

Guidance on Horse-related Development

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A quick note on terminology

On 22 November 2023 the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), was re-branded as the Malvern Hills National Landscape. National Landscapes are designated AONBs. Consequently, the name Malvern Hills National Landscape is commonly used throughout this document. However, since ‘AONB’ remains the legal name for the designation, this term is also used in appropriate places, for example, when referring to the Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan, which is a statutory plan, or when directly quoting from older documents. The name used for the partnership associated with the designation is the Malvern Hills National Landscape Partnership.

1. Introduction

Horses in the Malvern Hills National Landscape

The Malvern Hills National Landscape is renowned for its landscape and scenic beauty. Both natural and cultural influences have combined to produce the landscape that is so highly valued today. The way that the land is used and the buildings within it also make a key contribution to the special character and local distinctiveness of the area.

The keeping of horses can have a very positive impact on the landscape, but it also has the

potential to introduce new buildings, structures, and equipment into the countryside. Without due care, these can affect both the quality and character of the landscape.

Please note that this guidance is a companion document to the previously published Malvern Hills AONB 'Guidance on Keeping Horses in the Landscape,' where further advice and information about good practice in horse management can be found¹.

The purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to encourage those thinking about equine development to carefully consider the potential impact such development can have on the special qualities of the Malvern Hills National Landscape. By paying careful attention to matters such as siting, layout and design, new equine development can sit comfortably within this nationally important landscape and help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. Development proposals in the setting² of the Malvern Hills National Landscape can also have impacts on the National Landscape itself and the advice in this document applies to these areas also³.

The Malvern Hills National Landscape covers a wide geographical area and falls under five administrative bodies at county, unitary and district level⁴. Therefore, this guidance also aims to encourage a consistent, 'good practice' approach across the Malvern Hills National Landscape and its setting.

Who this document is for

This document provides guidance for everyone considering equine development within the Malvern Hills National Landscape and its setting. This may include horse owners, land managers, land agents, architects and landscape architects and agents. It is also targeted at those with responsibility for setting the planning framework for development and for decision-making about individual planning applications.

Every equine development, from the building of stables and arenas to new gates and fencing, has the potential to make a positive or negative contribution to the Malvern Hills National Landscape. The guidance in this document will help those who value this area to make sure that future developments contribute to conserving and enhancing its special qualities⁵.

Status of this guidance

This guidance document has been produced to help deliver the Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan which '*formulates local authority policy for the management of the AONB*

¹ <https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/our-work/publications>

² Paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).

³ For more information on the 'setting' of the Malvern Hills National Landscape, please refer to the Position Statement on Development and Land Use Change in the setting of the Malvern Hills National Landscape.

⁴ Herefordshire Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Worcestershire County Council and Gloucestershire County Council.

⁵ <https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/19-24-MHAONB-Management-Plan.pdf> - refer to Page 9 - 'Special Qualities of the Malvern Hills AONB'

and for the carrying out of their functions in relations to it (Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). The Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan, and its associated guidance, is a material planning consideration in decision-making by local planning authorities⁶.

Using the guidelines within this document will also help relevant authorities to meet their statutory duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty⁷⁸.

The need for this guidance

The riding and keeping of horses for both commercial and domestic purposes brings great pleasure to many people. The economic benefit of these activities to the countryside is acknowledged but it is also essential to make sure that horse-related development does not impact on the special qualities of the Malvern Hills National Landscape. Even small developments may have a relatively large impact on the landscape.

The planning issues this guidance seeks to address are:

- stables, field shelters, manèges (outdoor schools), jumps, fencing and equine equipment;
- the subdividing of agricultural land into smaller-scale paddocks;
- damage to vegetation, soil structure and cover;
- adverse impacts on nature conservation; and
- pollution from manure heaps

For further advice and information about good practice in horse management, please refer to the Malvern Hills National Landscape 'Guidance on Keeping Horses in the Landscape.'

2. Horses and the Planning Framework

Local Plans are the starting point for assessing any development proposal⁹. All the Local Plans which cover the Malvern Hills National Landscape refer to the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated AONB. Some of these plans also contain policies relating to equestrian development.

