
Planning Support Statement: Equine Track System and Hard-Standing Area

1. Introduction

This proposal seeks approval for the installation of an equine track system and associated hard-standing area. The design represents a **low-impact, welfare-led and sustainable approach** to horse management. Track systems offer a natural, environmentally responsible alternative to traditional grazing, improving equine wellbeing while protecting land on a long-term basis.

2. Overview of the Track System

The track system uses a **fenced route** within a field, encouraging horses to move rather than graze the entire pasture. The **central grassland remains protected**, enabling controlled, seasonal grazing and improved pasture regeneration.

The system reflects the natural behaviours of free-roaming horses and includes:

- Restricted access to high-sugar grass
- Constant access to low-sugar hay via slow-feeder stations
- A movement-focused layout
- Enrichment areas (rolling zones, varied surfaces, hedgerows, shelter)
- Herd-based turnout to support social interaction

A minimum width of **4 metres** for narrow track sections ensures safe dual flow movement, efficient land use, and suitability for private equine management. Wider corners and activity spaces accommodate turning, resting and safe passing.

3. Benefits for Equine Health and Welfare

3.1 Increased Movement

The track encourages horses to walk between water, forage and enrichment points, supporting:

- Musculoskeletal health
- Joint mobility

- Weight regulation

3.2 Species-Appropriate Forage

Low-sugar forage reduces the risk of:

- Laminitis
- Colic
- Gastric ulcers
- Insulin dysregulation

3.3 Behavioural Wellbeing

Continuous movement, foraging and social contact reduces stereotypic and stress-related behaviour such as weaving, cribbing and box-walking.

4. Land-Management and Environmental Benefits

4.1 Protection of Central Pasture

The grass paddock is shielded from grazing and trampling, supporting healthier swards and long-term grassland resilience.

4.2 Reduced Soil Compaction

Movement is distributed around the perimeter rather than concentrated around gates and resources, protecting soil structure and drainage.

4.3 Reduced Poaching and Mud

By removing heavy traffic from sensitive areas, the track prevents wet-weather poaching and reduces erosion.

4.4 Efficient Manure Management

Horses use predictable dunging areas, simplifying manure removal and reducing nutrient overload.

4.5 Lower Maintenance Demand

Less damage means reduced reseeding, fewer soil repairs and minimal heavy machinery use.

5. Additional Environmental Benefits: Reduced Winter Stabling

The land sits on **heavy clay**, making winter turnout challenging under traditional systems.

The track and hard-standing allow horses to remain safely turned out in wetter periods, providing:

5.1 Reduced Bedding Consumption

Lower reliance on stabling reduces the need for:

- shavings
- straw
- other bedding materials

5.2 Reduced Waste Output

Less soiled bedding leads to smaller muck heaps and reduced waste handling.

5.3 Reduced Plastic Packaging

With less bedding purchased, plastic packaging waste is significantly reduced.

5.4 Improved Winter Welfare

Horses benefit from more movement, reduced stress, and improved respiratory health compared with stabling on bedding.

6. Hard-Standing Area: Purpose and Justification

Hard-standing is essential around water points, feeding stations, and shelter entrances to:

- provide safe, all-weather surfaces,
 - prevent soil degradation,
 - allow safe access for staff and machinery, and
 - maintain turnout on clay soils during winter.
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7. Hard-Standing Construction and Drainage

7.1 Depth and Layers

Total excavation depth: **200–250 mm**, comprising:

- **100–150 mm drainage layer**
- **100 mm top surface**

7.2 Drainage Design

A clean crushed-aggregate drainage layer disperses water and functions as a soakaway. Excavation reaches undisturbed soil to ensure permeability.

Additional drainage (French drains or subsurface pipes) can be added where ground conditions require.

7.3 Surface Material

Limestone is recommended for:

- superior traction
- antibacterial qualities
- urine-neutralising properties
- suitability for barefoot horses
- strong drainage performance

7.4 Build Process

1. Measure and mark the site
 2. Excavate topsoil
 3. Lay geotextile membrane
 4. Install drainage layer
 5. Compact
 6. Add surface layer
 7. Compact again
 8. Allow weathering to settle the surface
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8. Rainwater and Water Management

Roof runoff will be directed into soakaways, water butts, ponds, ditches or drainage systems.

Optional rainwater harvesting can further reduce mains water usage.

9. Environmental and Land-Use Considerations

The proposal:

- minimises erosion and runoff,
 - enhances pasture health,
 - reduces the need for fertilisers and chemical inputs,
 - uses natural, non-polluting materials,
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10. Biodiversity and Pasture Enhancement in Protected Central Grassland

A key environmental benefit of the track system is the **ability to protect and restore the central grassland areas**, which are no longer subjected to constant grazing and trampling. This enables these areas to be managed for biodiversity and long-term ecological value.

10.1 Protection from Overgrazing and Soil Damage

With horses restricted to the perimeter track, the central grassland is protected from:

- poaching
- compaction
- overgrazing

This prevents the dominance of invasive ryegrass, clover and weed species and allows natural meadow species to re-establish.

10.2 Restoration of Species-Rich Meadow Grassland

By resting and actively managing these areas—through seasonal grazing, targeted reseedling, and controlled topping—the pasture can transition towards a **species-rich, low-input meadow**, supporting deeper-rooting grasses and healthier sward structure.

10.3 Enhanced Wildlife Habitat

Protected grassland provides habitat for:

- pollinators
- insects and invertebrates (including crickets and beetles)
- small mammals
- a variety of bird species

Allowing grass to grow into **standing hay**, drop seed, and rewild naturally creates structural diversity favoured by wildlife.

10.4 Reduced Dependence on Herbicides and Mechanical Intervention

A healthier, more resilient sward reduces the need for chemical weed control or heavy machinery. Management becomes low-input and environmentally sensitive.

10.5 Soil Health and Climate Resilience

Protected, maturing grassland improves:

- organic matter levels
- carbon storage

- water infiltration
- drought resilience

These benefits align with broader environmental and climate-adaptation goals.

11. Conclusion

The proposed equine track system and hard-standing area provide a **sustainable, welfare-focused and environmentally responsible** approach to horse keeping. They:

- protect and enhance land condition
- improve equine welfare
- reduce winter stabling and associated environmental impact
- deliver biodiversity gains
- support efficient, year-round land-management
- promote resilient, species-rich grassland

The proposal aligns with modern best practice in equine welfare and rural environmental stewardship and represents a **low-impact, appropriate development** suitable for planning approval.

Odour Statement

The proposed development comprises a horse track system, wet-weather hardstanding areas and the replacement of an existing field shelter associated with the existing private equestrian use of the site.

No increase in horse numbers is proposed and therefore manure production will remain unchanged from the existing situation.

Horse manure is collected and managed as part of routine site maintenance. The proposed hardstanding and track areas will improve access for cleaning and manure collection throughout the year, particularly during periods of wet weather.

The proposal does not involve a commercial riding school, livery yard, livestock enterprise or any form of intensive animal housing.

As the proposal does not increase horse numbers or alter the established use of the site, no additional odour impacts are anticipated as a result of the development.