

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH – COMMERCIAL DIVISION

ANIMAL WELFARE ADVICE NOTE – AW4

RIDING ESTABLISHMENTS

Introduction

This advice note is intended to provide guidance on recommended practice at licensed riding establishments. It represents only a statement of opinion, and does not contain legal advice or a complete statement of the law. Information is also provided on the system that is operated by Ashford Borough Council with respect to issuing riding establishment licences.

The Legislation

The Riding Establishments Act 1964 states that where horses are kept for the purpose of letting them out on hire for riding, or for the use in providing instruction in riding and this is in return for payment then a licence is required from the Local Authority.

The licence is renewed annually and runs from one year from the date of issue. All new licence applications and renewals require an inspection by an authorised veterinary surgeon appointed by the Borough Council before a licence is used. If the veterinary surgeon is not satisfied at the time of the initial inspection, then the Borough Council may grant a provisional licence. This provisional licence is normally granted for a three month period but may be extended for a further three months, upon re-application, to enable the applicant to comply with the conditions of the licence and subsequently apply for a full licence.

Any person applying for a licence to keep a riding establishment must be over 18 years of age and experience in the management and care of horses and their ability must be proven by practical experience or by qualification. There are various approved qualifications, such as the British Horse Society's Assistant Instructor, Intermediate Instructor, Instructors and Fellowship Certificates and the Fellowship of the Institute of the Horse. Consideration would be given to persons holding Horse Masters or Stable Manager's Certificates. Licences will not be granted to any person disqualified under the Riding Establishments Acts 1964 and 1970 or other animal welfare legislation.

The Environmental Health Service at Ashford Borough Council issues riding establishment licences for businesses situated within our Borough. Certain conditions are stipulated on the licence that must be complied with by the licensee. These appear on the Schedule that will be attached to the licence. The licence and the conditions should be displayed to the public in a prominent position at the riding establishment.

When is a Licence Required?

A licence is required if you keep horses for the purpose of letting them out on hire for riding, or for use in provisional instruction in riding in return for payment. Please also note that even if you allow your horses to be ridden in return for a donation to be made towards the upkeep of the horse, this may be construed as a 'payment' and you may need to be licensed under the terms of the Riding Establishment Acts 1964 and 1970. Further advice may be sought by contacting the Animal Welfare Licensing Officer at Ashford Borough Council.

GUIDANCE ON THE LICENSING PROCESS

How do I apply for a licence?

You will need to complete an application form and return it with the appropriate application fee to the Community Services Directorate. The required fee will be indicated on the application form. Please note that fees increase on the 1st April each year, so you may need to check this amount before applying for your licence. Also be aware that in the event that your application is refused you will not be refunded the application fee or any part thereof under any circumstances. Fees are also not refunded in the event of an application being withdrawn.

With your application, you will also need to send a copy of your current public liability insurance certificate relevant to the business or details of your insurance company and policy number so that they can be contacted for confirmation. Without this documentation or information your application cannot be processed and will be returned to you.

In addition, new applicants are advised to contact the planning department to ascertain whether it is necessary to obtain **planning permission** for their establishment. This should be done **before** applying for a licence. Should you be considering carrying out alterations to an existing premise you are also advised to contact the building control department and/or the planning department.

The Processing of Applications

Veterinary Inspections

As already mentioned, under the terms of the Riding Establishment Acts, a veterinary inspection is required before a riding establishment licence can be issued. Therefore, for all applications for a licence, both new and renewals, the Local Authority is required to appoint an independent veterinary surgeon who is authorised by the BVA to carry out riding establishment inspections. It will therefore not be possible for us to use your own veterinary surgeon to carry out the inspection. You will be contacted in due course in order to arrange a suitable appointment for the veterinary inspection. Please also note that an Animal Welfare Licensing Officer from the Environmental Health Service may also accompany the Veterinary Surgeon during their inspection.

In addition to the above, a veterinary inspection will be required if any of the following circumstances apply to your application:-

- There has been a change of ownership at an existing establishment.
- You are an existing licensee relocating to a new premise.
- You require a significant increase in the numbers of horses to be kept at the establishment.
- If new accommodation is being added at an existing establishment (veterinary inspection of this accommodation will be required).
- Any other circumstances where an expert veterinary opinion is considered necessary.