This guidance document encourages the adoption of good practice by developers and applicants. Nevertheless, advice should always be sought from the relevant local planning authority before submitting planning applications, preferably including pre-application advice. We also recommend that all equine related planning applications include an equine management plan, which sets out how the land will be cared for, if planning permission is

⁶ A material planning consideration is a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application or on an appeal against a planning decision.

⁷ In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect AONB land in England (Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000).

⁸ [Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.levelling-up-and-regeneration.gov.uk)

⁹ <https://www.swdevelopmentplan.org/> <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/local-plan-1/local-plan-2021-2041>
<https://www.fdean.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/our-current-local-plan>

granted. We have helped to identify the details that should be submitted in such a plan in Appendix 1, at the end of this guidance document.

The AONB Management Plan is a material planning consideration in decision-making. However, it must be acknowledged that, in a plan-led planning system, it is the policies of the relevant adopted local authority development plan that have the greatest weight. As such, within this planning system, the hierarchy is as follows¹⁰:

Decision-making is taken in accordance with the adopted development plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The adopted development plan comprises the Local Planning Authority Development Plan and any 'made' Neighbourhood Development Plan.

The Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan, like the National Planning Policy Framework, is a material planning consideration but does not form part of the adopted development plan. Malvern Hills National Landscape Position Statements and guidance documents supplement the AONB Management Plan.

If you are thinking of using any land for equestrian use, you need to make sure the correct permissions are in place before such a change of use commences. In determining whether planning permission is needed, the local planning authority will look at factors such as:

- whether the field will be used permanently for horses;
- whether the horses will be fed primarily from grazing or from other sources;
- where and how often you ride the horses (including within the field);
- whether there will be any related structures on the land such as field shelters, stables, and jumps;
- whether it is for a private or commercial purpose; and
- what the land is currently being used for.

All of this information can be presented in a simple equine land management plan (refer to Appendix 1).

It is accepted that the use of land for simply grazing horses or ponies does not require planning permission, as this is considered to be an agricultural use¹¹. However, planning permission is likely to be required if:

- the land area is not large enough to support year-round feeding and additional feed is needed;

¹⁰ In England, Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states: "If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise." The National Planning Policy Framework is itself a significant material consideration, although it is acknowledged regarding the presumption in favour of sustainable development under Paragraph 11, particularly in relation to plan-making and decision-making. On Wednesday 13 September 2023, the DEFRA Secretary of State tabled a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) setting out a package of measures to support nature recovery in Protected Landscapes. The package includes a commitment to new legislation through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023), which will enhance National Park and AONB Management Plans by placing a stronger requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery.

¹¹ This is within the definition of agriculture, as currently defined in Section 336(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990), as grazing animals is included irrespective of the type of animal.

- horses are turned out on the land mainly for exercise;
- rugging the horses and/ or riding on the land is taking place;
- the land is subdivided into paddocks and shelters, where this is associated with recreation rather than agriculture; or
- grazing is part of a commercial activity, such as livery, or if other activities take place on the land.

3. Horse-related development considerations

Siting of stables or shelters

Three-sided, open fronted field shelters require planning permission if they are fixed in a permanent position and have solid floors. Mobile field shelters may not require planning permission, but they must be fully capable of being moved within the land and must be moved at least annually. Most stables and other buildings related to the keeping of horses require planning permission, although there may be some exceptions for stables/loose boxes erected within the curtilage of dwelling houses for horses '*kept as pet animals for the domestic needs or personal enjoyment of the occupants of the dwelling house.*' In accordance with good practice, it is recommended that you only apply for sufficient stabling to keep the number of horses that can be sustainably supported on the land holding¹².

Wherever possible, attempts should be made to avoid the need for new development through the reuse or conversion of existing buildings.

When new horse-related development is necessary, it should preferably relate to any existing buildings. This is especially important where the stables or shelters are close to historic farmsteads as the historic patterns of buildings and the land within and around them should be conserved. The advice provided in the Malvern Hills National Landscape Guidance on Building Design should be closely followed and the aim should always be to integrate new buildings sensitively into the landscape¹³.

