

CONSULTATION DRAFT

EQUESTRIAN DEVELOPMENT TECHNICAL ADVICE NOTE

SEPTEMBER 2022

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

DRAFT



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE & GUIDANCE

This advice has been produced to guide horse owners, equestrian businesses and their agents when applying for planning permission for equestrian development.

The Technical Advice Note (TAN):

- ▶ Provides the information that is needed for equestrian development proposals;
- ▶ Highlights relevant policies in the South Downs Local Plan;
- ▶ Provides advice and guidance on what is needed to obtain planning permission.

Please read this Equestrian Technical Advice Note alongside policies in the South Downs **Local Plan** (SDLP), the **Partnership Management Plan** (PMP), and together with the online **Equine Land Management Guidance**.

The Equine Land Management Guidance:

- ▶ Is useful for anyone wishing to embark on a conservation land management approach with equines and those wishing to obtain planning permission;
- ▶ Explains how equine land management practices can benefit the whole landscape, from horse health and well-being to biodiversity, views and the Special Qualities of the National Park;

- ▶ Sets out broad principles and suggests small-scale interventions which can help to enhance land grazed by equines (horses, ponies, mules and donkeys);
- ▶ Assists owners to consider how the management of land can also help to support their local landscape and the important functions (also called ecosystem services) it undertakes, such as protecting soils and improving water quality.

This guidance aims to provide equine owners, land agents/owners, planners and elected members with a useful tool to enable greater understanding of the planning and landscape implications of equestrian development. The most relevant policies, guidance and evidence include:

- ▶ SD2: Ecosystem Services
- ▶ SD4: Landscape Character
- ▶ SD5: Design
- ▶ SD8: Dark Night Skies
- ▶ SD9: Biodiversity
- ▶ SD17: Protecting the Water Environment
- ▶ SD24: Equestrian Uses
- ▶ SD50: Sustainable Drainage
- ▶ **Partnership Management Plan** (PMP)
- ▶ **South Downs Landscape Character Assessment** (SDLCA)

1.2 BACKGROUND

Good land management can have a positive impact on horse health as well as the wider environment and biodiversity. Horses are one of the most effective grazing animals for managing wildflower meadows. By adopting some key land management considerations and good practice principles, the recreational enjoyment of horses can be fully realised, whilst bringing positive benefits to the landscape and helping to strengthen local economic and social wellbeing.

This TAN provides further guidance on the Authority's expectations when applying Policy SD24: Equestrian Uses.

It is a material consideration when determining planning applications for equestrian development proposals. This means equestrian applications will in part, be assessed as to whether or not they demonstrate compliance with this guidance.

1.2.1 EQUESTRIAN ACTIVITY IN THE NATIONAL PARK

The National Park has over 1200km of bridleways, including 160km along the **South Downs Way**. Horse racing and polo form an important part of the area's cultural history in some locations including Goodwood, Findon and Midhurst. There are currently some 16 registered equestrian businesses, but many more smaller-scale businesses and privately owned horses, all of which rely on the support of other local businesses, such as feed suppliers, farriers, vets etc. These businesses make up an important part of the National Park's rural economy.

1.2.2 THE SOUTH DOWNS LOCAL PLAN (SDLP) (2014-33)

The SDLP is a landscape-led plan, putting the landscape and the delivery of ecosystem services at the centre of decision making. Ecosystem services are the benefits that people and society gain from a healthy, functioning natural environment. A development proposal can positively impact ecosystem services by, for instance; restoring grassland; using sustainable and locally sourced materials; using grey/rain water harvesting and protecting soils from erosion and degradation. More information can be found in Policy SD2 of the SDLP, and the **Ecosystem Services** Technical Advice Note.

