

27 June 2022

Jacqui Wheeler  
Parks and Countryside Access Officer  
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead  
The Town Hall  
St Ives Road  
MAIDENHEAD SL6 1RF

Dear Jacqui,

### **Trial of permissive horse riding access at Thriftwood Extension to Ockwells Park**

I am writing to thank you and all who have been involved in implementing the trial permissive horse riding scheme at Ockwells Park.

As you know, equestrians are increasingly concerned about having to use local roads to access bridleways and other off-road access. The British Horse Society collates statistics each year to understand the rate of incidents involving horses and riders on UK roads and in the year to 28 February 2021 alone there were **1,010** road incidents involving horses reported to the Society. Of these,

- **46 horses** died and **118** were injured
- **130 people** were injured
- **45% of riders** were victims of road rage or abuse
- **80%** of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too close to the horse
- **43%** of incidents occurred because a vehicle passed by too quickly.

Research indicates that only a fraction of incidents – possibly as low as 10% - are reported to us.

Riders are therefore understandably desperate to find safe riding routes away from the traffic, particularly in the more built-up areas of the country such as we have here in the South. The opportunity to ride off-road in places such as Thriftwood makes a significant difference to their ability to enjoy riding and exercising their horses safely, and this initiative by RBWM is therefore greatly welcomed by local riders.

We understand the anxiety that others who enjoy walking at Thriftwood – and particularly those with dogs – may have about allowing horses into the area. I hope however that this trial period will help to allay their concerns. Many horse riders are also dog-owners, and so understand how important it is to introduce dogs and horses to each other in a well-managed and sympathetic way. Once they have had the opportunity to become socialised together, they can be exercised in the same space quite harmoniously; for example, I have regularly ridden at Greenham Common, a very popular area for dog walking because it is well fenced, and I have never experienced any difficulty with the many dogs that I met there, both off and on the lead.

We would recommend therefore that those who enjoy exercising their horses and dogs at Thriftwood take a bit of time to allow their animals get to know each other in a calm and controlled way that ensures that neither the dog nor the horse is startled and frightened. This may mean that in the early stages of this trial horse riders have to stop and wait for dog owners

to call their pets to them, and that those with dogs have to put them on the lead initially until they have got over the excitement of seeing such a large and unfamiliar animal.

With consideration for others by all users, there is every reason to expect that this trial will be a success – but if there is anything that the BHS can do to support this initiative, or to reassure other users, please don't hesitate to let either our local Access & Bridleways Officer Trisha Mentzel or myself know.

With all best wishes,

Yours sincerely

*Petronella*

Petronella Natrass, MSc, MIPROW  
Access Field Officer – South Region