Worcestershire Access and Informal Recreation Strategy

2009-2019

Prepared by the Parks and Countryside Task Group

On behalf of the Worcestershire Partnership's Cultural Theme Group

WORCESTERSHIRE
SOURCE OF EXCELLENCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> "Access to culture, leisure and recreation has a key role to play in enhancing the quality of life in Worcestershire"
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> **Worcestershire Cultural Strategy 2009-2013**

Worcestershire's Access and Informal Recreation Strategy (AIRS) covers the period 2009-2019. It replaces the former Worcestershire Countryside Access and Recreation Strategy.

Access and recreation plays a key role in the continued social, economic and environmental well-being of Worcestershire. It forms part of a Green Infrastructure network extending across the county and beyond. Access and recreation provides both quantifiable and qualitative benefits to residents and visitors alike. This Strategy complements the Worcestershire Partnership's Cultural Strategy, which includes an Action to *"Maintain and where possible improve standards on parks and countryside sites and routes through the implementation of the Worcestershire Countryside Access and Recreation Strategy (now the AIRS) and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan"*.

The AIRS covers both urban and rural access and informal recreation, and focuses primarily on those less planned - and often non-statutory and less well-funded - elements of Worcestershire's access and recreation resource. Other strategies, plans and programmes provide the strategic direction and local action planning for more formal sports, indoor recreation, children's play, etc. Many of these plans are signposted at Appendix 5. Delivery mechanisms and funding opportunities for more formalised access and recreation are well-established; those 'softer' elements of urban and rural access and recreation that provide people with countless opportunities to improve their health and to experience a sense of achievement are now being incorporated into the 'mainstream'. Indeed, Natural England has stated that green infrastructure is *"increasingly recognised as an essential part of sustainable spatial planning"*[1]. This positive development is fully supported by the AIRS.

This strategy highlights how access and recreation transcends disability and disadvantage and draws communities together to create a cohesive society; it discusses how access and recreation can generate economic gain; it demonstrates the key health advantages that participation can deliver, and addresses the standards that are expected from people's recreation experiences. It is recognised that play and the opportunities for play that are provided in the county's greenspaces are extremely important. However, given that this is considered in detail in the Worcestershire Play Strategy, the AIRS does not seek to duplicate that work. Finally, the AIRS also identifies negative aspects of the access and recreation experience, and draws attention to the conflicts that can occur between different uses and users of land.

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[1] 'Green Infrastructure Guidance', Natural England (2009)

1 BACKGROUND

1.1   The county of Worcestershire is located in the Heart of England and is characterised by a landscape and townscape of great diversity offering numerous recreation opportunities. In addition to the 555,400 residents, this opportunity is also available to a population of around 3 million who live within an hour's drive of the county. It was estimated that in 2004 approximately 10 million visitors came to Worcestershire[2], many with the purpose of enjoying its outstanding natural beauty and participating in a recreation activity. It should not be surprising that surveys repeatedly cite being able to enjoy open spaces as being amongst the top priorities of local residents and visitors:

- 82% of respondents said that access to nature and the countryside was good or very good in their wider local area compared to just 3% who said it was poor or very poor.

- The percentage of people who said the availability of parks and open spaces is very good increased from 16% in 2003 to 19% in 2005. In total, 62% of people said the availability of parks and open spaces in their local area was good or very good[3].

- In 2009, 93% of Worcestershire residents classed parks and open spaces as either 'important' or 'very important'[4].

1.2   The variety and contrasts of Worcestershire's urban and rural landscape greatly influence the context of many recreational activities, such as walking, horse-riding, cycling, canoeing and leisure driving, presenting both residents and visitors with an abundant 'resource' for a wide range of recreation experiences. For example, the ancient landscapes of central and western Worcestershire can be intimate and secluded, with their woodlands and hedgerow oak trees, parklands and country houses, and dense matrix of lanes and footpaths, appealing particularly to the naturalist and the historian. The more open landscapes to the south east of the county provide a marked contrast, with their characteristic market gardening and orchards and associated roadside stalls and blossom routes, together with prominent villages, offering architectural interest and settings of particular appeal to artists.

1.3   The landscapes of high slopes and wooded hills, which border the county to the west, north-east and south-east, provide more challenging conditions, rewarding visitors with splendid panoramic views of the surrounding lowlands. The eastern slopes of the Malvern Hills offer the additional potential for hang-gliding and similar activities, whilst the expanse of common land below provides ideal opportunities for kite flying and orienteering.

1.4   In total contrast, walking, canoeing or fishing the Severn, Teme or Avon allows the flat river valley landscapes to be explored, and water-borne recreation extends to the county's network of canals, as well as specialist facilities for sailing, windsurfing and diving

2 'Economic Impact of Tourism in Worcestershire' 2002-04
3 Worcestershire Citizens Panel survey, May 2005
4 Worcestershire Citizens Panel survey, June 2009

at lakes across the county.