When developing in a new location the building(s) should be sited as inconspicuously as possible, so important viewpoints in the surrounding landscape should be identified to determine the visual impact of any development. Even small developments can affect the landscape and people's enjoyment of it. The Malvern Hills National Landscape Guidance on Identifying and Grading Views and Viewpoints provides non-technical advice to help people assess views and development impacts on them.

Generally, new buildings should relate to existing features and respect the lie of the land, so isolated, elevated or skyline sites should be avoided. The use of earth mounding and cutting into the ground to change levels should also be avoided.

¹² It is recommended that one hectare (2.5 acres) of mixed species grassland be provided per horse (500kg+)

¹³ Malvern Hills National Landscape – Guidance on Building Design – Section 7: Farmsteads and agricultural buildings

Wherever possible, buildings should be sited to benefit from the natural folds in the land and from existing trees and woodland to both minimise the impact of new development and to maximise protection from the weather.

Materials and design of buildings

The design of prefabricated stables is often 'off the shelf' and fairly standard and in less sensitive areas is likely to be an acceptable option if appropriately sited. These stables are likely to be constructed of timber. In a protected landscape like the Malvern Hills National Landscape, consideration of materials is important. Ideally, stables should be treated with a dark stained preservative/finish such as RAL Black-grey 7021/NCS 8502-B, or a 50/50 mix of black and a warm red-brown such as rosewood. This should help to ensure the structure does not stand out unduly in the landscape. The choice of colour should be made in relation to the context in which development will be viewed. Guidance produced by the National Landscape on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development can assist in this regard¹⁴.

A dark coloured felt is often the least intrusive roof covering for small stables. For a more substantial stable roof, fibre cement roofing sheets provide a durable solution. Dark coloured roofing sheets or tiles, for example RAL 7015 slate grey/NCS 7005-R80B should be used since these will help the building recede within the landscape and minimize glare.

Metal buildings and roofs are also another option, but these are often more problematic because metal sheets – even dark ones – will reflect light in certain conditions. Even small buildings can stand out in the landscape if the finish is shiny or if the colours chosen are too light or unsuitable. The choice of colour and finish is therefore crucial. Light roofs including some standard shades, such as 'Goose Wing Grey' and certain standard greens such as 'Juniper Green,' should be avoided. Darker roofs and elevations are recommended. Colour choices for metal walls and roofs should be informed by the Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour, which provides a range of colour suggestions in palettes appropriate for each landscape character type area of the National Landscape¹⁵. Profile sheeting may not be available in the full range of colours suggested by the guidance but there should be 'off the shelf' colours available which are a close match. For example, Meadowscape (Anthracite) - NCSS 6052Y. A matt, leather grain finish is recommended for metal sheeting to minimise glare.

Wherever possible, for permanent buildings, the use of traditional materials and finishes will be encouraged, especially where new stables and barns are located close to older farmsteads. New buildings should take their design cues from the immediate vicinity and may include materials such as red brick, Malvern stone, dark stained waney edge timber, rough cut timber cladding and clay tiles, depending on locality.

Jumps

¹⁴ https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/guidance_on_colour_use_screen-1.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MalvernLandStratGuideLoResFinal_000.pdf

Brightly coloured jumps left in position after use can be visually intrusive in open countryside. Planning conditions may be imposed that require jumps to be removed after use and stored off site. Jumps that are affixed to the ground do require planning permission and should preferably be constructed of unpainted natural materials e.g. for hunter trials and cross-country events. Ideally, jump wings should be coloured dark brown/black or another colour which ensures they do not stand out. The poles and fillers should also be of a colour finish that is unobtrusive and not brightly coloured. Wherever possible, poles and fillers should be stored overnight.

Lighting

A sense of remoteness and tranquillity, underpinned by dark night skies and limited noise and disturbance is one of the special qualities of the Malvern Hills National Landscape. The lighting of stables and other equine buildings should be kept to the minimum required for safe working and should comply with guidance provided in the Malvern Hills National Landscape Guidance on Lighting in order to reduce light pollution. Lighting arenas within or close to the Malvern Hills National Landscape will be discouraged.

National and local planning policies also strictly control new residential development in the open countryside outside boundaries of recognised settlements. That means that it is highly unlikely that planning permission would be granted in the open countryside for a new dwelling for occupation in conjunction with stabling¹⁶.

