growth. However, on wet ground or heavy clay it can cause compaction which reduces drainage, increases surface run-off and reduces grass growth. Try to avoid rolling; use sheep if possible as their hoof action can even-out the damage caused by horses' hooves.
- Cutting tall ungrazed grass helps prevent latrine areas from being established. You should remove cuttings as they can be harmful to horses. If they are left on the land they will smother plants and lead to over enrichment of the soil.

Top tips on hay making

- If you have excess grass, especially during the peak growing seasons, you may want to make hay for your own use or to sell. You will be sure of its quality (dustiness etc) and content (knowing that it is free of poisonous plants, for example). A local farmer or contractor may be able to make the hay for you.
- Try to cut hay late in July at the earliest so that flowers and grasses can set seed. Graze the pasture over autumn and winter – subject to the condition of the land and poaching – then close it off from April to late July/August. If possible cut the hay from the inside of the field out to give mammals and birds a chance to get out of the way!
- If you take regular hay crops from the same field it may be necessary to use a limited amount of fertiliser infrequently to compensate for the nutrients taken out of the soil through the crop. If you have plenty of land you could take a hay crop only every three years from the same field as part of a rotation system. Graze with horses in year one, graze with sheep in year two and take a hay crop in year three.

Top tips for managing species rich grassland sites and conservation sites

- If you already have species rich grassland it will benefit from a slightly tailored maintenance regime. Think carefully before applying fertiliser as this will have a detrimental effect on valuable plant species and will reduce the diversity of the grassland sward. This could in turn affect your horse.



Species-rich chalk grassland grazed solely by horses

- If you have land that is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Local Wildlife Site you should consult Natural England or your local wildlife trust. You may also be eligible for extra advice and support.
- If your grassland is already species rich you may be subject to Environmental Impact Assessment regulations. This means you will need to carry out a full survey of the grassland before undertaking any changes to its management, such as spraying or ploughing. For more information contact the Freephone Helpline 0800 028 2140, or visit www.defra.gov.uk
- There may be many other valuable wildlife habitats on your land, including wetland, river banks, ponds, orchards, neutral/acid grassland, scrub and woodland. Consider the impacts your activity may have on these habitats carefully. Regular surveys will help you identify what is present and monitor change.

Top tips for enhancing your grassland

Enhancing the species of flora in your grassland, hedgerows and woodland will provide benefits for both your horses and the local wildlife. If you need to reseed your pasture be sure to buy seed of British provenance and one that has a mix of grasses, wildflowers and seed. Try to avoid those that contain perennial ryegrass.

The steps below will help you achieve more diverse grassland:

- Identify what is currently in the grassland. If there is already good diversity, make sure your management techniques continue to support these species. Avoid using fertilisers, allow areas to set seed in rotation by shutting an area off from April to September, and avoid over grazing or poaching.
- If the species are limited in number and you want to increase their diversity you may need to reduce the soil's fertility, especially if it has been fertilised regularly in the past or used for more intensive agriculture such as arable crops or forage grass for dairy cattle. Fertility can be reduced by taking a hay crop for two or three years or by grazing.
- Prepare the ground for sowing seed in the autumn or early spring by grazing hard in the lead up to create patches of bare ground (not poached). Alternatively, scarify the surface of the ground to create bare patches or over seed. Seed can be spread directly by hand or by machine or by spreading green hay from a neighbouring wildflower site.
- Light grazing by livestock after sowing can help work the seed into the soil. If a whole field has been newly sown it should be grazed lightly by sheep or topped regularly in the first year. Horses should be able to start grazing between 12-18 months after sowing.

Further information

For more advice about managing obesity and potential laminitis in horses see the Blue Cross information sheet 'Fat horse slim', visit www.fathorseslim.org.uk, or refer to the British Horse Society leaflet on laminitis, available at www.bhs.org.uk

The Flora Locale Learning Zone provides a step-by-step guide to improving species diversity on your pasture, as well as running courses and offering advice about suppliers of locally produced native seed. For further information visit www.floralocale.org or phone 01488 680 457.

Trees and hedges

Trees and hedgerows provide shade, shelter and a good source of forage. They are also a vital component of the distinctive landscape of the Malvern Hills AONB and bring great benefits to birds, mammals and insects.