1.5 Worcestershire's urban areas provide yet another valuable recreation resource, yielding a host of opportunities. These range from city walks through the historic streets of Worcester, to cycling through Redditch town's extensive green spaces, and from informal opportunities in the county's numerous fine public parks, to volunteering in small informal greenspaces within residential areas. As the main centres of population, with convenient transport and access, the county's urban areas often represent the most readily available resource for informal outdoor recreation.

1.6 The range of different recreation 'opportunities' available within the county include:

- publicly and privately-owned and managed countryside sites which offer facilities and services to users such as those at country parks, picnic sites, and countryside visitor centres;

- public parks which offer informal open space as well as play equipment, sports pitches and formal gardens;

- the opportunity to be free to discover greater solitude, the natural environment and attractions that are offered by regional routes of more than a day's duration. Walking such long-distance waymarked routes, e.g. the Worcestershire Way, gives confidence to users about their right to be there and what is expected of them;

- miles of public rights of way through town and country that simply offer the opportunity to be challenged to route-find and pre-plan a visit;

- permissive walking, riding and cycling routes;

- many rivers, canals and other water bodies providing opportunities for canoeing, sailing and angling.

1.7 This Strategy encompasses all areas of the county, from open countryside, to urban fringe and town and city centres. A full glossary of terms is provided at Annex B, but for convenience, the following terms are defined:

- *'access'* refers to all the means of enabling people to enjoy recreational routes and open spaces in both urban and rural areas.

- *'informal recreation'* embraces a wide range of activities. Common to all is that they are characterised by their use of, and access to, the natural environment.

- *'landowners'* has been loosely used to refer to land owners, managers and agricultural tenants.

1.8   The provision of 'access' is an obligation upon many organisations. In recognition of the wide scope and 'shared responsibilities' amongst organisations in the county - allied to the fact that there is no single body responsible for recreation - many agencies, interests and organisations have been involved in the preparation of this revised Strategy. Development of the Strategy has been led by the Parks and Countryside Task Group, which is part of the Worcestershire Partnership's Cultural Theme Group. The Parks and Countryside Task Group is made up of a number of organisations that collectively provide routes, rights of way, country parks, nature reserves, picnic places, urban parks, staff, management expertise, information, education, and funding - as well as maintaining links with user groups, private landowners and local communities. Between them they cater for at least 20 different activities that can take place on the sites and routes shown on the AIRS map at Appendix 1. Moreover, many of the organisations are also well-placed to integrate access and recreation interests into their other areas of influence.

1.9   This Strategy has been subject to consultation to ensure it reflects the needs and aspirations of a broad section of society and represents a diverse range of interests, both urban and rural.

1.10   The Strategy has been drafted in the context of Government polices relating to recreation such as the Rural White Paper 2000 'Our Countryside: The Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England', The Countryside and Rights Of Way Act 2000 and Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Open Space, Sport and Recreation.

1.11   At county level, the AIRS has also been influenced by - and seeks to complement - more local strategies, plans and policies including the Worcestershire Sustainable Community Strategy, District Local Development Frameworks and Cultural Strategies. One of the Priority Outcomes of the Sustainable Community Strategy is *'To enhance Worcestershire's countryside and urban greenspace and appropriate access to them while protecting the natural and historic environment'.* This strategy is the responsibility of the Parks and Countryside Task Group, which sits within the Worcestershire Partnership as part of the Culture Theme Group. One of the benefits/outcomes within the Worcestershire Cultural Strategy[5] is that there will be increased quality of, and access to, the natural environment. The AIRS - formerly CARS - (along with the Worcestershire Play Strategy, District Play Action Plans and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan) is identified as being integral to the delivery of this outcome.

1.12   Successful delivery of the AIRS can help in raising performance measured through the Government's National Indicators[6]. This is especially important in the context of Worcestershire's Local Area Agreement (LAA), as performance against the LAA influences future funding for the Worcestershire Partnership. The AIRS can contribute to a number of National Indicators, both directly and indirectly. Examples of these linkages are given at

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[5] Worcestershire Cultural Strategy, prepared by the Culture Theme Group for the Worcestershire Partnership (2009)
[6] The National Indicator Set (NIS) is the only set of indicators on which central government performance manages local government. It covers services delivered by local authorities alone and in partnership with other organisations like health services and the police. The NIS replaces all other existing sets of indicators including Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). More information is available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

Appendix 3, but this is not an exhaustive list; it is likely that there are other less obvious areas in which the AIRS could also make a limited but valued contribution.

1.13 The development of this Strategy has proceeded in parallel with statutory duties. The local Highway Authority (Worcestershire County Council) prepared and published a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) in 2007. The RoWIP assesses:

- The extent to which the local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the authority's area;
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind and partially sighted people and others with mobility problems.

1.14 The Local Highway Authority has also established a Local Access Forum (LAF) to advise on the improvement of public access to land in their area, for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment. The LAF have been consulted during production of this Strategy[7].