Manèges / Arenas

Manèges are increasingly included in equine planning applications and can have a large impact on the surrounding landscape. As a flat surface is needed for a manège it is essential to choose a level location where the re-contouring of the land surface is not necessary. In the often hilly landscapes of the Malvern Hills National Landscape this may be a challenge but the use of cut and fill to create terraces should be avoided as it creates unnatural landscape features. Positioning manèges on skylines and within important views should also be avoided.

As with new equine buildings, a manège should sit close to other development wherever possible so that it 'reads' as part of the existing complex and can take advantage of existing buildings, trees, and woodland to minimise its impact in the landscape. When deciding on the size of the manège it is also important to consider the local landscape character and the space needed to develop surrounding access paths, track ways and gates, since this may be considerable. These elements too should be sensitively designed.

Manège fencing should be in an appropriate design reflecting local fencing styles and agricultural in appearance. Dark staining may help it recede within views and sensitive planting of native hedge and tree species close by can help soften the effect. Rigid, straight lines of planting along fence lines may need to be avoided as this can further emphasise the

¹⁶ Unless in accordance with Paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

un-natural shape of a manège within the landscape. Wet leaves can also be dangerous for riders if they fall on arena surfaces so allow space between the arena and the planting.

The surface materials of the ménage should, if possible, be dark in colour to avoid glare and to reduce general visibility but note that some dark sands may provide a riding surface which is unsuitable for use in an arena. Certain surfaces may not be suitable for sports horses jumping at higher levels and for dressage horses which are performing at an elite/professional level, although we would encourage darker materials surfaces wherever possible and any alternatives should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Care should be taken to avoid materials often branded as 'recycled' (such as from carpet rubber or recycled tyres) where these may be harmful to the environment.

Enclosure

Whilst planning permission is not always required for enclosure, it is an integral part of the overall application. The most common form of field enclosure used is post and rail fencing which should always reflect local designs and materials, but the impact of fencing could be considerably softened by planting a native hedge alongside, where appropriate to landscape character. Once established this can also provide extra foraging for horses and shade and shelter.

The enclosure and sub-division of paddocks is of particular concern because these tend to be much smaller than the size and shape of traditional fields in the Malvern Hills National Landscape, eroding the local landscape pattern. The hard grazing in these smaller 'starvation' paddocks can also change the appearance of the grass sward in each area, further leading to adverse alterations and loss of landscape character. A mixed sward instead of rye grass can avoid this scenario as horses can be kept on a larger area and avoid laminitis issues, which is often the reason for subdivision. Where field patterns have been enlarged over time it is important to ensure that any sub-division of them respects historic field patterns and boundary lines.

Where temporary subdivision is needed, this should be achieved using darker tape and posts. White tape is usually visually intrusive in this protected landscape, as are brightly coloured electric posts. Green or brown tape and posts are preferable. Post and rail fencing should not be painted white, or any other bright colour for this reason. Gates should be traditional wooden, or metal farm gates and the introduction of more suburban designed gates and gate piers should be avoided.

Access and services

New accesses will almost always need planning permission, certainly when accessing onto a classified public highway. Wherever possible existing field gates should be used to gain access to stables, manèges and paddocks. Hedgerow and wall removal, including between fields, should be avoided (and may itself need permission under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997). The width and length of any new access formed should be kept to the minimum necessary for safety and practicality.

New buildings should be sited to minimize the need for new trackways wherever possible. Where needed, access tracks should be sensitively routed, working with existing landscape contours, or

following the lines of historic trackways, avoiding them being routed directly across fields or using cut and fill.

Construction details for the trackway should reflect its anticipated level of use, the nature of the ground and drainage. In most situations an unbound or semi-bound surface will be sufficient for a lightly trafficked site and will be suitable for use by horses. Fully bound surfaces such as asphalt, bitumen or concrete will usually be inappropriate. Trackways should be of a rural appearance, constructed using local materials where possible; stone or crushed stone top dressings should be local or in a dark colour to avoid standing out in the landscape or should be matched to the colour of local stone. Reinforced grass tracks may be an option for lightly trafficked sites in areas which are particularly sensitive in terms of landscape and wildlife. Areas needed for car parking, turning, and unloading should also be included in any application.

