

Scottish Wind Farm Advice Note



Introduction

BHS Scotland supports the Scottish Government's Renewables Strategy to produce 20% of Scotland's energy from Renewables by 2020.

This statement gives advice to developers, councils, horse riders and carriage drivers as to the safety and access implications for horses and their riders or drivers arising from the construction and operation of wind turbines in the vicinity of routes for riding and/or driving horse drawn vehicles.

This statement gives advice to ensure that the safety implications for horses and riders, carriage drivers and other users of the Scottish countryside and the road network are taken into account and addressed in the determination of planning applications for wind farms. The Society normally restricts itself to commenting on the safety implications for equestrians and rarely comments on either the aesthetics or economics of turbines.

Horse riding on Wind Farms

Many riders and carriage drivers are reluctant to take their horses near wind turbines. There are varied reports from those who do. Some report initial signs of fear, which either become magnified as they approach the turbines, or diminish as the horse discovers no or little threat.

The BHS believes that if horses are familiarised with wind turbines in a gradual and sympathetic way then most horses will accept them.

Wind farms can in fact sometimes pose a positive opportunity for horse riders by creating routes and improving access.

Positive case study: Meadowhead Farm at East Kilbride and improved access courtesy of Whitelee Wind Farm

During construction and assessment

The assessment and construction period of wind farms can have safety implications for all highway users, especially equestrians, and appropriate measures need to be taken to address these.

The Society recommends that no anemometer should be situated closer than fall over distance plus 10 percent from any track used by horseriders or carriage drivers and that no associated cables should be situated any closer than 30 metres from an equestrian route, as the cables can be difficult to see, especially for a startled horse.

The construction period of a wind farm can last for months and may generate significant HGV and non-HGV traffic movements.

The Society expects developers to provide, as part of the planning application, details of:

- The length of the construction period
- The number of vehicular movements during the construction and maintenance periods
- The route of vehicular movements
- Any engineering works to be carried out on the surrounding road network to cater for the construction and maintenance traffic
- If any such works will involve widening of narrow lanes – the Society will expect the developer to do this by strengthening the verge and then re-grassing it to the original width so that the result is not a widened lane that will increase traffic speeds
- Altering junctions, corners and bends to accommodate the low-loaders – the Society will expect the developer to ensure that the final layout will not disadvantage equestrians by removing wide verges on which they wait to cross roads.

Tracks and Paths

The Society does not expect any multi-use trail to be resurfaced with tarmac.

All off road routes and access tracks created as part of a wind farm development provide an opportunity for horse riding. BHS asks that all routes are created with a surface that is top dressed in fine material such as whin dust in order to create the best surface possible for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Separation distances – As a starting point when assessing a site and its potential layout, a separation distance of four times the overall height should be the target for core paths and National Trails, as these are likely to be used by equestrians unfamiliar with turbines. And a distance of three times overall height from all other routes, including roads. Where the recommended separation distances cannot be achieved, the Society will expect the developer to demonstrate how safety issues can be addressed by carrying out agreed works. They should provide details of an alternative route that could be used by equestrians whose horses will not use the existing route because of the closeness of the turbines to the road or right of way, together with details of the provision of funds to improve other rights of way; or to create new routes in the locality.

Planning

If planning permission is granted, the Society will expect the Local Planning Authority to impose planning conditions to address the following situations, in order to reduce the impact of the development on those taking access.

1. That any work affecting a core path will only take place with the approval of the local authority.
2. Where it is proven that there is no alternative to using the line of a path or track as the access route, the route should be widened to allow the vehicles to be fenced off from the bridleway or byway. All vehicles should be required to slow down or stop when meeting walkers and cyclists and particularly horses.
3. If construction traffic has to cross an equestrian route, this should be done at right angles, with warning notices for both vehicle drivers and equestrians. The construction traffic should give way to the users of the public right of way.
4. If it is necessary to close an off road track at any time while large turbine components are brought on site, this should only take place when the relevant Temporary Traffic Regulation Order has been made.
5. To restrict usage of core paths by HGVs to ensure that equestrians can ride and carriage drive safely in the early morning, in the evening, at the weekend and on Bank Holidays.

Surfaces and Access controls

Wind farms can provide great opportunities for off road riding so it is important that developers create paths and tracks that provide a comfortable surface for horses that is top dressed in fine material to make them soft. The unbound nature of wind farm tracks can be very good for horses as long as they are not too stony.

Access controls, gates and stiles for instance should be suitable for equestrian access, BHS can advise developers on this.

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Safe Familiarisation

Wind Farms can provide a great opportunity for off road riding,

Horses are herd animals, they find safety in numbers, they are also flight animals, when startled their first instinct is to flee to safety then to turn around and look at the thing they are fleeing from, this part of the guidance is designed to advise you how to safely introduce your horse to wind turbines for the first time.

The first time you take your horse to a wind farm you are advised to arrange to be accompanied by a horse that is already used to turbines – so plan your approach and join in with your wind friendly buddy.

Plan in advance where you are going to park your trailer or lorry so that it does not interfere with works traffic, land management traffic or the public, it is a good idea to park and unload where your horse can see the turbines and then hack towards them with your confident buddy. This gives your horse a chance to acclimatise itself with something new from a distance then gradually and confidently approach the turbines. Consider how you first introduced your young horse to traffic; you need to do it gradually and in the company of an experienced horse.

To your horse the turbines could signify a large unusual tree that moves, they don't know to be afraid of wind turbines, so it is important that you are confident and reassuring.

Wear hi- viz gear on yourself and your horse.

Be calm and confident yourself as your mood can affect your horse.

While riding in wind farms

Be aware that turbines require maintenance so there might be vehicles about.

Be aware of ground conditions, wind turbines may have been placed in previously boggy areas, so know whether or not it is safe to ride off the track.

Expect the unexpected - wind turbines do turn to face the wind so they may suddenly swivel. Turbines might also stop and start and when doing so can emit strange squeaks and clunks. Horses are more likely to react to unusual noises, rather than the rhythmical movement of the blades.

From some aspects it is possible to hear and feel the swoosh of the turbine blades, where they over sail tracks this can be hypnotic creating an 'odd' feeling, if you feel it your horse probably will, but as you remain calm and relaxed so will your horse. Many horse riders comments how ethereal and peaceful they find wind farms for riding.

The windier it is, the louder the turbines will be. Contact your local windfarm; they will usually have a control tower who can advise you of the expected windspeeds expected that day.

Blade Shadows

In sunshine the rotors of a wind turbine will cast a shadow on the ground which the horse is being asked to cross and this may frighten some horses. These shadows can affect ground a considerable distance from the turbine at certain times of day or year when the sun is very low. Blade shadows are not a problem if the turbine is to the north of the right of way or road. Blades that start to turn while in a horse's sight line may upset the horse. Remember that the horse can see behind them, so may be frightened by something you have not noticed.

Snow and Ice

During very wintery weather it is wise to avoid wind farms as snow or ice that has accumulated on the blades can be thrown to the ground.

Lightening

During thunderstorms it is wiser to avoid wind farms as the turbines can make lightening more dangerous. Wind farms are by their nature criss crossed with underground cables, not the place to be during a lightening storm.