1.15 It is recognised that the Strategy will only be effective if it is based upon a detailed understanding of current management pressures and the demands and aspirations of users. To this end the collective knowledge of Task Group members has been supplemented by findings from other sources such as Citizens' Panels and consultations undertaken on other strategies.

1.16 A significant concern the Task Group identified was the lack of countywide data specifically in relation to access and recreation. This is compounded by the fragmented and uncoordinated nature of the data where it does exist. For example, there is no agreed standard definition of what constitutes a recreation site, and there is often no agreed definition to explain differing categories of site, e.g. the difference between a Country Park and a Nature Reserve. The absence of any strategic mapping or database of site information for the county is also identified as a concern; the map accompanying this Strategy, compiled from the results of an audit of recreation sites, helps begin to overcome this problem. The map can be seen at Appendix 1.

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[7] For more information on the LAF, visit: http://worcestershire.whub.org.uk/home/wcc-local-access-forum.htm

2. THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE CONTEXT

2.1 Green Infrastructure (GI) is the network of green spaces and natural elements that intersperse and connect our cities, towns and villages. It is the open spaces, parks waterways, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, wildlife habitats, street trees, natural heritage and open countryside. Green Infrastructure provides multiple benefits for the economy, the environment and people[8]. The different elements of green infrastructure can be both the drivers of, and the outcomes from, successful access and recreation opportunities.

Figure 1 – The Seven 'pillars' of Green Infrastructure in Worcestershire

2.2 Worcestershire's 'Planning for a Multi-Functional Green Infrastructure Framework' research paper[9] divides green infrastructure into seven inter-linking sections (see Figure 1 above). Recreation and access initiatives form part of the 'Recreation and tourism' and 'Access and movement' sections respectively, although the AIRS has clear impacts on – and is impacted by - all elements of GI.

2.3 It is recognised that walking and cycling along green corridors, whilst an attractive recreational pursuit, also provides a means of functional and sustainable low-carbon transport. Taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by the many miles of accessible

8 Definition adapted from 'West Midlands Green Infrastructure Prospectus'
9 Planning for a Multi-Functional Green Infrastructure Framework in Worcestershire technical research paper, Version 1, Worcestershire County Council (November 2009)

linked movement corridors, including footpaths, bridleways and canals, is an alternative to car-borne traffic for many shorter journeys, and can be encouraged through, for example, the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the Local Transport Plan. These opportunities offer people the chance to improve their health – both physical and mental – through exercise, and this can reduce stress levels, and reduce the cost of ill-health on society. This issue is explored further in the Health and Wellbeing chapter.

2.4 Many people's recreation experiences will be based on a desire to be among biodiversity; to hear birds singing and to appreciate plants and animals in their natural environment. Similarly, the landscape itself is a key factor in many people's recreation choices, especially for the more dramatic locations in the county such as the Malvern Hills.

2.5 Green infrastructure links our built and natural heritage, which so often frames opportunities for access and recreation, be it through walking along historic routes, to enjoying the sights of ancient monuments in the landscape. Worcestershire's historic environment is rich and varied, with over 22,000 sites recorded on the Historic Environment Record. Some of Worcestershire's field patterns date back to the Bronze Age[10], and in passing by such features in the course of access and recreation, a tangible and irreplaceable link is made with the past. Historic environment assets are found in both rural and urban areas and, alongside more formal recreation (for example visits to National Trust properties), they provide a variety of informal experiences.

2.6 The importance of each of these green infrastructure drivers to access and recreation users will differ depending on their particular local circumstances, and the environments that are most accessible to them. For some, any or all of the green infrastructure 'pillars' may feature in their reasons for visiting a particular site, whilst for others it may be an unconscious contributor to their choices.

2.7 As green infrastructure becomes embedded in the planning process, new developments will seek to integrate as many of the GI issues as possible. Natural England[11] has stated that *"Variation in design and layout provides the opportunity for a range of green infrastructure functions, including formal and passive recreation..."* This will lead to positive gain for access and recreation, as existing networks become linked and new opportunities arise. The long-term management of these resources must be factored in from the outset and appropriate delivery and funding mechanisms identified to ensure the network remains valued and high quality into the future.

2.8 Green infrastructure planning recognises the need for a linked network of green sites, both formal and informal, which can deliver multiple benefits. It should be recognised that this Strategy is primarily concerned with the recreational benefits of land; this extends beyond GI to encompass all opportunities, including heavily urbanised routes and spaces.

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10 Planning for a Multi-Functional Green Infrastructure Framework in Worcestershire technical research paper, Version 1, Worcestershire County Council (November 2009)
11 'Green Infrastructure Guidance', Natural England (2009)

3.   STRATEGIC THEMES AND ISSUES

3.1   There are a wide range of specific, localised issues related to access and informal recreation that would be impossible to explore at a county level. The AIRS takes a strategic approach in identifying the higher-level areas of concern for Worcestershire. Local issues are addressed through a variety of bodies in their local plans and programmes.