The purpose of Policy SD24: Equestrian Uses, is to ensure the careful planning and design of equestrian development and sensitive management of land on which horses are kept. It seeks to permit equestrian activities that have a positive impact and protect the National Park's landscapes. Although SD24 is a key policy against which equestrian development proposals will be assessed, the SDLP should be read as a whole and there will be other policies relevant to your development proposal. See **Section 1.0**

1.2.3 LANDSCAPE

National Parks are nationally valued landscapes. In the UK landscapes have been shaped by people and nature over thousands of years. All of our landscapes are made up of the same set of 'elements'. These elements are both natural, e.g.; landform and geology, and cultural, e.g.; roads, field patterns and buildings. Different landscapes display these elements in different patterns, and it is these patterns that make a place distinctive. National

Parks are charged with conserving and enhancing this distinctiveness or **landscape character**.

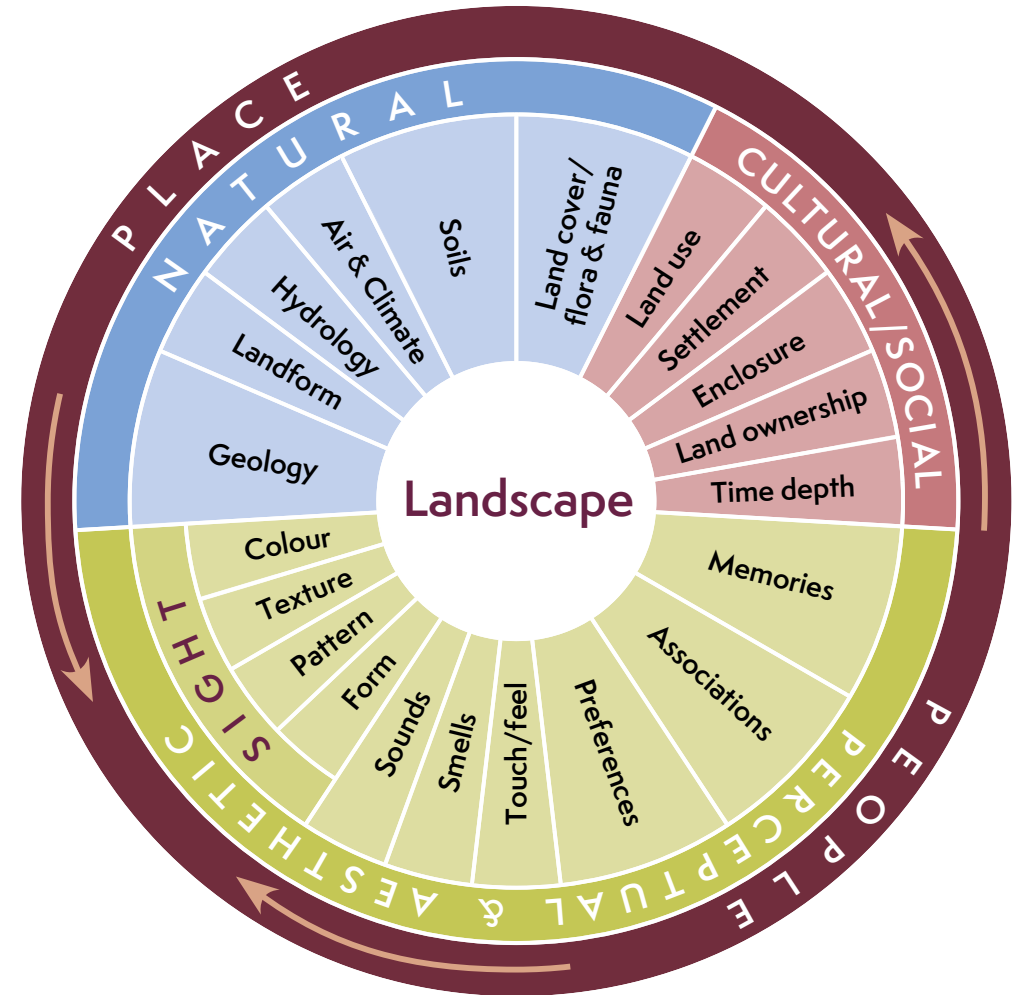
FIGURE 1 and **FIGURE 2** show all of the different elements of a landscape. As landscape is such a broad term, thinking about how decisions can benefit climate change, ecosystem services and nature also all contribute positively to the landscape. More detail on understanding landscape to help with equestrian planning applications is set out in **Section 3.1**.

