

**Y PWYLLGOR CRAFFU
LLE, CYNALIADWYEDD A NEWID HINSAWDD**

31 GORFFENNAF 2024

STRATEGAETH FARCHOGAETH SIR GAERFYRDDIN

Y Pwrpas:

Rhoi diweddariad i'r Aelodau ar ddatblygiad ein Strategaeth Farchogaeth sydd ar ddod gan gynnwys cyfres o gamau gweithredu arfaethedig y gellid eu cynnwys yn y ddogfen derfynol.

Yr argymhellion / penderfyniadau allweddol sydd eu hangen:

Rhoi sylwadau ar ddatblygu Strategaeth Farchogaeth Sir Gaerfyrddin

Y Rhesymau:

Llunio barn y Pwyllgor Craffu ar gamau gweithredu posibl i wella'r ddarpariaeth farchogaeth yn Sir Gaerfyrddin cyn cyhoeddi'r strategaeth.

Angen i'r Cabinet wneud penderfyniad NAC OES

Angen i'r Cyngor wneud penderfyniad NAC OES

YR AELOD CABINET SY'N GYFRIFOL AM Y PORTFFOLIO:

Y Cynghorydd Aled Vaughan Owen

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PLACE, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31ST JULY 2024

CARMARTHENSHIRE EQUESTRIAN STRATEGY

1. Introduction

1.1 One of the key policies in the current Carmarthenshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) is to develop an Equestrian Strategy. The service is current developing this Strategy to ensure it is fit for purpose and deliverable with an associated Action Plan. This will need to be developed in conjunction with numerous service managers across the Authority as the provision and possible of enhancement of equestrian access in the County is not limited to a single service area.

2. Vision

2.1 The principle aim of the Equestrian Strategy is to 'promote and develop and accessible network for equestrian use' (Policy 6, Action 17, Carmarthenshire ROWIP 2019-2029)

2.2 We will strive to recognise the needs of the equestrian community and seize opportunities for equestrian access development where we have powers and resource to do so.

2.3 We will maximise value from available resources and will endeavour to seek funding opportunities to support equestrian access.

2.4 The Equestrian Strategy will seek to set out a realistic strategic delivery programme to achieve these aims.

3. Current Situation

Equestrianism

3.1 According to the BETA National Equestrian Survey 2023, the number of people participating regularly in equestrian activities in the UK has reached 1.82 million. This figure has increased from 1.8 million in 2019 and 1.3 million in 2015.

3.2 According to the Wales Outdoor Recreation Study (WORS) 2016-17, horse riding was an activity enjoyed by 3% of the adults in Wales who took part.

3.3 Participation data for this strategy was gathered in 2021 through our online consultation, this was combined with membership data from the British Horse Society (BHS). Available data at the time suggested that in 2021 there were 1,326 (0.7%) horse and rider combinations in the County taking part in equestrian activities.

3.4 Available data informing this strategy provides an illustration of the potential demand for equestrian access opportunities. Operational findings in Carmarthenshire continue to demonstrate a pastime which has a considerable level of interest and demand for provision.

CCC Managed Equestrian Access

Public Rights of Way

3.5 Carmarthenshire's PROW network, (excluding Bannau Brycheiniog), offers a total of 166.06km of bridleways, which horse riders are legally entitled to use. The network also has 82.9km of Restricted Byway and Byway Open to All Traffic (combined) that both horse riders and horse drawn vehicles are legally entitled to use.

Route Type	Number of Routes	Length (km)
Footpath	2956	2282.0
Bridleway	138	166.06
Byway Open to All Traffic	88	81.3
Restricted Byway	1	1.6
Totals	3183	2530.96

3.6 The figures above show that 10% of the total length of PROW network in Carmarthenshire provides any equestrian access opportunity and in the case of carriage driving, 3.2% of the total network can be lawfully accessed.

Highways

3.7 Carmarthenshire has the second longest network of public roads in Wales. Equestrians are legally entitled to freely use all classes of public road in the County (excluding motorways). The County's network of minor unclassified roads (UCRs) see fairly low vehicular traffic flow and are therefore most suitable for equestrian use; there are total of 1658km of UCRs across Carmarthenshire (approximately 45% of the total network).