3.2   Due to the variety of people, places and environments that can both affect, and be affected by, access and recreation, it would not be possible to account for all these factors at a strategic level. Access and informal recreation contributes to a better quality of life by being integrated into a range of other public policy priorities, including the environment, the economy, and health and well-being.

3.3   The quality of the urban and rural environment is the greatest attraction for many people who participate in access and recreation. Through contact with the environment, promotion of the need to protect its intrinsic qualities can be better understood. Recreational use of land can also contribute to more sustainable management, with associated benefits to biodiversity.

3.4   The economic aspects of access and recreation are notable. Revenue from visitors is a valuable source of income. Recognising that 'recreational activities' constitute an element of 'tourism', it is worth noting that the Visit Heart of England survey on behalf of Worcestershire County Council in 2002 calculated a visitor spend locally of £422 million each year. Spending by local residents on their recreation activities also contributes, e.g. the annual costs for keeping a horse have been estimated at between £2,000 and £5,500 per year[12].

3.5   Health and well-being can be both a motivator and an unintended benefit from taking part in access and recreation activities. Participation in physical activities can improve the health of participants by overcoming the onset of obesity and diabetes and in particular reducing the risk of heart disease, the biggest single cause of premature death in the UK. In addition the social aspect and peace and quiet associated with many recreation activities also contribute to a sense of well-being.

3.6   The concept of sustainability and sustainable development has become increasingly central to policy-making in recent years. The AIRS fully embraces the notion of living within environmental limits, ensuring a strong, healthy and just society, achieving a sustainable economy, using sound science responsibly, and promoting good governance.

3.7   Community cohesion involves diverse communities sharing common objectives and respecting the beliefs and cultures of others, thereby creating a positive and inclusive society where no group is disadvantaged. Access and recreation providers can facilitate increased community cohesion through planning for the needs of a range of users. This

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[12] www.equine-world.co.uk, 2009

ensures that all sectors of society have the opportunity to participate in recreation and for disparate groups to come together and interact where otherwise they might not. Volunteering in urban and rural recreation and access projects is one of the key mechanisms through which this cohesion can be delivered, and partner organisations have a strong history of working with volunteers that should be maintained and expanded where possible. Natural England recognise the importance of community cohesion. Along with life-long learning and volunteering, it forms a policy priority within their Green Infrastructure guidance. The guidance states that benefits of access, recreation, movement and leisure in relation to this priority include places for meeting and events; reducing the perception of crime through enhanced permeability and accessibility[13].

3.8   Climate change is the greatest environmental challenge facing the world today. Rising global temperatures will bring changes in weather patterns and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather. We need to act now to adapt to climate change and to reduce the risk by contributing less to the causes. The AIRS has a role to play in ensuring that access and recreation activities are planned and delivered to minimise and offset climate change impacts. Many of the spaces and routes considered in this strategy will have an equally valuable role to play in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. Examples of this include increased provision of trees and planting at suitable sites, and designing new buildings to be able to cope with expected future weather conditions.

3.9   Within the strategic themes covered above, the following key issues that the Strategy should address have emerged:

All members of the community should have opportunities to enjoy access and recreation;

Enjoyment of urban and rural open space should be enabled in ways that minimise damage to the landscape, geodiversity, the built environment, biodiversity, and archaeology;

Local communities should be actively involved in projects and support 'community generated' projects

Further recreation opportunities are needed to support the regeneration of the urban and rural economy through tourism and visitor spend

Public transportation routes should be integrated with recreation sites and access gateways. This is particularly important near large population centres, to enable access other than by private car

There is a need to identify a process for determining where - and how - to make additional access opportunities available

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[13] 'Green Infrastructure guidance', Natural England (2009)

The needs of differing users need to be managed and the potential for conflict between users, local communities and landowners needs to be reduced

Activities such as walking, canoeing and cycling should be promoted to contribute to a healthier lifestyle and the feeling of 'well-being' for people

There is a need to understand, and where appropriate meet the demand for, improved access to water

There is a need to ensure that all access and recreation-related development is designed to minimise energy use in construction and future operation

There is a need to carefully plan the location of new recreational infrastructure in anticipation of the impacts of climate change

There is a need to recognise the role that green-space can play in terms of producing bio-fuels and accommodating or slowing flood water

Over 67% of respondents to the 1999 Worcestershire Citizens Panel felt that they needed more information on where to go and what to do in order to make greater use of the countryside

The top free recreation attractions in the county include: –

- Malvern Hills (>1,250,000 visitors per year),
- Clent Hills (500,000),
- Lickey Hills Country Park (500,000),
- Worcester Woods Country Park (400,00),
- Waseley Hills Country Park (250,000),
- Kingsford Forest Park (250,000),
- Wyre Forest Visitor Centre (200,000),
- Hartlebury Common (150,000),
- Pershore Bridge Picnic Place (100,000) and
- Evesham Country Park (100,000)

4. VISION, BROAD AIMS AND PURPOSES

4.1 The vision developed by the partnership for this Strategy is:

To develop a recreation culture in Worcestershire in which residents and visitors alike benefit from the opportunity to access a range of high quality urban and rural recreation opportunities. This will be planned and implemented having respect for the wishes of both landowners and the local community and ensuring the utmost protection of environmental interests.