Please be aware that the veterinary fees incurred in processing your application will be recoverable from you at cost.

Once we have received the veterinary report following the inspection, you will be advised of any works that need to be carried out so that the licence can be issued.

Please also note that authorised officers of the Borough Council may inspect the establishment at other times during the year (e.g to investigate a complaint or to carry out a health and safety inspection).

Fire Safety Officer

In certain circumstances the Fire Safety Officer will also be asked to visit your establishment to provide advice and to check that the fire precautions are adequate. This will normally be for new establishments, or where there is a change of ownership at an existing establishment. There are no additional costs incurred for this visit. The Fire Safety Officer can be contacted on (01233) 637277.

GUIDANCE ON ANIMAL WELFARE AT LICENSED RIDING ESTABLISHMENTS

The following sections provide guidance on operating to best practice at licensed riding establishments. Please note that this information is for guidance only, and it is the actual conditions attached to your licence that **must** be complied with.

Inspection

The animals must be in good health, physically fit and suitable for the purpose for which they are used. Animals three years or under, in foal or within three months after foal are not suitable and it is an offence to hire them out.

The inspecting veterinary practitioner will require that every horse be brought out of its stable and walked or trotted on a hard surface to establish its fitness for work. He will be looking at the fitting and condition of the shoes. He will check for sores, galls and other injuries. Any horse with defects such as these or in any other way considered to be unfit will not be included in the Licence, which stipulates the number of horses used, until such time as it is deemed fit for work by the veterinary practitioner.

He will also require that a separate register of all horses up to and including the age of three years must be kept on the premises by the Licence holder and made available for inspection at any time. Horses at half livery of which the establishment has limited use and any animal used for providing instruction on return for payment whether owned by the establishment or not will be included under the terms of the Licence. Horses kept at full livery for private owners will be noted at the time of the inspection.

Accommodation

Accommodation must be substantial enough to contain the animals and must provide warmth and shelter in clean hygienic conditions. There must be safe access to stalls and boxes which should be large enough to allow the animal to lie down and get up without risk of injury and should be large enough to allow the animal freedom of movement to turn around. There must be no fittings, projections or other structural features which may cause injury. All doors should open outwards. Any buildings converted for use as stabling must comply eg cow sheds, pig sties or other agricultural buildings would not be suitable without some major modifications being carried out.

Consideration should be given to the total number of animals on the premises (including those at livery) in relation to the buildings and land available. The yard for instance must provide enough space for every animal kept on the premises.

Natural lighting within the stables must be such that the use of artificial light is unnecessary during daylight hours, although this must be provided for night use. Animals must be protected from possible injury from electrical lights and switches or any other similar fittings in their stalls or boxes. Natural ventilation should provide fresh air without exposure to draughts.

Drainage must be adequate to carry away liquids voided by the animals and so keep their standing dry. Drains should discharge outside the building preferably into a specially constructed receptacle designed for that purpose. There must be provision for the storage

and disposal of manure and soiled bedding well away from the stables where it cannot cause a nuisance to the horses or your neighbours. Remember, manure heaps smell and also attract flies! In addition, manure/bedding heaps can self ignite and be a fire risk or they can smoulder and cause a bonfire nuisance. It is therefore very important that they are managed properly.

Welfare

Horses at grass must have water at all times as well as adequate pasture and shelter and supplementary feed when in work and during the winter. This may well depend on the type of animal and the pasture provided. Thoroughbred Arabian or Hunter type animals will need stabling or at least a shed and supplementary feed during the winter. The New Zealand rug is an alternative method of protection from the weather. Native ponies can be maintained at grass with shelter and supplementary feeding. Fencing must be maintained in a safe condition, free from hazards such as loose or broken rails and rubbish. Horses at graze should be visited at least daily by a person competent enough to recognise injury or illness.

The supply of food, drink and bedding material must be adequate and suitable. Hay and food must not be mouldy or show signs of rodent infestation. In the case of supplementary feed, this should be kept in rodent proof bins. The horses must be adequately exercised, groomed, rested and visited at suitable intervals. Stable records must show that this has been done in respect of each horse.

Every precaution must be taken against the spread of infectious disease and veterinary first aid equipment and medicine must be maintained on the premises in a clean state at the place set aside for that purpose. Isolation facilities must be provided for any animal with an infectious disease. First aid equipment should include an antiseptic solution and powder, dressings, bandages, scissors and a thermometer. The name, address and telephone number of your veterinary practitioner should be prominently displayed in a conspicuous position in case of emergency.