FIGURE 1: VIEW OF SOUTH HARTING FROM HARTING DOWN



© John Manley

FIGURE 2: WHAT IS LANDSCAPE?



Source: Natural England (<https://bit.ly/3UGLqhd>)

2. TECHNICAL ADVICE

This technical information provides some examples of development that might require planning permission.

2.1 DO I NEED PLANNING PERMISSION?

The way in which horses are both used and cared for has the potential to change the use and importantly then the character of the land. This is why some equestrian uses require planning permission and others do not.

Whether planning permission is required for proposed changes depends on the 'lawful use' of the land. The lawful use will usually be either agricultural or equestrian.

Typically countryside is classed as agricultural. Where horses are mainly grazed, in a similar way to livestock, the agricultural use and agricultural character of the land is retained. These horses are 'grazed', and with no change of use, planning permission is not usually required. Overstocking does not always mean that permission for an equestrian land use is required providing the horses are still mainly grazed, but negative landscape effects can still arise.

Intensively kept horses that are fed supplementary feed as their main food source and are regularly ridden on the land are sometimes deemed to be 'kept' rather than just grazed.

More intense equestrian activities and/or development, would likely change both the use and character of the land. Therefore this would likely require planning permission. Examples include the introduction of: permanent structures, tracks and hard surfacing, horse-walkers, gallops or sand schools/manèges.

Equestrian land uses are not defined in planning legislation, however case law has established different horse 'types'. The most common are summarised in **[TABLE 1]**.

Please contact the **SDNPA** for; **Do I need planning permission?** and **General advice** if you are unsure or have any questions.

TABLE 1: DIFFERENT HORSE LAND USE 'TYPES'

Type	Grazed	Kept	Planning Permission Required?
Working (agriculture)	✓		No – agricultural use
Racing horses OR Stud/ breeding of horses	✓	✓	Yes – equestrian use or mixed equestrian and agricultural uses
Recreational (including commercial livery yards and riding schools)	✓	✓	Yes – equestrian use or mixed equestrian and agricultural uses
Incidental residential (i.e. pet ponies)	✓		No – but structures may need permission
Grazing	✓		No

Examples of equestrian development that are likely to require planning permission include (not exhaustive):

- ▶ the building of stables, feed or equipment buildings and permanent field shelters;
- ▶ indoor/outdoor riding arenas;
- ▶ permanent jumps;
- ▶ gallops and canter tracks;
- ▶ horse walkers;
- ▶ polo pitches;
- ▶ toll rides;
- ▶ lighting columns;
- ▶ hardstanding; and
- ▶ conversion of redundant farm buildings for equestrian use.

2.2 PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT

Some changes to agricultural land benefit from **permitted development** rights and therefore do not normally require planning permission.

2.2.1 FIELD SHELTERS

There are four primary factors established through case law which are used to determine whether a field shelter (or other structure) needs planning permission for equestrian use. These are:

- ▶ size;
- ▶ permanence;
- ▶ physical attachment to the ground; and
- ▶ whether or not the shelter is actually moved.

Generally speaking, providing the land has an existing agricultural/grazing use, the provision of moveable field shelters does not require planning permission where:

- a) they are on skids rather than a permanent concrete base, and are easily moved by a tractor and;
- b) they do not remain in the same place for more than six months, and;
- c) the shelters also allow horses free access in and out (no doors or barriers) and;
- d) they have no water or electricity connections.

2.2.2 OTHER PHYSICAL CHANGES

The addition of fencing, gateways, trackways and hardstanding are likely to require planning permission. Contact the **SDNPA** prior to installing any structures or surfaces and consider submitting a free 'do I need planning permission?' **form**.

3. EQUESTRIAN PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The following explains what information should be submitted in a planning application.