4.2 To enable this vision to be translated into practical policies the following broad aims have guided how the 'key issues' identified at section 2.5 have been addressed:

Continue to pursue and establish partnership between organisations, and with local communities, for projects, funding and the joint promotion of activities

Encourage better understanding of the needs of all users, and landowners

Promote responsible use by participants and land managers to minimise conflict with local residents, landowners and other users

Share and adopt common working practices in regard to information exchange and standards of service and provision

Promote and adopt sustainable practices of recreation provision to maintain and enhance environmental quality

Meet the access needs of those who have limited opportunity to enjoy informal recreation

Raise awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities associated with recreation in the County to visitors and local communities

Increase the quality and range of opportunities for recreation in a manner that maintains and enhances environmental quality, is appropriate to local character, and meets identified needs

Provide a strategic focus to help shape and assist the formation of appropriate planning policies and for use in determining planning applications

Promote the recognition and adoption of the objectives and policies within this strategy in other policy documents, both statutory and non-statutory

4.3   The purposes of the Strategy are to:

- raise awareness of the importance of access;

- support proposals for grant applications where they are in conformity with the Strategy; and

- help align the work of partners and to help guide priorities;

- influence the future provision of facilities and opportunities;

- influence the management of facilities;

- inform the preparation of GI frameworks and other relevant work, such as Local Development Frameworks and Local Transport Plans.

5. Access for All

Objective: Ensuring opportunity is available to all sections of the community to enjoy access and recreation opportunities.

5.1   In this context the term 'Access for All' reflects diversity and the need to ensure recreation and access activities are inclusive of the whole community so that the access and recreation opportunities may be a source of enjoyment for all. Diversity encompasses gender, age, race, sexual orientation, disability, religion and belief.

5.2   Surveys of visitors to countryside sites in the county, and indeed the Country as a whole, have shown that the majority of participants are typically white, middle-aged, middle-class and able-bodied[14]. Outside this 'participation profile', a significant proportion of the county population is under-represented in countryside recreational activities. This includes young adults (<25 yrs), low-income groups, those from different cultural backgrounds, people with disabilities (including those with visual impairments), older people, those without access to a private car, and women. As these groups account for a significant number of the population it is important that their needs are taken into account and that it is recognised that some under-representation is due to a lack of awareness of the opportunities that are available.

5.3   Young people have their own particular needs, and for those too young to access transport independently, there is a need to ensure provision is available locally. One of the 'principles and values' underpinning the Worcestershire Play Strategy[15] is to ensure that children and young people have safe and easy access to a range of play opportunities within a reasonable distance of their homes. The Strategy also asserts that children's favourite place to play is outdoors, and access and recreation providers can help to ensure that children's' needs are taken into account in planning and maintaining sites.

5.3   Findings on lack of participation are in the main correlated locally through the use of survey information and informal information from staff on site. It is recognised, however, that baseline information on use by BME groups and disabled people is currently limited. For council-run sites, this can be addressed through an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA), which is a tool for identifying the potential impact of a council's policies, services and functions on its residents, could be used. An EqIA can help staff provide and deliver excellent services to residents by making sure that these reflect the needs of the community. By carrying out EqIAs, a council may also ensure that the services that it provides fulfil the requirements of anti-discrimination and equalities legislation. Other organisations that manage access and recreation sites could also apply the principles of EqIA to ensure they are providing the right kind of services and information for site users.

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[14] Natural England's Diversity Review (2005)
[15] Worcestershire Play Strategy 2007-2010, Worcestershire Partnership (2007)

5.3   In seeking to provide an inclusive experience, recreation planners and site managers need to ask:

- What factors dissuade these potential users from visiting recreation sites? and

- Once there, how can we ensure that they enjoy their visit?

5.4   It has been found that 'barriers' to participation in access and recreation activities[16] include:

- Financial costs incurred;

- Lack of time and other commitments;

- Lack of appropriate activities to attract excluded groups and provide a positive experience;

- Lack of awareness of local initiatives and lack of perceived relevance;

- Physical difficulty of access;

- Lack of confidence and negative perceptions of the environment – including fears of getting lost, not knowing where to go, lack of support, feelings of vulnerability, fears for personal security, and negative perceptions of regular users and groups;

- Lack of (appropriate) interpretative information at sites, inadequate signage, and lack of publicity;

- Lack of accessibility information for users

- A neglected or poorly maintained environment;

- Negative feelings associated with previous experiences of access and recreation;

- Lack of (accessible) transport.