Country Parks

3.8 A Byway, 2.7km in length, travels into Pembrey Country Park providing statutory access to ride a horse or carriage drive through the park to mean high water at Cefn Sidan beach. Horse riders are permitted to then ride from the BOAT onto a designated section of the beach, owned by Carmarthenshire County Council. Carriage driving is not permitted on the beach. Llyn Llech Owain Country Park and Mynydd Mawr Woodland Park offer permissive off-road horse-riding opportunities that are free to use. Currently permissive bridleways within Llyn Llech Owain and Mynydd Mawr extend to approximately 3km.

Cycle Paths

3.9 Shared use Cycle Paths add 2.4km of permissive access to horse riders.

Equestrian Provision outside of CCC Control

3.10 Welsh Government Forestry Estate

The Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE) is managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

A significant proportion of the estate has been designated permissive access for equestrians. The WGWE forestry estate extends to some 7167 hectares which is accessible to horse riders in Carmarthenshire. There is open access for carriage driving in Crychan Forest and NRW operate a permission system for the remainder of the WGWE.

Both horse-riders and carriage drivers can make use of parts of the woodland estate across Carmarthenshire under the terms of a Concordat between Natural Resources Wales and the British Horse Society (BHS). There are however, some WGWE sites excluded from the permissive access agreement, Pembrey forest is one such site. Equestrian access at this site is allowed but requires users to purchase an annual permit.

Permissive equestrian access provided across the WGWE is managed and controlled by Natural Resources Wales, certain locations may be closed off for safety reasons or during certain times of the year due to forestry operations.

3.11 Riding Centres

For non-horse owners, opportunities to ride or carriage drive are reliant on riding centres that offer the necessary facilities for a fee.

Carmarthenshire is well served by riding centres located across the County offering lessons and riding experiences (Beach/Forest/Mountain rides) for all ages.

Carmarthenshire's riding centres offer their services to people of all abilities from complete beginners to advanced equestrians, many also offer riding for the disabled (RDA) opportunities. Most riding centres across the UK are privately owned and run. Carmarthenshire County Council is not involved in the operational planning or delivery of equestrian opportunities through the County's riding centre facilities.

3.12 Training and Competition Venues

Carmarthenshire has several venues which offer opportunities in numerous competitive disciplines. These venues run organised competition and training events, normally for a participation, entry or membership fee. Use of these types of competition facility also require competitors to have their own public liability insurance.

Most competition venues across the UK are privately owned and run. Carmarthenshire County Council is not involved in the operational planning or delivery of equestrian opportunities at these types of venues.

3.13 Private Hire Venues

There are several private hire venues in Carmarthenshire which offer facilities to hire for most equestrian disciplines, for a fee. Use of these facilities will normally require participants to have their own public liability insurance.

These venues offer a range of facilities, predominantly based on all-weather surfaces to allow use all year round. Venues for private hire provide parking for horse transport so visitors can travel their horse(s) and make use of facilities regardless of location.

These venues are privately owned and run, Carmarthenshire County Council is not involved in the operational planning or delivery of equestrian opportunities at these types of venues.

Commitment to develop an Equestrian Strategy

3.14 The current Carmarthenshire ROWIP sets out policies and actions for managing the public rights of way network for the 10 years (2019 – 2029), considering public need, relevant legislation and available resources.

3.15 During the ROWIP consultation phase, the Local Access Forum (LAF) members felt that it was important for the local authority to commit to producing an Equestrian Strategy to recognise the access opportunities and challenges for equestrians across Carmarthenshire.

3.16 Forum members felt that the proposed strategy should identify where equestrian access is most needed and how it could be best developed and enhanced whilst working in harmony with other policies and strategies such as Transport Plans and the Hub of Wales Cycling Strategy.

3.17 Policy 6, Action 17 within the ROWIP is therefore, to develop an Equestrian Strategy for Carmarthenshire that is designed to 'promote and develop and accessible network for equestrian use'.

4. Consultation

4.1 Nothing of this type has been developed before in Carmarthenshire or anywhere in Wales and as a result very little existing data is available to build an accurate picture of the equestrian industry in Carmarthenshire.

