

# **ACT Equestrian Association Comments on the Stromlo Forest Park User Group Priorities 21.11.2019**

## **1. Maps of current Equestrian Trails in SFP created by SFP management**

The map labelled **Equestrian Trails 1** shows the current route of the BNT out of the Park to the John Gorton underpass via a cavaletti in the north east corner. The BNT route crosses the stub of Uriarra Road and uses the northern side of Holdens Creek in the underpass on its way to the Molonglo River corridor.

The map labelled **Equestrian Trails 2** shows the current and proposed BNT entrance from the Cotter Road. The entrance point itself is fixed. Public Works agree it is the only safe crossing for horses on this section of the Cotter Road. Most of the current route from the cavaletti entrance is cross country to the management tracks around Blue Gums; its alignment dictated by the condition of the ground, some of the lower parts of which are prone to impassable boggy areas at certain times of the year.

The proposed alternate route is predicated on the Government being ready to spend several million dollars on an enclosed oval. This will entail enclosing a section of the Creek in a drain and building a bridge for horses over it. The cross country element of this new route will be dictated by contours until it meets the existing equestrian trail to Blue Gums.

## **2. A4 Map reflecting the Plan of Priorities Created by the Stromlo Forest Park Users Group to the East of the Entrance Road**

The map labelled **Equestrian Trails 4** shows the current route of the BNT across the open country north of the running track in relation to the proposed extension of the criterium track. There is no safe way the BNT can cross the criterium track unless cyclists are obliged to stop and wait for horses to cross – twice! - which would defeat the purpose of a criterium track. Playing chicken to get across is not an option.

The configuration of the extension will obliterate half the BNT route and squeeze what is left of it against a new running track. There isn't much to choose between speeding bikes and running people as far as unsettling a horse, creating opportunities for accidents or just simply turning a pleasant riding experience into an ordeal.

The dam rest spot shown on **Equestrian Trails 1**, along with the tie rails and picnic table, under this new arrangement would be completely cut off from any equestrian trail. When you are dealing with animals travelling distances in an Australian Summer that is not acceptable.

It has taken 11 years for ACTEA to get any route for the BNT through SFP that was not a totally impossible notional line on a Master Plan and we expect that the actual route we have now will not be moving very far from its current alignment. In any case ACTEA would not be agreeing to a change in alignment until a definite decision has been made about moving the low cost accommodation from its current site on the Master Plan to the Village hub as proposed by Stromlo Forest Park Users Group.

## **3. A4 Map reflecting the Plan of Priorities Created by the Stromlo Forest Park Users Group to the East of the Entrance Road**

This section of the Stromlo Forest Park Users Group Priorities Plan on **Equestrian Trails 3** is very worrying, filled as it appears to be with vague but aggressive inroads into the existing equestrian

trail network.

Stromlo Forest Park was designed as a multi-use recreation area and that includes horse riding – and not horse riding where you have to venture forth on a cavalry horse in full body armour. Specific concerns are:

Item 15 – a 5k Parkrun Circuit. ACTEA is already in discussions with City Services and Parks & Conservation about Parkrun being granted permits to run with dogs and prams on designated equestrian trails on a Saturday morning when, like everyone else who works, horse riders are trying to get their horses out. Dealing with people racing against the clock is not consistent with safety and ACTEA will resist any attempt to conduct Parkrun activities on equestrian trails. There is an entire grass running track for the purpose in the Park.

Items 10 and 14 seems to be proposing more running and cycling tracks across the equestrian trail network. If the intent is to drive equestrians out of the Park this would be a good way to do it. These new routes look to be heading for Blue Gums which equestrians were promised from the beginning would remain as a relatively quiet refuge on the mountain, with tie rails and a water trough. Blue Gums is of particular value to people travelling on short rides from the riding schools and agistment centres to the west of SFP on the Cotter Road.

There are rules about horses and cyclists interacting at SFP, spelled out on the Park website (<http://stromloforestpark.com.au/facilities/conditions-of-use>) which include :

- Stromlo Forest Park has designated Mountain Bike (MTB) and equestrian trails. Cyclists are not permitted to use designated equestrian trails. Equestrians are not permitted to use designated MTB trails. Other fire trails are open to both equestrians and cyclists.
- Equestrians have the right of way over other users on all trails. This is an international standard. Walkers have next priority and then cyclists.
- Cyclists should yield to horses by stopping and asking permission of the horse rider to pass.

ACTEA expects that these rules will continue to dictate how the existing tracks and trails at SFP are used.

The design of the trail system on the eastern face of the mountain is subject to a number of Principles developed at the beginning of the construction of mountain bike trails at SFP and pretty much adhered to by the Park Management ever since. A copy of those Principles is attached. Basically they promote track crossings at existing intersections, maintaining good sight lines and, where it is unavoidable, only crossing mid track on uphill bike routes. Where these Principles have not been adhered to equestrian trails have been lost. This happened on Pipeline Road once the first downhill track went in followed by a proliferation of additional crossing spreading north along the Road. In the end ACTEA, for the safety of horse riders, had to request that Pipeline Road be removed from SFP Equestrian Trail Maps. We don't expect this to be other than a rare occurrence. Together with the bitumening of the equestrian trail along the Uriarra Road boundary, these losses come to 12km of equestrian trail. Any more is unacceptable.

ACTEA expects that any development of cycling and running infrastructure will respect the existing equestrian trails including the Bicentennial National Trail the existence and safety of which has been the subject of a Memorandum of Understanding between the ACT Government, the ACT Equestrian Association and the Board of the Bicentennial National Trail since 2004.

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