5.5   With careful planning, community involvement and a positive attitude, many of these barriers can be overcome. Firstly, however, it should be recognised that different barriers apply to different sectors of society. Similarly, it should not be inferred that under-representation of a particular group implies it is excluded. In practice, our knowledge of the reasons for under-representation of particular groups is limited, including knowledge of ways in which ethnic minorities relate to recreation and access opportunities, or how young people can be encouraged to take part. In contrast, a wide variety of excellent initiatives have been undertaken to enable greater access to urban and rural recreation for people

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[16] By All Reasonable Means: Inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people (2004)

with disabilities or those with limited mobility, not least because of the duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). The Act requires all service providers, including those involved in access and recreation site management, to take reasonable measures to provide access for people with disabilities. Significant work in this area has been undertaken by the Fieldfare Trust and the former Countryside Agency. This includes the Countryside Agency's 2004 report 'By All Reasonable Means: Inclusive Access to the Outdoors for Disabled People', a publication that recognises it is not necessarily the disability itself that hinders participation, but rather insensitive obstructions that could have been avoided with more forethought for the needs of differing users. In light of the paucity of data for other under-represented groups, the Government launched an 'Outdoors for All' Diversity Action Plan in March 2008. The Action Plan aims to ensure that opportunities are maximised for more people from currently under-represented groups to benefit from everything that the outdoors has to offer (DEFRA 2008).

5.6   When planning new recreation sites or changes to existing provision, consideration should be given to the access needs of all those with a disability. The principle of 'Least Restrictive Access', as defined by the former Countryside Agency, should be followed wherever possible. This requires that *"all work, whether planned improvement or ad hoc maintenance, must meet the highest possible access standards for that piece of work. Where the highest access standards cannot be achieved – for example, because of insufficient funds, lack of consent by a landowner or practical difficulties – there should always be a clearly reasoned and documented justification for the decision to use a lower standard"*. One mechanism for delivering these high standards is through environmental stewardship, whereby through specific agri-environment schemes farmers receive payments for creating new permissive routes for people with restricted or reduced mobility.

5.7   Worcestershire County Council's Countryside Service commissioned the Centre for Rural Research to undertake research into the barriers for use by local under-represented groups (Storey & Connelly 2006). The research concluded that there are many barriers to people's use and these are different not only across the different groups, but also within them. Some have little interest; for others, physical barriers prevent use; whilst for others still it is negative preconceptions and ideas. Solutions will not solely rely upon physically improving access facilities; less tangible methods that foster understanding, a sense of belonging and welcome are needed. These include:

- Ensuring the effectiveness of letting people know of the opportunities that exist, in terms of what's on; where to go; when to go; what you can and can't do when you get there, including the level of facilities and 'access' arrangements at particular locations. This aims to assist all visitors in making an informed choice about the suitability of a destination for their needs and increase their confidence on arrival.

- Supporting local communities and empowering any excluded groups and individuals, whilst recognising that differing areas of the county have different community sectors experiencing difficulties with accessing recreation opportunities.

- Integrating access and recreation with other activities such as art and educational

projects.

5.8   Transport to, from and through recreation sites should be specifically considered by site managers in terms of accessibility by all transport modes. The private car is often favoured for accessing recreation sites, especially those in more remote locations. However, promoting access primarily by private car will effectively exclude a number of groups who either do not have access or are unable to use this mode for a variety of reasons. These groups include:

- Those without access to a car;
- Low income groups;
- Persons with mobility impairments (for example disabled persons, those in poor health or lone parents with pushchairs);
- Those that live in less accessible areas (such as rural areas) with relatively poor access to passenger transport infrastructure and services
- The young and the elderly.

5.9   It is essential that Worcestershire County Council, along with public and private sector partners, seek to maximise sustainable transport options such as walking, cycling and passenger transport to, from and through recreation sites. This should be developed using a planned, strategic approach to transport accessibility, which connects recreation sites into Worcestershire's Integrated Passenger Transport Network (IPTN)[17]. This approach will deliver the following key benefits:

- Promote equality of opportunity to access a range of recreation sites for all people, regardless of means. This will assist in achieving a fairer society where all citizens enjoy a high quality of life;

- Improve quality of life by enhancing sustainable choices to access recreation sites. This will act to promote the maintenance and enhancement of Worcestershire's healthy, natural environment.

- Reduce overall emissions from transport by promoting sustainable alternatives to access recreation sites. This will act to mitigate climate change, and will protect the environmental quality of recreation sites and the routes to/from these sites.

- Contribute towards improved safety, security and health, through encouraging sustainable access to recreation sites.

- Support economic competitiveness and growth, including tourism.

5.10   A common misconception is that those living in more rural areas enjoy better access to recreation resources; this is often not the case, and both urban and rural users may have to travel for some distance to access the kind of sites they wish to visit. Accessibility

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[17] The Integrated Passenger Transport Network (IPTN) is defined in the Integrated Passenger Transport Sub-Strategy within the Worcestershire LTP3 Compendium. The IPTN refers principally to Worcestershire's scheduled rail and bus network, but also identifies how demand responsive modes, such as community transport and taxis, fill the gaps in this network to provide universal coverage across Worcestershire.

planning at both county and local levels is undertaken by Worcestershire County Council to inform the Worcestershire Local Transport Plan process. This process considers all key services and facilities, including recreation sites. The Third Worcestershire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 (LTP3) will specifically assess the accessibility of recreation sites, and will identify those sites which currently suffer from poor levels of accessibility, particularly by sustainable modes. As a key part of this process, schemes aimed at resolving transport accessibility issues to specific recreation sites will be developed and progressed as part of the LTP3 Delivery Programme.