4.2 To inform and shape the strategy, data specific to Carmarthenshire's equestrian population and available facilities was required.

4.3 Working with the British Horse Society (BHS) a comprehensive public survey questionnaire was developed, aimed at equestrians, equestrian businesses, clubs and organisations and elected representatives.

4.4 The survey was launched online 21 June 2021 and ran until 25 July 2021. The survey was administered electronically via the Council's online consultation page on the website. Moreover, it was distributed directly to organisations and clubs.

4.5 A total of 502 responses were received from various sections of the equestrian community. Most respondents who took part in the consultation were individuals (95%). Additionally, 17 businesses, 6 organisations/groups, 1 Town and community council and 1 local elected member completed the online survey.

4.6 Following completion of the survey extensive data analysis was required to interpret the data gathered.

5. Current Position

5.1 The strategy is currently in draft form with the final chapter of strategic Actions that will comprise the Delivery Plan yet to be finalised.

5.2 The full data analysis has been added to the draft strategy, following on from the introductory chapters already drafted which provide background information, legislative and policy context, and details of existing equestrian provision.

6. Next Steps

6.1 Following receipt of comments and recommendations from Scrutiny Committee and implementation of any appropriate changes, the Countryside Access Manager will work with relevant CCC service managers to examine and finalise the proposed set of strategic actions that have been compiled to achieve the goals of the Strategy as outlined in the ROWIP.

6.2 Once this stage is completed the final draft document will be provided to the Carmarthenshire Local Access Forum (LAF) and the BHS for comment. The target date for achieving this stage of strategy development is September 2024

6.3 Subject to implementation of any appropriate changes or amendments to finalise the strategy, it will be taken through the approvals process by the end of this calendar year.

6.4 The suite of potential actions for consideration are outlined below.

Proposed Action	Benefit to Equestrian Access	Risk/Challenge
Interactive Equine Access map	Map would provide a clear, one-stop resource to identify access opportunities for equestrian residents, tourists etc.	Cost to develop Resources required to keep mapping up to date.
Scope the potential for additional access option on CCC Land	A potentially considerable increase in local authority managed equestrian access opportunities.	Suitability of existing infrastructure. Impact on land management Conflict between users Resistance from existing Users

Create an Equine User Group	Opportunity for equestrian stakeholders to contribute towards prioritising maintenance and planning enhancement across the equestrian access network, according to available resources.	Further staff commitment to appoint and coordinate an additional stakeholder group Managing expectations of group members
Develop volunteer equestrian maintenance resource	A volunteer workforce, not limited by the limited PROW maintenance budget, with a vested interest in keeping the equestrian access network open and available.	Staff resource required to manage and coordinate volunteer workforce
Develop PROW/Road network rating system for equestrian use	Using available data against a rating system that takes account of suitability and cost, lengths of the PROW and/or road network with the potential for providing increased equestrian access opportunities can be logged and rated for further investigation.	Cost to develop. Potential conflicts between Rating outcomes and PROW & Highway Network Hierarchies. Resources required to implement and maintain enhancements.
Prioritising the investigation of unrecorded Higher Rights across the PROW network, leading to Orders to amend the legal record where appropriate.	Where evidence is discovered to suggest equestrian rights exists on PROWs currently recorded as footpaths, the Modification Order process has the potential to see amendments to the Definitive Map and Statement, increasing the number of bridleways and/or restricted byways.	Increase burden on Order making staff within Countryside Access team. Resource implications for increasing specification of PROW assets from footpath to bridleway compliance.
Take account of potential future legislative change proposed under the WG Access Reform Bill when planning any PROW maintenance and improvement schemes.	Where the potential for future equestrian access has been considered in all PROW schemes, the enactment of proposed access reform legislation could be delivered more promptly to the benefit of both equestrian users and cyclists.	Increased infrastructure costs Access Reform bill not lead to legislative change.

7. Challenges

7.1 Developing and delivering an Equestrian Strategy for Carmarthenshire presents several challenges the principal ones are outlined below.