As a horse owner or landowner you can contribute to landscape and wildlife enhancement by preserving trees and hedgerows and by planting native varieties in appropriate locations. Planting should always be carried out in accordance with the character of the local landscape. You can achieve this by consulting the relevant Landscape Character Assessment for your area. These assessments are prepared by Worcestershire County Council (www.worcestershire.gov.uk/landscape), Herefordshire Council (www.herefordshire.gov.uk) and the Forest of Dean District Council (www.fdean.gov.uk).

These local authorities also have access to Historic Landscape Characterisations, which you should consult if you are considering planting new boundaries or re-instating historic field boundaries. This will help ensure that any work you do respects the historic character of the area.

Top tips for planting and managing trees and hedges

- Look at established hedgerows and trees in your area to identify the species they contain and in what proportions. You can then try to replicate this with any new planting.



Newly laid hedge at Petty France

- Avoid planting non-native species such as laurel, privet and conifers on boundaries, around maneges or to camouflage buildings. These can detract from the local character of the landscape and make the very thing you are trying to conceal stand out more.
- Avoid planting species such as yew, laburnum, laurel and privet which are poisonous for horses.



Inappropriate hedge species

- If you would like to plant a native species hedge try to buy plants that have been grown in your local area as these are more likely to survive. Choose bare root stock and plant from November to February. For guidance on planting techniques visit the websites of the Woodland Trust (www.woodlandtrust.org.uk) and the Wildlife Trust (www.wildlifetrusts.org). A number of different organisations run tree and hedge planting courses, including the BTCV (www.btcv.org).
- Prevent your horse from browsing hedges and trees too heavily – over time the damage this causes can kill the tree or hedge. It is an offence to damage trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order or those growing in a Conservation Area. It is also an offence to remove most countryside hedgerows without first submitting a hedgerow removal notice. Contact your relevant local authority for further information.



Hedge planting protected from horses with suitable fencing

- Prevent grazing damaging to fruit trees in traditional orchards. This sort of grazing damage is a particular concern since traditional orchards are important elements of the historic landscape and biodiversity of the Malvern Hills AONB.
- Protect individual or groups of veteran or specimen trees with parkland style guards. Most fencing and tree/hedge companies supply tree guards that prevent rabbits from chewing young trees and hedging plants. Remember that the girth of the tree will expand as the tree grows and so guards will need to be checked regularly and loosened over time.



Tree guards prevent damage by horses

- Newly planted and specimen or veteran trees will probably need to be protected. Fences need to be at least two metres away from newly planted hedges to take account of the long reach of a horse.
- Leave berries on hedges as long as possible to provide winter food for birds. You should avoid cutting during the bird breeding season (between 1 March and 31 July). All wild birds, their eggs, young and nests are protected by law.
- Hedgerow fruit is only found on old wood so do not cut hedges more than every two to three years. Ideally this should be in January or February. If ground conditions do not allow machinery onto land at this time you should try to cut as late in the autumn as possible.

Further information

Advice on hedgerow management can be found at www.defra.gov.uk and www.hedgeline.org.uk

A brief summary of the law is provided in the leaflet, 'The Hedgerows Regulations: Your questions answered'. More detailed guidance is available in 'The Hedgerows Regulations 1997: A guide to the law and good practice'. Both are available free of charge by emailing farmland.conservation@defra.gsi.gov.uk



Leave berries on trees and hedges as long as possible to provide winter food for birds

Fencing and boundaries

Your choice of materials and where you site fencing has considerable implications for the wider landscape. Sensitive and well thought out fencing accompanied by careful grazing can enhance species rich grassland, wildlife abundant hedgerows and the visual landscape. Conversely, a plethora of fields sub-divided by inappropriate materials is often associated with poor land management.

Fencing should always be carried out in accordance with local landscape character and you should consult the relevant Landscape Character Assessment and the Historic Landscape Characterisations for your area (see page 8).

Top tips for fencing and boundaries

- Horses are herd animals so allow them to run as a group as much as possible rather than grazing separately in small paddocks.
- Make sure that field sizes are large enough and that there is sufficient grass and/or supplementary forage for there to be no competition over resources.