5.11 'Access' means more than simply providing suitable paths and gates into and within recreation sites. It also applies to the ability of users to get to and from the site, and to find out information before and during their visit. Increasingly, users of recreation sites rely on the internet for researching their visit. Recreation providers who maintain websites should ensure that the information provided is clear and easy to navigate. Consideration can be given to including accessibility measures within the site to cater for users with visual impairments. Websites can be tested to ensure they provide the right level of information, and that information is kept up-to-date. The Web Accessibility Initiative[18] provides website authors with guidance on ensuring their information can be accessed by as wide a section of society as possible.

5.12 Written information in leaflets, brochures and signage boards should also be accessible. Where appropriate, certain material could be made available in large-print, Braille or audio versions. It is recognised that there will be limitations in the resources of some operators to accommodate the needs of all users through constraints on finances, staffing and time; a range of charitable and public-sector organisations may be able to offer support and guidance, and some of these organisations are signposted in Appendix 5.

ACHIEVEMENTS

For the last three years (2009), the Countryside Service has delivered a 'Countryside with Confidence' course, with the aim of furnishing those who want to get out in the countryside with the skills and confidence to do so.

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[18] The 'Web Accessibility Initiative' has been established to provide strategies, guidelines, and resources to make the Web accessible to people with disabilities. More information is available at: http://www.w3.org/WAI/

ACCESS FOR ALL - POLICIES

AA1   Opportunities to increase participation in access and recreation by under-represented groups will be encouraged. Measures should be broadly based upon:

- **Examining reasons (physical and perceived) for the lack of participation;**
- **A commitment to following the principles of 'least restrictive access' – all work, whether planned or ad-hoc, should meet the highest possible access standards, with reasoned justification where these standards cannot be achieved.**
- **Liaison with respective interest groups and local users in design solutions;**
- **Raising the confidence of (potential) users;**
- **Promoting details of available facilities at sites, e.g. access gateways and gradings of difficulty in access; and**
- **Stating clearly the activities that may legitimately be carried out at sites.**

Where work is undertaken to improve or enhance 'access for all', regard should be given to good practice guidance.

AA2   When considering access to/from and within recreation sites, providers should take into account those who either do not have access or are unable to use the private car, including low income groups, persons with mobility impairments (including disabled persons, those in poor health or lone parents with pushchairs), those living in less accessible areas (such as rural areas) with relatively poor access to passenger transport infrastructure and services, and the young and the elderly.

AA3   Wherever possible, recreation and access providers should seek to ensure that any access to/from and within sites connects with Worcestershire's Integrated Passenger Transport Network and should liaise with transport planners at an early stage. New, improved, or modified access arrangements should have regard to the provisions of the Worcestershire Local Transport Plan.

6   Making the Most of Opportunities

Objective: Securing and promoting opportunities for access.

6.1   Within Worcestershire many areas of land, as well as some areas of water, provide opportunities for public access. In some cases, the right of access is secured by a private or public Act of Parliament, as in the case of the Malvern Hills, country parks, National Trust land and Access Land. Other access is provided through voluntary agreements such as via leases or licences (as is often the case with bodies of water), or in return for an annual payment such as that provided through agri-environment schemes.

6.2   The public rights of way network offers access to the public to nearly 3,000 miles of paths in Worcestershire, including 15 recreational waymarked routes. The management of the network, such as signing, way marking, maintenance etc. is often of a legal nature and a matter for the local Rights of Way Improvement Plan rather than this Strategy (except from a strategic perspective). The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 gave statutory rights of access (on foot) to 'open country' as defined by the Act. However, the majority of the small number of areas in Worcestershire which qualify under the Act already have public access, often exceeding those rights given by the provision of Access Land. Guidance has been given to landowners where rights did not previously exist, and as a result there have not been any significant issues brought about by the provision of Access Land.

6.3   Information on the opportunities currently available for recreation is crucial and the map included at Appendix 1 indicates some of Worcestershire's wealth of access opportunities. The Map depicts a considerable area of land - the 2001 audit of access provision revealed 5,600ha as available for recreation. In reality, this figure is likely to under-represent the true area, and it is impossible for the map to present a comprehensive picture of the county's access resource, not least because it continues to evolve. For example, it does not include the considerable recreation opportunities associated with our built environment such as provided by the countryside parkland and gardens of historic houses. Sites and access opportunities shown on the map are all free at the point of use; it is recognised that there are significant additional sites which also provide opportunities, but these fee-paying sites have not been included. Neither does the map show the land that offers permissive access made available through agri-environment schemes such as Environmental Stewardship[19.] Similarly, these permissive rights of access are often omitted from Ordnance Survey (OS) maps because they cannot be guaranteed. This can result in a lack of use or a missed opportunity for potential users, demonstrating the need to promote their availability. The AIRS map forms a key component of Green Infrastructure planning; by mapping the available opportunities, potential deficiencies in provision – especially in the light of planned new development – can be identified. A Green Infrastructure approach ensures that the access and recreation sites are not viewed in isolation, but rather form part

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[19] Permissive access opportunities offered through Agri-environment schemes can be viewed at http://cwr.naturalengland.org.uk

of a wider network that embraces the historic environment, landscape and biodiversity. This co-ordinated approach will be taken forward through the planning system at county and local level.