Horses let out on hire must be supervised by a person of 16 years or over who is suitably qualified unless the Licence Holder is satisfied that the hirer is competent to ride without supervision. The business in general must not be left in charge of a person under 16 years of age.

Equipment must be maintained in good condition so as not to cause suffering to the animal or accident to the rider. Particular attention must be given to the condition of the leather buckles, stitching and padding and to the degree of wear on cheek pieces, bits and rings of snaffles bearing in mind the particular animal who will be wearing them. Saddles should be fitted individually and inspected under a rider. Single webbing girths are dangerous and should not be used. Stirrup irons must be of a suitable size for the rider. Correct fitting is essential in the case of 'Western' or ex army type saddles and in the use of patent safety stirrup irons.

Fire Precautions

The Fire Prevention Officer will be asked to check the adequacy of the fire precautions at all new establishments. Fire exits must be kept clear and a suitable system for evacuation in case of fire must be maintained.

'No Smoking' notices must be displayed and fire extinguishers must be easily accessible and kept serviced. Water must be readily available. The name, address and telephone number of the Licence Holder or other responsible person with direction for actions particularly with regard to evacuation in case of fire must be prominently displayed on the outside of the premises.

Insurance

The Licence Holder must hold a current Public Liability Insurance Policy to provide an indemnity against a liability to pay damages for accidental bodily injury or damage to property to those hiring a horse for riding or receiving instruction from a member of his staff or of any of his clients in connection with his business.

Specific requirements exist with regard to:-

a) Trekking Centres

In the absence of stabling, there must be safe arrangement for feeding, grooming and saddling-up. A stout rail (not a wire fence) with enough space for every animal to be tethered, should be provided.

There must be at least an acre of good quality grazing per pony and unless the fields used can be regularly rested then extra rations should be fed. Unspillable containers and a routine to prevent kicking and bullying amongst the animals should be used. Clean water must be available at all times.

There must be dry storage for saddlery under cover. Leather should be kept clean and supple with regular dressing. Hand stalls with detachable bits and ropes as neck straps and for tying up at halts are advised.

Particular care should be taken of the state of the horses feet. They should be trotted on a hard surface in hand to check for signs of lameness and if shod then the trek leader should be capable of giving first aid to shoeing. There should be at least one whole day's rest per week for every animal. Spare animals are essential for an efficient centre.

No one should lead a trek without the basic knowledge or practical experience necessary.

b) Tethering

Tethering as a method of managing horses is generally unsatisfactory but if and when it has to be used then the following code should be observed:-

- (i) **The Site** must be flat, well grassed, well drained and free from poisonous plants. There must be shade available.

The animal must not be allowed to come into contact with highways, footpaths or fences.

The Site must be at least 20 ft radius and must be changed every 24 hours.

- (ii) **The Tether** must be firmly staked and have a 360° swivel. Both leather neck band or head collar must be fitted with a swivel.

The Tether must be inspected at least once every twelve hours.

- (iii) **Animals** less than two years old must not be Tethered Mares should not be tethered near stallions and vice versa. Animals must not be tethered in extreme weather conditions. They must be inspected at least once every twelve hours. Water must be available at all times and if grazing is poor then supplementary feed must be given.

FURTHER INFORMATION

1. The term 'animal' or 'horse' means any horse, pony, Ass, mule or jennet for the purpose of this informative.
2. For further reading see 'A Guide to the Riding Establishments Acts 1964 and 1970; published by the British Veterinary Association, 7 Mansfield Street, London, W1M 0AT. Telephone: 020 7636 6541. Fax: 020 7436 2970. Website: <http://www.bva.co.uk>.
3. For details of examinations and qualifications contact The British Horse Society, The British Equestrian Centre, Stoneleigh, Deer Park, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, CV8 2LR. Telephone: (01926) 707700. Fax: (01926) 707800. Website: <http://www.bhs.org.uk>.
4. Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 2JR. DEFRA Helpline (Public Enquiries) (0645) 335577. Website: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/defrahome.htm>.
5. For further information please contact your own veterinary officer or the Animal Welfare Licensing Officer, Environmental Health Services, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL or telephone (01233) 330470.