3.1 APPLICATION CONTENTS

Generally the more detailed the information provided by an applicant the better. It will be helpful to include detail on the following:

- ▶ **Location and dimensions** of any proposed structures and fencing.
- ▶ **Materials** proposed for structures and fencing. These will need to be locally characteristic and natural in appearance e.g. unpainted timber cladding, unpainted steel, simple grey concrete roof, and equine friendly post and wire fencing or similar visually unobtrusive options, such as dark posts with electric tape;
- ▶ **Hard and soft landscaping** will need to demonstrate it is characteristic and planting delivers **biodiversity net gain** (i.e. native species found locally). All surfaces aside from stables, yards and muck heap bases, should be permeable where possible. Outdoor arenas/manèges are best surfaced with darker materials and selected for sustainability (e.g. recycled or low carbon impact materials). Avoid materials likely to remain long-term in the environment;
- ▶ **Conservation-based Land Management Plan** – to demonstrate that the land will be managed using best practice principles that also benefit

horse welfare, landscape and biodiversity. See **Section 4.0** and the **Equine Land Management Guidance**;

- ▶ **Waste management plan** for horse manure and bedding. (**Section 4.1.1**);
- ▶ Scheme of **External Lighting** and **Dark Night Skies** mitigation (if lighting is proposed). (**Section 3.2.1**).

Planning conditions may also be applied:

- i) to require an appropriate equine land management plan to achieve positive land management and prevent the harmful impacts of over-grazing such as, erosion and poaching. (See **Equine Land Management Guidance**);
- ii) to restrict the use to a non-commercial/personal use, or for the domestic enjoyment of the applicant or their successors in title;
- iii) in the case of permanent field shelters or stables on land where horses are predominantly still grazed, the 'equestrian' use may be limited to any permanent field shelters and stables, associated hardstanding and access, with the remaining field retained as grazing or agricultural land;

- iv) to secure the ongoing operation of the site in accordance with a land management plan, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) maintenance and management plans, waste management plans, etc;
- v) to remove agricultural permitted development rights. This means all new fencing would require planning permission;
- vi) to control any external lighting on site.

3.2 LANDSCAPE & SITE ASSESSMENT

As with all development, care should be taken to avoid detrimental impacts from equestrian development on the landscape. Negative landscape impacts can be caused by: poorly sited and designed field shelters, fencing, field sub-division (with hedges or fences), buildings, outdoor arenas, tracks, walkers, over-grazing, waste storage, water pollution and intensive land use

[FIGURES 2-4].

FIGURE 3A: OVER-GRAZED PADDOCK LEADS TO POACHING IN WET WEATHER (LOW WEALD)



FIGURE 3B: DROUGHT CONDITIONS FOR EXPOSED SOILS (LOW WEALD)



FIGURE 3C: WINTER PASTURE ALLOWING STANDING HAY FOR WINTER GRAZING CAN HELP PROTECT SOILS (NOT IN SDNP)



FIGURE 3D: REPEATED FIELD SHELTERS BECOME VISUALLY INTRUSIVE (OPEN DOWNS)



FIGURE 3E: REPEATED SAWN RANCH-STYLE FENCING CREATES VISUAL IMPACTS AND A POOR EXPERIENCE OF THE LANDSCAPE FOR WALKERS (LOW WEALD))



FIGURE 3F: HAND-CLEFT CHESTNUT FENCING (LOW WEALD)



FIGURE 3H: REPEATING SMALL PADDOCKS OF SAWN RANCH-STYLE FENCING CREATES AN INTENSITY OF USE, CHANGE IN CHARACTER AND IMPACTS VIEWS (GREENSAND)



FIGURE 3I: POACHING (LOW WEALD)



FIGURE 3J: GRAZING IN HERDS WITH VISUALLY 'LIGHT' POST AND WIRE FENCING' (COASTAL PLAIN)



FIGURE 3K: CONSERVATION GRAZING WITH PONIES (SOUTH DOWNS)



The **Local Plan** policies require a landscape-led approach to the design of all development. Understanding the landscape within which a site sits helps to define how much capacity a site may have for both horses and structures. 'Landscape-led' means ensuring that any change to buildings, roads/tracks, fields and boundaries etc. follows or responds to the patterns (landscape character) that make the local area distinctive. More information is available in the **Design Guide** Supplementary Planning Document.