Field size should respect landscape character

- Landscape character should influence where you position fencing. When you are considering new fence lines, take account of the contours of the land, how existing trees and hedges fit in and where existing fencing would tie in. The historic character of the area is also important. Historic field boundaries such as hedges and walls should be retained and it may be desirable to place new boundary features along the lines of historical ones.
- Fencing small, uniform rectangles is unlikely to suit even the least open of landscapes and should be avoided, particularly when using visually intrusive materials such as machine finished post and rail fencing.

- Permanent sub-division of fields should be kept to an absolute minimum. The scale of the landscape is one of the most important elements of landscape character and should not be compromised.
- Landscape character should influence the design of any fencing and the materials used. Hedgerows, ditches and locally sourced timber are traditional means of enclosure; think about what would have been used in the past and what impact modern materials may have. Use low impact materials to reduce the visual impact of fencing.
- Avoid machine finished post and rail (especially when coloured), which is expensive, tends to be eaten by horses and soon becomes a burden to maintain. It also looks incongruous in most landscape settings and so detracts from the quality of the landscape.



Visually insensitive ranch-style fencing

- Never use trees instead of fence posts when putting in a fence as this will harm the tree by potentially introducing disease or restricting its growth.
- Use a horse-friendly wire netting, such as Equi-fence or Tornado Fencing which has far less visual impact when used without a top wooden rail. It is high tensile, durable, and designed specifically for use with horses. A strand of plain electric wire, rope or dark coloured tape can be added along the top to prevent horses from leaning on the fence. This fencing is generally cheaper than post and rail, and requires fewer wooden uprights and less maintenance.



Landscape sensitive and horse-friendly wire fencing

- Avoid creating individual turnout patches, small permanent enclosures or starvation paddocks – there are other ways to reduce grass intake when necessary (see page 5).
- If you need to use semi-permanent fencing use wooden or dark green/brown posts and dark green, brown or black tape, or electric rope.
- If you need to use temporary fencing to restrict grazing, wooden or dark plastic posts with electric rope or dark coloured electric tape are most appropriate. Coloured tape is no more expensive than white tape, lasts as long and is just as effective (horses can see natural colours most easily).
- Keep fences well maintained to prevent flapping wire and remove temporary fencing when not in use.
- Make use of existing natural boundaries such as hedges when fencing around outdoor arenas and do not fence around arenas unless necessary. Choose fencing materials that will have less impact on the landscape such as chestnut cleft fencing, black rubber and local fencing timber and use fewer rails.



Dark electric tape and wooden posts providing visually sensitive fencing



Visually insensitive electric tape

- Plant native hedges along boundaries where this is in accordance with local landscape character.
- Check whether you need planning permission to keep horses (see page 15) and to erect fencing. Fencing of more than one metre in height that is adjacent to a highway will generally require planning permission. Elsewhere, fencing over two metres in height will require planning permission. Development Control Officers can put conditions on planning permissions as to the type of fencing that can be used, so think carefully about your choice of materials when submitting an application.



Hedging can screen fencing

Waste management

A horse of average-size produces 7.5 tonnes of manure a year. Traditionally this has been spread on fields as fertiliser and this is still the Environment Agency's preferred method of manure management. The storage and disposal of manure can impact on neighbours, water quality, species diversity and land quality. A well thought out plan for these issues is therefore imperative. Careful consideration also needs to be given to which bedding material to use and how to dispose of it properly.

Key facts about waste regulations

- Anyone who keeps horses and ponies has a 'duty of care' to make sure that horse manure is stored and disposed of correctly. The Environment Agency regulations state:

"The Duty of Care requires that you ensure all waste is stored and disposed of responsibly, that it is only handled or dealt with by individuals or companies that are authorised to deal with it and that a record is kept of all wastes received or transferred through a system of signed Waste Transfer Notes." Details of registered carriers and permitted sites can be found on the Environment Agency's website at <http://www2.environment-agency.gov.uk/epr/>
- A waste carrier who is paid to transport manure must be registered with the Environment Agency. If you transport waste that belongs to you then you do not need to register. If the manure is used as a fertiliser then it is not waste so the requirements to use a registered waste carrier and transfer notes do not apply.
- Environment Agency guidelines for stables state that the following is **mandatory**:

"Run-off from manure heaps, contaminated yards, stable washings and hay soaking should not be allowed to enter surface waters or watercourses unless a written authorisation (a discharge consent) has been received from your Environmental Regulator."
- Open burning of manure as a controlled waste is an offence under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It may also be an offence under the Clean Air Act 1993.
- Effluent leaching from large manure piles can have serious pollution implications and offences are prosecutable.

