

Roxton 'cyclepath/footway' and bridge

At the hearing on 1 December 2021, the BHS, represented by Mark Weston and Ann Kennedy, and the Wyboston, Chawston and Roxton Bridleways Group, represented by Kim Gubler, made the case for the inclusion of equestrian access on the proposed cyclepath/footway around Roxton and in particular over the new bridge. This proposed route features as a thicker red line on General Arrangements Plans Sheets 1 and 2.

We note that Andrew Prigmore of Bedford Borough Council supported this position which is in accordance with the Council's policy that new routes should be bridleways: The Local Plan 2030 by states at Policy 91 iv) that "All new routes should be multiuser routes and dedicated as bridleways with a minimum width of 4 metres" . The Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan recognises the need for improved connectivity of the network and that "Where possible all new routes created will be to a multi user status (such as Bridleways)" (para 5.2).

We undertook to provide more information about the need for safe equestrian access over the Roxton bridge and the reasons why the new path should be a bridleway. This further information addresses three key issues:

- The extent of the equestrian access network in the area, given that there is no bridleway within the scheme area (although there are many in neighbourhood);
- The demand from local equestrians for use of the bridge, given that surveys undertaken indicate very low or negligible current use; and
- The safety issues arising from a failure to accept our case and to leave equestrians on the carriageway across the bridge.

Riding network in the area

It is a fact of life that horse riders cannot just ride on bridleways and byways but are obliged to use roads to access such off-road riding. So only considering the bridleways does not give a full picture of the routes affected by any proposal. This is true in this area and of this scheme.

We have attached a map which indicates the equestrian riding routes available to horse riders in the Wyboston, Chawston and Roxton area, which use (or would use) the bridge and the 'cyclepath/footway'. This map clearly shows that, whilst there are no bridleways within the scheme area, there are many bridleways in proximity which create circular routes if the Roxton bridge can be safely used. It is worth noting that riders (like walkers, dog walkers and cyclists) tend to prefer circular routes to out and back routes. Some horses can become rather excitable when asked to turn round.

The routes illustrated include those referred to in Ann Kennedy's response to the consultation on 24 July 2020 on behalf of BHS Bedfordshire:

"The use of the new 'footpath/cycleway' would allow riders to create safe routes on this path and on quieter side roads:

- A circuit of about 10 miles could be created using the new route to the connection with the Lane in Chawston and then to Colesden to pick up the bridleway that leads back to the bridleway bridge at 16E and return via Roxton High Street and School Lane. A 10 mile hack takes about 2 hours and would be considered an appropriate distance by experienced riders to maintain fitness and wellbeing of both horse and rider.
- There would be a very short circuit available within Roxton, using School Lane, the new route, part of Bedford Road and the High Street. At less than 2 miles this would be useful for a quick daily exercise route.
- There would also be a 'lollipop' ride from Wyboston and Chawston down to join this circuit and back – another good daily exercise route.”

These routes are highlighted in yellow on the attached extract from the Bedford Borough online map of rights of way. The proposed 'cyclepath/footway' is shown on the map as a dotted green line.

There are two further opportunities which may further increase the options available to local horse riders using these circuits:

- Bedford Borough is seeking funding to address the dead-end nature of BW22 alongside the great Ouse south of Roxton such that it would connect to the village and in particular to School Lane and thus to the new “cyclepath/footway” – this upgrade is highlighted in pink on the map
- Should the northern of the two EWR route options be selected there is the opportunity to create an off road alternative to the road between Chawston and Colesden, in the form of a trackside or service road bridleway, which would significantly increase the attractiveness of the longer circuit above. Obviously, this is far from certain but the potential benefit is significant and the possibility should not be obstructed. The approximate line of the relevant section of the northern EWR route is shown in pale blue on the map

So whilst it is accepted that there are no bridleways within the scheme area, there most certainly are roads used by equestrians to access bridleways in the proximity of the scheme and the Roxton Bridge is a critical element.

Demand

The Wyboston, Chawston and Roxton Bridleways Group, represented at the hearing by Kim Gubler, estimates that there are about 100 horse riders within the catchment area and that, between them, they have about 150 horses.

Many of these, though by no means all, are based in Rookery Road to the north of The Lane in Wyboston (the road at the north of the attached map highlighted in yellow). The screen shot from Google Earth below shows the length of Rookery Road and it is striking that the majority of the properties have grass paddocks to their rear.



It is true that, since the A421 was opened in 2006, only a few riders are brave enough to use the bridge in its current design with low parapets. But there is definitely demand to use a safe bridge and off-road route to access the routes described above.

We reiterate that the lack of riders using the current bridge is not evidence of a lack of local riders who would use the bridge if they considered it safe enough.

Note that these riders do not have access to other bridleways not shown on the map provided – there are no bridleways to the north of Wyboston, nor to the south of Roxton.

Safety

As the proposals currently stand, any rider who wishes to cross the Roxton bridge will find themselves obliged to ride in the carriageway. It is acknowledged that this route will be used by vehicular traffic at significantly higher than present levels, due to the closure of other roads as part of this scheme. In particular the many HGVs based in Chawston will need to use this bridge.

As a result, a horse being ridden across the bridge could find itself sandwiched between a passing HGV on the right and a cyclist on the cyclepath on the left - effectively being 'undertaken' by a cyclist whilst also being overtaken by a vehicle. This is exceedingly dangerous for all concerned, not just the horse and rider.

The BHS Director of Safety's view is that "the risk to horse riders having cyclists pass them on the nearside and vehicles pass them on the offside is very high and is a significant safety issue. A cyclist suddenly appearing on the nearside of the ridden horse has the very real potential (even for a well trained horse) to cause the horse to move the other way into the path of a vehicle on the road. This arrangement should never be planned."¹

In practice of course, the actual outcome of this proposed arrangement is that local riders would remain unable to use the bridge because they will deem it far too unsafe – they will be excluded when there is a perfectly feasible opportunity to include them within the non-motorised provision of this scheme.

The suggestion that horses and other non-motorised users cannot safely share a route alongside a carriageway is refuted by the examples of the new routes alongside the de trunked A14² as well as by the Cambridge to St. Ives Guided Bus bridleway. Furthermore, the many bridleways, byways and restricted byways in the country are shared safely by all and we are not aware of any recorded incident of a horse injuring a third party.

Summary

We contend that Roxton bridge is an important link in the local equestrian network, as shown in the map provided, notwithstanding the fact that there are no bridleways within the scheme area itself.

Further, we argue that there is a significant, currently unfulfilled, demand from local riders to be able to use this bridge to access this equestrian network.

The intention to exclude the horses from the new 'cyclepath/footway' increases the dangers to horse riders (notwithstanding the higher parapets now to be provided) and will prevent horse riders from using the bridge.

We can see no legitimate reason for not designating the 'cyclepath/footway' a bridleway. There should be no additional cost involved (merely different signage) and indeed it might be possible to save funds as there would only be a need for higher parapets on the bridleway side of the bridge.

Further, the provision of equestrian rights on this new route is in line with both national and local policy as further described in Mark Weston's submission of further information.

Ann Kennedy
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Bedfordshire Access and Bridleways Officer

¹ This email is reproduced in Mark Weston's further submission

² Photographs and more information about these routes is provided in Mark Weston's further submission