By considering landscape first, we can avoid or 'design out' unnecessary harm and help new development fit within an existing landscape. Locating new development characteristically, also means we can maximise the benefits of a change by allowing natural processes (ecosystem services) to continue.

A lot of evidence about landscape character can be seen on an Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 map **[FIGURE 4]**.

It shows us many elements that make up a landscape, for example; patterns of landform, drainage, fields, and importantly helps us understand relationships between them. For example, Figure 5 shows 'hanger woodland' – steeply sloping land which is wooded. Even at very local scales, patterns and relationships can still be observed. These patterns, or landscape character, are described in much more detail in the South Downs **Landscape Character Assessment**. Considering your own holding in terms of patterns, will help the best decisions to be made when considering how to change a site (**Section 1.2.3**).

TABLE 2 overleaf provides an initial checklist of key landscape considerations. These should help when both considering a new equestrian development and putting together a planning application.

FIGURE 4: ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP SHOWING PATTERNS OF LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS

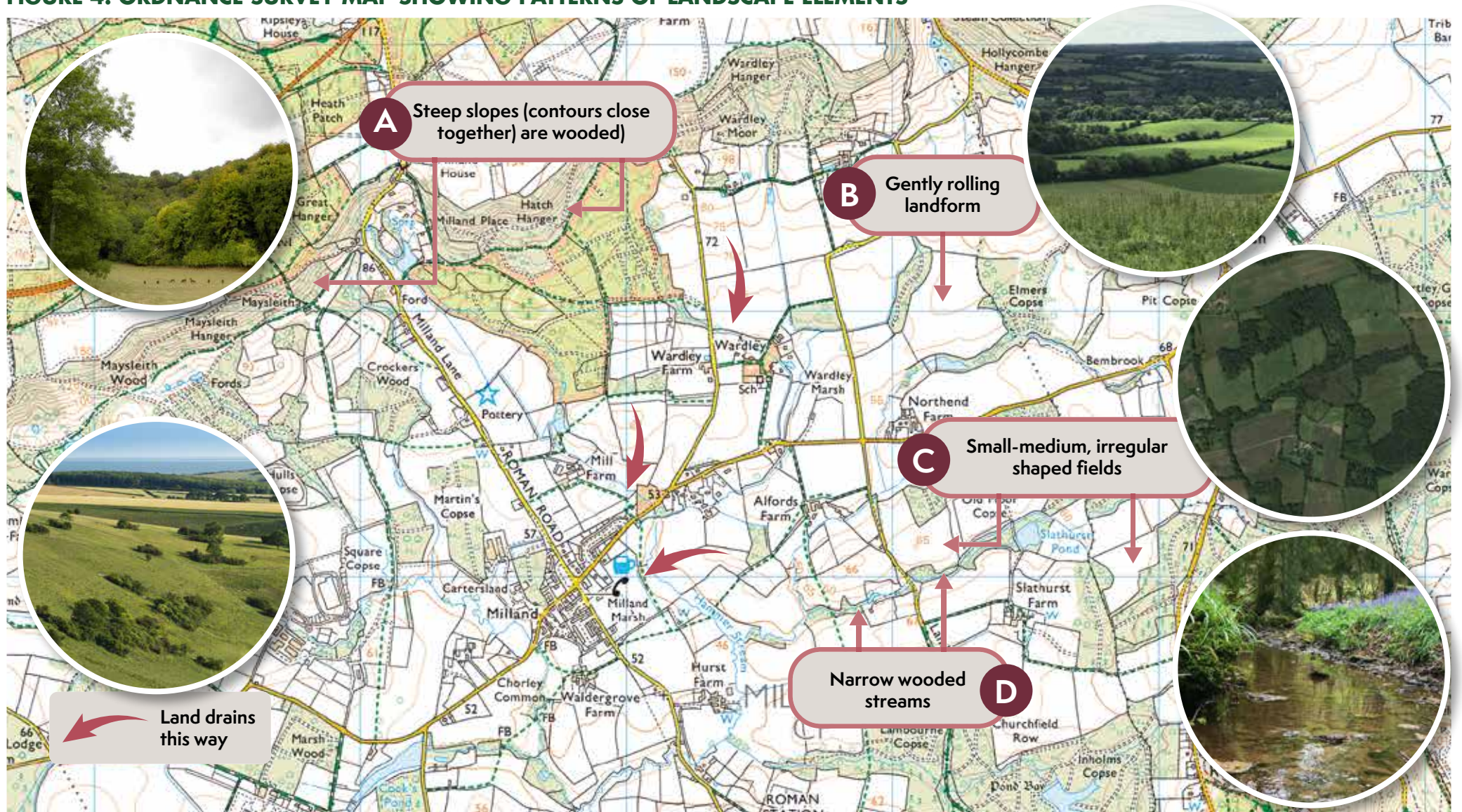


TABLE 2: LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Site Characteristic	Things to Consider	Site Characteristic	Things to Consider
Area of land available	As a rough guide, 1 ha per horse is ideal, if the horse is to receive all or most of its nutrition from grazing. This is a large figure because this guidance is about avoiding harm to the landscape and the functions it undertakes. There are many variables, such as horse size, how much it is worked/ridden and the soils. All will alter this figure, but reducing the pressure on land is the best way to avoid landscape impacts from over-grazing, find out more here .	Water bodies, and groundwater sensitivity	Are there ponds, streams or ditches nearby? Are any of these historic features, such as dew or hammer ponds? Is the site near a borehole/well, or is it in an area of groundwater sensitivity? See OS Map, Magic Map and the Environment Agency .