⁴ Temporary means 12 months and may not return until three years later.

Top tips for managing waste

- One of the best ways for small-scale horse owners to manage their manure is to compost it at home in a properly constructed manure store. It is generally accepted that once manure has been composted for 12 months the larvae of harmful parasites will have died.
- Composted horse manure is valuable to gardeners and allotment holders; you may be able to bag it up and leave it at an accessible gateway for local people to pick up.
- Manure from commercial yards can be treated in the same way as it is treated by private horse owners. It can be spread on land as fertiliser provided the rate of application does not cause pollution or exceed the needs of crops or the soil.
- Bedding materials such as wood shavings, shredded paper and cardboard can be composted before spreading to make best use of the nutrients.
- Good practice guidelines from the Environment Agency include the following: *"Temporary field⁴ heaps should be sited where there is no risk of run-off polluting watercourses. They should be at least 10 metres from a watercourse and 50 metres from a well, spring or borehole that supplies water for human consumption or for use in farm dairies."* Field heaps should also not be placed over field drains.
- *"Permanent stores should have an impermeable base that slopes so that run-off can be collected easily in a sealed underground tank."*

A well-constructed permanent manure store must therefore have a concrete base, which slopes to the back of the store (in the absence of a sealed underground tank). It should also have solid sides that prevent the muck spilling out and contaminating adjacent land. Ideally, the muck should be kept as dry as possible.



Permanent manure store

- The guiding principles of waste management are 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle'. Can you reduce the amount of time your horse spends in the stable to cut down on bedding and feed waste? Can you reduce the amount of bedding you use, perhaps by using rubber matting? Can you choose a more readily biodegradable bedding material such as paper or straw? And can you reduce or recycle feed packaging?
- Consider whether you could reduce the variety of feed stuffs you are using. For example are you using two feeds that provide similar nutritional value?
- Water is an increasingly precious commodity. Check water troughs around the stables and in fields regularly to make sure there are no leaks. Minimise use where you can and install water butts to collect water run-off from stables and other buildings to use for scrubbing boots and horses' hooves.

- Burning or burying plastics on your site is illegal. You can temporarily store your own plastic in a secure place and arrange for it to be collected by contractors for recycling. Small yards/individuals could explore the possibility of forming a 'plastics cooperative' with their neighbours where waste plastic can be taken to a central collection point and the cost of collection can be split.

Further information

For more information on waste legislation contact the Environment Agency on 08708 506 506

www.environment-agency.gov.uk. The Environment Agency's Pollution Prevention and Guidance note, which covers waste from kennels, catteries and stables is also available on the website as is additional guidance for owners of stables and livery yards.

You can use the recycling directory on www.wasterecycling.org.uk to search for facilities in your local area.



Manure storage at a livery yard ready for removal

Buildings and other structures

Even keeping horses on the smallest scale is likely to require development of some kind and it is rare for equestrian development not to need planning permission. If you are at all unsure about whether or not you need permission you should check. Regardless of the type of development proposed – be it a simple field shelter, stabling or new access and tracks – consideration will need to be given to a number of factors including siting, scale, design, materials, colour and landscaping. Fitting in with the character of the landscape should be a key consideration.

Light pollution is a growing concern. External lighting can make a site appear very prominent in the landscape and affect the valued sense of rurality. Any planning applications should set out clearly whether or not artificial lighting is proposed, and if so, how light pollution will be minimised.

It is possible that an over-concentration of horse paddocks and/or associated structures in any one area can have a cumulative harmful impact on the local landscape. This should be avoided.

Security is usually a key concern when keeping horses. Applications to change the use of land to horse keeping or to erect infrastructure to house horses should usually only come forward where security can be provided through an existing dwelling on site. Where this is not possible those who wish to keep a horse in the AONB should consider using a commercial livery.

Top tips for buildings and other infrastructure

- It is your responsibility to ascertain whether or not planning permission is required for any development. Contact your Local Planning Authority for pre-application advice before submitting a formal application.
- Where possible, existing buildings should be used and new structures should be kept to a minimum.
- New buildings, shelters, or arenas are best located within existing farmsteads or groups of buildings, rather than in open countryside. Where possible, avoid open fields or remote corners.
- Consider carefully where any developments will be sited and what materials they will be constructed from. Take care to minimise impacts on the surroundings and ensure that developments are appropriate to the landscape.

