

The law and management of public access rights vary widely between the four countries of the United Kingdom. Practical elements of the following advice apply in all of them but the legal requirements in Scotland and Northern Ireland may differ from those in England and Wales.

More advice is available on [www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice](http://www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice).

**IMPORTANT** This guidance is general and does not aim to cover every variation in circumstances. Where it is being relied upon, The Society strongly recommends seeking its advice specific to the site.

Many situations where gates are needed are not ideal in terms of the following check list because of natural constraints. Where it is not possible to change the natural constraints, the degree of hazard posed by a gate increases with each failed point. It is important to reduce the number of points on which a gate fails and improve other points to compensate.

For more information, see [BHS Advice on Gates](#).

All gate installations should comply with the British Standard 5709 as a minimum for good practice. However, it is possible for a gate itself to comply but the conditions of its site to make it an obstruction. Regard to the site of a gate is as important as attention to the gate itself.

- The gate should be operable from horseback with the lever or latch at top rail height to enable the gate to be opened using one (and the same) hand (see BHS Advice on Gates).
- The gate must not require lifting to open or close it or for the latch to fasten.
- There must be a minimum 1.525m gap between posts or between protrusions from posts (e.g. latch mechanism) on a bridleway, 3m on a byway.

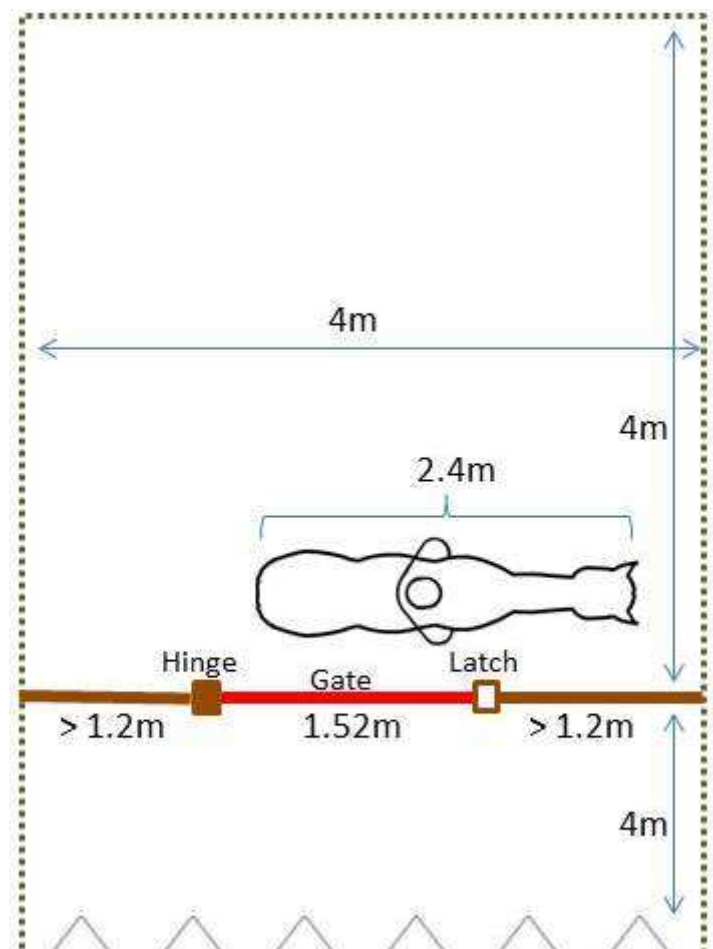


Figure 1 Manoeuvring space plan

- The gate must open freely to at least 90 degrees but preferably not swing away from the rider under its own weight to an angle wider than 110 degrees.
- 1.2m space is needed for the horse's head and neck in line with the gate beyond the gate post at the latch end. Allowance should be made for a hedge's growth between cuts.
- Minimum manoeuvring space 4m x 4m before and after the gate including 1.2m beyond the clapper post (latching post) with clear height of 3.7m.
- The ground throughout the manoeuvring space should be firm, level (not sloping) and even and free of any obstacle on or above the ground.
- Self-closing gates must be installed only where there is ample room on level ground.
- The closing speed of self-closing gates MUST be adjusted to at least 8 seconds (measured from an angle of ninety degrees open).
- Double gates must have one gate firmly anchored.
- The gate should be possible to use by people with disabilities, children and the elderly who may have less strength or dexterity but who are still able to ride or drive a horse. A sensible standard is to consider a twelve year old child, rather than the installer.
- Gates beside cattle grids must be hung with the latch away from the grid and with a barrier between the gate and grid, extending beyond the grid.
- Gates beside roads should be set back far enough that the gate can be operated with the horse well off the carriageway and to provide waiting space for at least three horses, at least 4m from the kerb on a bridleway, 6m on a byway.
- Good installation and maintenance are vital. The best gate and latch can still be difficult if put in poorly.
- There must be no barbed wire on the gate, clapper post or within 1m of the latch.
- There must be no unshielded electric fencing within 3m of the gate and no barbed wire on or within 1m of the gate.

Once installed, gates cannot be forgotten. Wooden posts and gates in particular will need checking and adjustment because the gates and posts will shrink and swell as they age and with the effects of the weather. Gate posts in clay earth will need to be well supported, with concrete if necessary, and checked more frequently because of the tendency to move in clay.

## Gate latches

No single design of gate latch is suitable in every situation. Many are adequate and safe. The primary requirements are:

1. A latch release that can be operated with the same hand as moving the gate.
2. Operated from horseback with the lever or latch on the top of the gate so the rider does not have to bend so low as to risk being unbalanced.
3. Does not need physical strength or precise dexterity to operate (could it be used by a twelve year old child?).
4. Any mechanism should avoid a protruding bolt or any other part on the gate or post which could injure a horse. In particular, spring bolts are condemned as they have caused serious injury, especially on self-closing gates. The British Standard 5709:2018 requires a retracting D bolt with rounded edges, not a single horizontal rod.

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