Hilly or sloping land	Avoid groundworks – levelling land or making bunds. Take into account slopes when siting gateways and fencing to avoid water logging and poaching. Consider how landform affects water movement on your site, work with, rather than against the site's natural processes in a landscape-led approach. Wet areas might be best left for wildlife.	Designated nature sites	Are there any designated sites for habitats and species on or near the land? See Magic Map .
Public Right of Way	Views from footpaths or bridleways. If near a long-distance or promoted route (like the South Downs Way) people can be more sensitive to a change in a view. Find these on an OS Map .	Existing land use	Is the land in equestrian or agricultural use? Seek to retain as much land in agricultural use as possible.
Historic field boundaries	Find out if you have historic field boundaries (and other elements of landscape). The older the landscape the more sensitive it is to change. Retain and enhance these and integrate them into changes. Avoid removing or eroding old field boundaries by subdivision of land. See Historic Maps .	Existing buildings	What buildings exist on or near the site. What value do they have in the landscape, e.g. is it a historic farm or listed/historic buildings? Can they be re-purposed, re-configured or reduced in number if appropriate? Can any new development be located close to them? See Listings and Advice .
		Existing habitat	What veteran or important trees are on the site? What species are in existing hedgerows, do they fit the definition of ancient hedge ? Are there copses, ancient woodland or shaws/rews (wooded field boundaries) and shrubs, or wind breaks?
		Dark night skies (DNS)	Find out which Dark Skies Zone you are in. Avoid roof lights and flood lights. Security lights should be on a timed, motion sensor and meet key criteria to protect species, such as bats, and the DNS reserve status.
		Soil type	Clay soils will have lower carrying capacity of stock/horse numbers unless other management techniques can be used (such as resting the ground). See Soilscapes for basic information about your soils.

More information can be found in the **Equine Land Management Guidance**.

Examples of development that are likely to be unacceptable include:

- ▶ Levelling a hillside to provide a flat school/arena, or building platform;
- ▶ Removing historic field boundaries or sub-dividing a historic field;
- ▶ Creating bunds;
- ▶ Large buildings with rooflights;
- ▶ Floodlit manège/outdoor schools, and indoor schools with excessive rooflights.

Examples of situations where development is likely to be unacceptable include:

- ▶ Where a proliferation of equine activity already exists;
- ▶ Highly sensitive landscapes.