Services such as water and electricity are often required on larger equine sites and care should be taken that unsightly overhead wires are not used unless no other alternative is available. Where the undergrounding of cabling is considered, advice should be sought from the relevant Local Authority.

The storage of manure also requires careful planning. A single horse can produce 50 pounds of manure per day which is 9 tonnes annually. The collection of manure and any spreading is likely to require hard surfaced areas and vehicle access so this, as well as any storage facilities, should be part of any planning application for equine development. Storage of dung on site should be carefully sited and carried out in such a manner as not to endanger or pollute the surrounding land or water environment through seepage into water courses, taking advice from the Environment Agency.

Planting

Planting may be used to reduce the adverse effects of development, but this should always complement or reflect existing or historical tree and hedge cover. The starting point for any application should be good design rather than mitigation, especially now that so many tree species are suffering from tree diseases and may not be long lived. Hedges and informal groups of trees will usually appear more natural than screening along site edges or building boundaries. Non-native trees should be avoided.

New planting should almost always consist of native trees and shrubs appropriate to the Malvern Hills National Landscape and it is important to always match tree species to site conditions to make sure they thrive. Suggestions for suitable trees and shrubs are provided in the Malvern Hills National Landscape Guidance on Keeping Horses in the Landscape.

The Malvern Hills National Landscape is an area with many important wildlife sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), these are indicated on development plan proposal maps and should always be avoided both for development and for landscaping, although horses can sometimes be valuable grazers on such sites.

4. Additional advice and information

It is strongly recommended that early consultation and pre-application advice discussions are held with your local planning authority to ensure that you are aware of all relevant planning policy for any horse-related development you are proposing and to avoid running into potential issues when a planning application is submitted. As well as the guidance referred to throughout this document, further advice on the management of land for keeping horses is available from the British Horse Society¹⁷.

¹⁷ <https://www.bhs.org.uk/>

Appendix 1 – Conservation-based Equine Management Plan

A well thought out conservation-based Land Management Plan submitted alongside a planning application will help to provide comprehensive information to the planning authority. All management plans should establish a broad aim for the site and then a series of actions needed for this to be achieved. The broad aim should cover equine health/needs, conservation objectives, restoring field boundaries where appropriate, enhancing features that contribute to landscape character and managing land to support good water quality. It should include the following information:

- Current land use and the extent of the land holding.
- Number and type of horses, ponies, donkeys, or mules, including breed, height, weight, use.
- Any other livestock that may be grazed alongside equines on the site; mixed grazing can help with managing land positively.
- Amount of land available for turnout and grazing (owned/rented), it may be that additional land may be available off site to allow for resting and rotation of the land.
- Type of land, soil type, topography, and grass sward type. MAGIC is an online mapping system which provides a useful source of site-specific information on these areas.¹⁸
- Detail on land management objectives, e.g. will the horse receive most or all of its nutrients from the land, if biodiversity is a key aim how will grazing by horses help, if land is for limited turnout only where will horses spend the rest of the time and how will poaching and over grazing be prevented?
- What resting and rotation programme will be in place? Is there enough land to shut some up over the summer for standing hay, will horses be moved to another site when necessary to rest land?
- Parasite control regime to prevent latrine areas building up and over grazing. This might include daily dung removal, resting land for extended periods, mixed grazing with other livestock and regular worm counts.
- Weed management, how will overgrazing be prevented and how will notifiable weeds (ragwort) and other invasive weeds (docks, Creeping Buttercup) be controlled?
- What land management techniques will be used, such as rolling, harrowing, fertilising, reseeding? These should largely be unnecessary if good land management practices are in place on horse grazed land.
- How will damage to land be prevented in wet weather, especially on clay soils? E.g. will horses be stabled, kept on hard standing, turned out in arenas in wet conditions.
- Managing excessive seasonal growth. Laminitis and obesity are serious issues in equines and frequently these are managed by creating 'starvation paddocks' which have a negative landscape and biodiversity impact.
- Fencing proposals – permanent/non-permanent, where will they be sited? What materials will be used?

¹⁸ www.magic.gov.uk

- Details of how waste (manure and bedding in particular) will be stored, managed, and disposed.

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