7.2 Developing a strategic document that is both ambitious and deliverable – the strategy should be the catalyst that drives some positive outcomes for equestrian access in Carmarthenshire however, budget constraints can and will hinder the improvement/enhancement proposals that can reasonably be delivered.

7.3 Managing expectations throughout strategy development – stakeholders and enthusiasts have a proven record for pushing the Authority to deliver more equestrian access opportunities and to maintain and enhance access to the highest standards. Whilst we want to develop a strategy that has the full support of the equestrian community, it cannot be a wish list of future provision ideals so managing expectations and justifying the limitations of the strategy will be key.

7.4 Unknown future budget constraints – the current economic climate, which shows no signs imminent recovery, puts pressure on all Local Authority budgets. Statutory duties must take precedent and therefore the ambitions of a strategy that might include actions not supported by statute may not ultimately be deliverable if future budgetary constraints prevent it.

7.5 Access Reform in Wales - The Welsh Government wants to provide for wider access to the countryside for the purposes of recreation and simplify and harmonise procedures for designating and recording public access. One of the proposed reforms would see the extension of rights to ride a cycle

or horse to public footpaths. This proposal would obviously have an enormous impact on the current provision of equestrian access in Carmarthenshire, potentially opening hundreds of kilometres of PROWs presently closed to equestrians. The strategy must therefore deliver under current statute whilst also taking account of this possible future change to the fundamental arrangement of access to PROWs as they currently stand.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

NO

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report:

Signed: **Dan John** **Head of Environmental Infrastructure**

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets	Bio-diversity & Climate Change
None	Yes	Yes	None	YES	Yes	YES	YES

1. Legal

Dependant on the final actions developed within the Equestrian Strategy the legal implications of the strategy might have an impact on current enforcement practices on CCC public highway networks.

There may also be a need for Legal Orders to be processed if alterations to the network are negotiated for the benefit of equestrian users, identification of this need would be on a case-by-case basis taking account of the change being proportionate and affordable.

2. Finance

The strategy as a whole is being developed with available financial resources in mind. Any actions developed in the final stages of the strategy must be proportionate and demonstrate best value.

Outcomes need fall within existing budgets for all affected services or be clearly identified as aspirational and needing additional funding in order to deliver.

3. Risk Management Issues

Any improvements or enhancements to CCC equestrian provision identified in the strategy will be subject to any appropriate design standards and to robust risk assessment to safeguard the public.

4. Staffing Implications

Safeguarding existing equestrian access will be taken forward with existing staff resources. The resource implications of any improvements will be considered as part of the feasibility of any proposed actions.

5. Physical Assets

The County has an extensive road and PROW network in varying condition. A hierarchical risk-based approach is taken to maintenance of the Highway and PROW asset to achieve best value with limited available budgets.

Historically, Country and Woodland Park assets, managed by the Outdoor Recreation Service (ORS), do not offer any equestrian access or have any designated bridleways. The ORS provides permissive, and clearly designated and signed, off-road horse-riding opportunities in Llyn Llech Owain Country Park and Mynydd Mawr Woodland Park.

Asserting and safeguarding access rights and opportunities will need to be the central focus of the strategy and any improvements where they are brought forward will need to accord to relevant design standards, robust risk assessments and would be subject to appropriate consultation.

6. Biodiversity & Climate Change

With a limited and fragmented PROW network, much of the path network open to equestrian users can only be accessed by users if they transport their horse(s) to an appropriate location.

If the equestrian strategy can deliver positive changes that can provide some additional equestrian routes or some off road or recognised quiet road connectivity between existing routes, we might see a small reduction in large, high emission vehicles on the road.

This would contribute in a small way to Net-Zero targets.

Most of Carmarthenshire's existing equestrian access opportunities exist in areas of open countryside or along green corridors, rich in biodiversity.

In the development of strategic actions, the equestrian strategy must take account of conservation policy and guidance alongside relevant conservation and environmental legislation.

This will ensure any potential equestrian access developments and/or enhancements do not cause damage to habitats which support local biodiversity. Proper considered actions could potentially deliver habitat and biodiversity improvements in conjunction with access.

**CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO
HOLDER(S) AWARE/CONSULTED**

YES