3.2.1 DARK NIGHT SKIES & LIGHTING

Any new development should have a sensitive approach to lighting which conforms to the Institute of Lighting Professionals **guidance** for lighting. Consider environmental zones and aim to achieve zero upwards light spill in all respects. Lighting affects the National Park in 3 ways:

- 1) The International **Dark Skies Reserve** Status – retaining dark skies is critical to being a Reserve. The South Downs provides many in the south-east with the opportunity to experience amazing dark skies;
- 2) Dark Skies are a perceptual quality of our landscapes and support people's health and well-being;
- 3) Impacts upon wildlife, particularly, but not limited to, protected species such as bats.

Further information/advice on sensitive lighting can be found in the SDNPA's Dark Skies **Technical Advice Note** and **Bat Conservation Trust's Lighting Guidance**.

3.2.2 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Where development proposals involve an existing yard, positive design principles include:

- ▶ Re-configure/re-use/consolidate buildings to reduce the amount of built form and overall developed area;
- ▶ Site new buildings characteristically. Often this means close to existing buildings, or in a cluster around a yard, rather than multiple structures spread across the land;
- ▶ Use locally appropriate materials characteristic of the area to reduce the visual impact of new buildings;
- ▶ Maximise ecosystem services by: rainwater harvesting, restoring or enhancing native hedgerows, allowing scrub and trees to regenerate and increasing the diversity of grasslands;
- ▶ Keep parked cars and hard surfacing to a minimum, close to buildings within yards and ensure it remains informal;
- ▶ Avoid external lighting, but where necessary include on a motion sensor and timer. Avoid lighting areas facing open countryside. Follow best practice guidance to avoid negative effects on people and wildlife;
- ▶ Keep it simple – avoid creating complex field boundaries, follow local field patterns and work with contours to locate temporary fencing;
- ▶ Reinforce or restore hedgerows along historic field boundaries, use temporary and visually permeable fencing elsewhere and if using tape, select dark colours **[FIGURE 5]**;
- ▶ Keep access tracks narrow and informal, particularly in rural areas **[FIGURE 6]**.

FIGURE 5: VISUALLY PERMEABLE FENCING USING TAPE



FIGURE 6: NARROW AND INFORMAL TRACK



4. CONSERVATION-BASED LAND MANAGEMENT

Horses are used by many organisations to undertake conservation grazing – this means grazing land to benefit the landscape (wildlife, heritage and people).

Horses are herd animals, naturally moving long distances to look for food and they have adapted to eat a varied high fibre, forage diet. A key aspect of a conservation-based land management plan is to work with horses' needs *and* the capacity of the land to help build a wider variety of species within the grassland. Greater plant diversity is better for both horse-health and landscapes. Find out more in the **Equine Land Management Guidance**.

4.1 LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

A well thought out conservation-based Land Management Plan submitted alongside a planning application will help to provide comprehensive information to the Planning Authority. A good management plan can meet not only policy SD24, but other policies in the Local Plan that need to be addressed to gain permission. For advice on any aspect of land management in relation to equestrian development, submit a **pre-application request** or contact your local **SDNP Ranger**. Land management plans could follow this basic structure set out in **TABLE 3**.

TABLE 3: BASIC STRUCTURE OF A CONSERVATION-BASED LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

Section in the Management Plan	Explanation	Example
Establish your Baseline	Tell us what you have and describe its condition	i) 3 acres of rye grass pasture, some invasive weeds and 20% bare soil. ii) 150m of hedgerow, native species, unmanaged with some gaps. iii) Temporary small, fenced paddocks
Set an Aim	Tell us what you hope to achieve by managing the land differently	i) A greater variety of plants in the grassland, reduce amount of bare soil ii) Restore/thicken hedgerow iii) Restore characteristic field pattern, improve visual impacts
Propose Actions	Set out the actions needed to achieve the aim. Tell us at what time of year these will be undertaken	i) Re-seed bare soil, with mixed native species of grass and wildflowers, alter grazing regime to allow for rest periods and avoid grazing grass shorter than 5cm. Hand pull invasive weeds before they flower. ii) Lay hedgerow to reinvigorate growth and fill the gaps. iii) Create larger paddocks and graze some horses together, remove excess fencing. Follow the contours and swap fencing tape for a darker colour to reduce visual impact.
Monitor	Tell us how you will measure success	i) Count number of species in 5 random 1m squares per acre, before (Baseline stage) and after management. Estimate area of exposed soil. ii) Make wildlife observations, nesting birds, butterflies, take photographs. iii) Before and after photography of fencing and bare soil.