- Consider your neighbours and try to minimise any impacts on them.
- New tracks should follow the contours of the land and surface dressings should blend with the surrounding landscape.
- Choosing the right natural materials and roof colour can be enormously effective in helping your new building to blend into the surrounding landscape.
- Keep lighting to the minimum required for working and security purposes. Always minimise light spill by angling lighting to the ground and by using night sky friendly lamps.
- Consider making space for wildlife in buildings – barn owl boxes, ledges for swallows and house martins or bat bricks will be valuable additions.
- Choose a relatively level site and avoid excessive cut and fill. Avoid artificial mounding of soil.
- Surface dressing should blend with the surrounding landscape, ideally as close to the colour of the local soil as possible. Avoid synthetic materials; materials such as sustainably sourced wood chip, sand, or sand mixed with natural fibres are recommended.



Stables built into an existing building



Horse outside stables

Planning permission

Planning permission is usually required to use land for keeping horses for non-agricultural purposes and development. This includes stable blocks, hard standing, exercise arenas, hay barns, feed stores, tack rooms, new gateways, tracks or access points on to highways, permanent jumps, and lighting. It also includes engineering works such as moving earth.

Sub-dividing agricultural land into paddocks with shelters for horses is likely to be regarded as a material change to recreational use, and will require planning permission.

In a limited number of cases proposals may be considered 'permitted development' under planning regulations, which, subject to certain criteria, do not require planning permission. The 'grazing' of horses is deemed to be an agricultural use and does not require planning permission.

What is the difference between 'grazing' and the 'keeping' of horses?

The use of land for grazing horses or ponies does not require planning permission so long as the majority of the animal's food is obtained from the land being grazed. However, if the grazing is part of a commercial activity, such as a livery, or if other activities take place on the land, this will require planning permission.

Current legal precedent helps illustrate this point. The Sykes Test suggests that if the predominant purpose is for the horses to survive off the land from the grass (which could include feeding hay made on the holding), this equates to 'grazing'. However if the predominant purpose is simply to provide a location for horses to live and they receive supplementary feeding from elsewhere outside the holding, then that is regarded as the 'keeping' of horses on the land.

Should I seek advice on planning matters?

As planning policies, case law and regulations change from time to time it is always advisable to contact your local planning authority to discuss what you have in mind. As well as providing valuable advice, it may well save you time and money. Local planning authorities can, and do, order unauthorised developments to be dismantled.

AONBs have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty and this will be given great weight in local planning policies and decisions on planning applications in these areas.

Further information

For more details on the planning system in relation to horses see the Country Land and Business Association guide at www.cla.org.uk.

You can find out more information on the planning system in general at www.planningportal.gov.uk

Information is also available from 'A farmer's guide to the planning system' which is available at www.defra.gov.uk

Funding support

Funding is available to support good landscape and wildlife management. The schemes outlined below cover the whole of England. To find out about other local schemes contact your local authority, wildlife trust or the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership Office.

The Single Payment Scheme

The Single Payment Scheme has replaced traditional subsidy payments for farmers and landowners, including equestrian land owners. All land for which Single Farm Payment is claimed must be kept in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). Horses are accepted as grazers to help achieve this so long as the land is neither undergrazed nor overgrazed. For more information visit www.defra.gov.uk

Environmental Stewardship

You may be eligible for Environmental Stewardship grants to maintain existing features and deliver significant environmental benefits in high priority situations.

The Entry Level Scheme (ELS) is open to all farmers and landowners and works on a points basis. Points are gained for a variety of management options; those that are most likely to be suitable for horse owners include:

- boundary features,
- trees and woodland,
- historic and landscape features,
- buffer strips on grassland, and
- some of the lowland grassland options.

Agreements under ELS are for five years. All holdings need to be registered with the Rural Land Registry.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) is a competitive application process and applications have to be supported by a Farm Environment Plan. This Scheme is more suited to larger applications which enhance and maintain biodiversity, historic environment, landscape, access and resource protection. Agreements are for ten years.

For more information about these schemes visit www.naturalengland.org.uk

The following bodies provide financial support to the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership



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