

Road Safety for Horse Riders – text of email received

Dear Local Parish Councils and Local Authorities

We are writing as local horse riders and residents from Wensley, North Yorkshire to raise a growing concern about the safety of horses and riders using the roads in our area, and to ask for your support in helping us find ways to make our local roads safer.

We appreciate that our rural roads are shared by many different users, and we are not asking for horse riders to be given priority over other road users. We simply want the existing Highway Code guidance to be recognised and respected so that everyone can use our roads safely.

The scale of the problem nationally is extremely concerning. The British Horse Society's latest statistics show that 2,810 incidents involving horses on UK roads were reported during 2025. In those incidents, 59 horses were killed, 82 horses were injured and 86 people were injured. Even more concerning, 83% of incidents involved a vehicle passing too quickly, while 78% involved a vehicle passing too closely.

The Highway Code was updated in 2022 specifically to improve the safety of equestrians. Drivers are advised to slow to no more than 10mph, leave at least two metres when passing a horse, be patient, avoid sounding the horn or revving the engine, and pass wide and slow where it is safe to do so.

Unfortunately, our experience on the roads locally is that this guidance is very often ignored.

Personally, when riding last evening, 12 vehicles passed me. Only four of those drivers slowed down and gave my horse the appropriate space when passing. That means that approximately 67% of the vehicles that passed us did not do so safely.

That statistic is particularly frightening when you consider that a horse is a flight animal. Even an exceptionally well-trained and sensible horse can react instinctively when a vehicle approaches too quickly, too closely or unexpectedly. A moment of panic can result in a horse stepping into the path of a vehicle, falling, or dislodging its rider. The consequences can be catastrophic for the horse, rider and motorists involved. The BHS has specifically highlighted that horses can react quickly to unexpected movements and noise from passing vehicles.

Sadly, the problem is not limited to poor driving. The level of ignorance and abuse towards riders can also be astonishing. Last night, after asking a driver to slow down, the driver responded by putting their middle finger up at me — with their child sitting in the passenger seat.

Quite apart from the danger, we have to ask what sort of example this sets to the next generation. A child watching an adult behave aggressively towards a vulnerable road user who is simply asking them to follow the Highway Code is hardly the message we want to be sending within our communities.

The BHS recorded road rage or abuse in 22% of reported incidents in 2025. Across the ten years of its Dead Slow campaign, almost 20,000 incidents involving horses have been recorded, with hundreds of horses killed and injured. The BHS also reports that horse

fatalities recorded through its system increased from 21 in 2016 to 59 in 2025 — a 180% increase.

There is also an increasingly important local issue concerning access.

With limited access around the Bolton Estate, our ability to ride off-road has been reduced. Consequently, our use of the road network has had to increase. This is not because we particularly want to put ourselves and our horses in traffic; it is because safe off-road alternatives are becoming increasingly limited.

The BHS itself recognises that many equestrians would prefer not to ride on roads, but that access to safe off-road routes is essential because roads are increasingly difficult and dangerous to use. Its research and campaigning highlight the importance of providing safe routes for equestrians alongside other vulnerable road users.

We therefore want to ask whether our Parish Councils and local authorities would be willing to support us in raising this issue with the relevant highways authority, local councillors and other stakeholders.

We would particularly welcome support with exploring measures such as:

- Increased awareness of the Highway Code's equestrian passing rules within the local community.
- Appropriate "Dead Slow" or horse-rider road safety signage on routes regularly used by equestrians.
- Consideration of local roads or stretches of road where additional safety measures may be appropriate.
- Exploring opportunities to improve or reconnect off-road riding routes and bridleway access, reducing the need for horses and riders to use busy roads.
- Working with the British Horse Society, local authorities and other relevant organisations to identify potential equestrian safety hotspots.
- Encouraging local residents to report dangerous driving and equestrian near-misses so that the scale of the problem can properly be evidenced.
- Considering whether local awareness campaigns, community communications or parish newsletters could be used to remind motorists of the Highway Code.

We are not asking for motorists to be inconvenienced unnecessarily. We are asking for basic consideration and compliance with rules that already exist.

A driver slowing down to 10mph, allowing two metres of space and waiting a few seconds to pass safely can make the difference between an ordinary journey and a devastating accident.

The fact that two-thirds of the vehicles that passed one rider and horse in a single evening failed to do this demonstrates why we feel that simply having the Highway Code guidance in place is not enough. There needs to be greater awareness and, where possible, practical measures to encourage compliance.

We would be very grateful if the Parish Councils and local authorities could consider this issue and advise us whether you would be willing to work with local riders to improve road safety in our area.

We would be more than happy to attend a Parish Councils/local authorities meeting to discuss the issue, provide examples of local incidents and identify particular roads or locations where we feel improvements could be made.

We genuinely believe that this is an issue of community road safety, rather than simply an equestrian issue. Horses, riders, pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and local residents all deserve to be able to use our rural roads without feeling that their safety is being put at risk.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our concerns. We hope that, with the support of the Parish Councils and local authorities, we can work together to make our local roads safer for everyone.

Kind regards,

Megan Beswick (on behalf of other local horse riders).