The following topics or questions could be covered in an equestrian land management plan. Each of these are explained in more detail in the **Equine**

Land Management Guidance:

- ▶ Equine health;
- ▶ Water quality;
- ▶ Number and type of horse, include breed, height, weight, use;
- ▶ Other livestock that may graze alongside equines;
- ▶ Amount of land available for turnout and grazing;

- ▶ Type of land, soil type, topography and grass species;
- ▶ Will the horse receive most or all of its nutrients/forage from the land?;
- ▶ A resting and rotation grazing programme to prevent over-grazing and field poaching;
- ▶ Parasite control regime to prevent latrine areas building up and over grazing;
- ▶ Weed management control;
- ▶ Land management techniques; rolling, harrowing, fertilising, reseeding;

- ▶ Damage prevention e.g. no turn-out in wet weather;
- ▶ Managing excessive seasonal growth;
- ▶ Treatment/nature of permanent and temporary field boundaries;
- ▶ Waste (manure) management.

4.1.1 MUCK HEAPS

When it gets wet, horse manure can leach harmful nitrates into watercourses and groundwater. Make sure, as part of getting to know the land, the local patterns of drainage are understood. Where does run-off from yards go after washing down? Where is the nearest watercourse? Consider Local Plan policy SD17 and apply the landscape-led approach. Determine how natural processes and vegetation can help to clean water. Contact **SDNP Rangers** or **The Aquifer Partnership** for more advice. **Government guidance** states that field manure cannot be stored where there is a risk of run-off:

- ▶ To nearby field drains;
- ▶ Within 10 metres of a watercourse;
- ▶ Within 50 metres of a spring, well or borehole that supplies water for human consumption.

Large parts of the National Park fall within areas of groundwater vulnerability due to underlying aquifers, which are particularly vulnerable to nitrate pollution. To prevent pollution, you must also not allow uncontrolled run-off from:

- ▶ Dirty yards;
- ▶ Washing out of stables;
- ▶ Soaking hay to suppress dust.

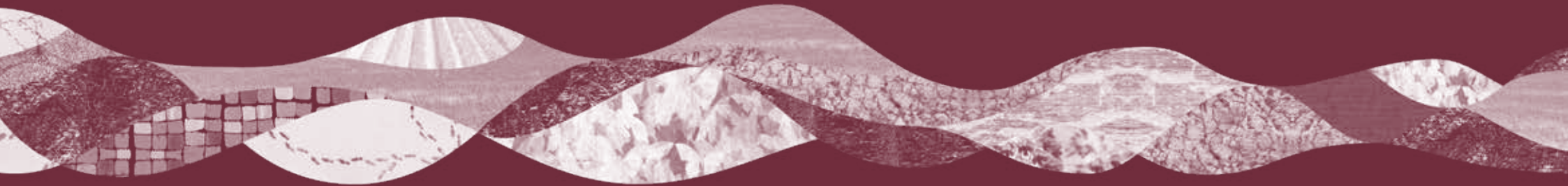
Muck heaps should be constructed with non-permeable (usually concrete) base and sides. Commercial yards will need to have manure collected from site by responsible waste contractors **[FIGURE 7]**.

FIGURE 7: MUCK HEAP CONSTRUCT WITH NON-PERMEABLE BASE AND SIDES



The guidance within this documents seeks to simplify matters and identify typical circumstances and scenarios. It does not seek to cover all situations and should not be read as a definitive statement. Please ask SDNPA for assistance.

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**



**EQUESTRIAN DEVELOPMENT
TECHNICAL ADVICE NOTE**

SEPTEMBER 2022