6.4 Even taking account of the wealth of opportunities presented on the map, there are still significant areas where opportunities for access and recreation are limited or do not exist at all. Much urban and rural land is in private ownership, which can restrict availability of access. One example of this is the lack of access to long lengths of the county's rivers, which reduces peoples' ability to enjoy water-borne recreation. It is likely that there will always be demand for greater access. Some users enjoy more formalised defined access, whereas others seek less constrained, more free-ranging access. The demands are many and diverse and emanate from a number of factors, including:

- A lack of understanding about where to go and what to do;

- Available access not necessarily falling in the best location to serve the areas of greatest need, such as around towns;

- A lack of provision for the needs of some user groups. There are, for example, few sites or routes that cater for cycling or horse riding, and those that exist are under great pressure, especially in the urban fringe. Some current access opportunities are permissive, which may introduce an inherent weakness as long-term access cannot necessarily be guaranteed;

- A desire for the opportunity to visit and enjoy each of the differing landscapes in the county and in particular the rivers, canals and water bodies, but also nature reserves, common land, and woodland; and

- The emergence of new activities and trends, and their associated requirements.

6.5 Fortunately many of these factors can be accommodated together, with good planning. For example, more access to woodlands (a relatively resilient landscape) could provide more access for mountain bikes. Similarly, creating additional links with the Rights of Way network, particularly between countryside and towns in the form of 'greenways', could benefit horse riders, cyclists and walkers.

6.6 A sizeable access resource already exists that can be revitalised or adapted and brought up to date to accommodate many of the activities that are being sought. However, where this cannot be realised, and as the mapping of access land in the county has not resulted in significant new areas of access land being made available, new access provision should continue to be sought. This can be encouraged through a number of means, where appropriate, such as planning agreements associated with the restoration of mineral sites, planning gain, agri-environment schemes or through landowners making access dedications.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Droitwich Canals Restoration Partnership oversaw a major project to re-link Droitwich's Junction Canal and Barge Canal to create a 21-mile cruising ring. The restoration has provided a major resource for access and recreation, alongside significant improvements to biodiversity and tourism.

MAKING THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES - POLICIES

MMO1 In the first instance preference should be given to making the best use of existing opportunities to meet the needs of recreation users. Proposals for new recreation sites (parks, country parks, picnic sites, community forests etc) and/or to increase access to sites (nature reserves, woodlands, gardens) should consider the following criteria:

- The proximity to centres of population and/or the ability to meet an identified shortage of opportunities for informal recreation in the area;
- The limit to accessing particular types of recreational facilities (e.g. water). This would be subject to the suitability of a particular landscape type to accommodate recreational activity or facilities;
- Public transport provision;
- Proximity to and ability to integrate with the rights of way network, recreational way-marked routes and the cycle network and the degree to which it is complementary to existing provision;
- The contribution to the local economy;
- The ability to accommodate associated facilities necessary for the use and enjoyment of the site in a manner that is appropriate and able to integrate with the landscape character, wildlife and cultural interests. Particular encouragement and high priority will be given to proposals that offer an opportunity for low-key recreational use of open water, rivers and canals subject to satisfaction of other policies in the Strategy. Provision is made for its ongoing upkeep and maintenance to ensure long term sustainability.

MAKING THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES - POLICIES (CONTINUED)

MMO Measures to extend, improve and manage access to land, via paths, permissive routes and trails for walkers, cyclists and horse riders will be supported where appropriate, such as where:

- **They contribute to and integrate into the existing public rights of way network or national cycle network as appropriate; or**
- **They provide for multiple use i.e. serve needs of walkers, horse riders and cyclists and the less able; or**
- **A need has been identified and is based around existing recreational facilities; or**
- **They act as a greenway from town into the countryside and utilise existing canal, former railway lines and river corridors, wherever possible; or**
- **They link with public transport routes.**

MMO3   Opportunities for the provision of additional access (routes and sites) will be sought where appropriate and secured through the use of:

- **Planning agreements as part of new development or the after-use of mineral workings and derelict land, in and on the edge of towns to provide infrastructure improvements; or**
- **Agri - environment schemes; or**
- **Land acquisition; or**
- **Legal instruments such as CRoW, RoWIP, dedication of land; or**
- **Management agreements and access agreements; or**
- **Restoration of unused, derelict or previously developed land.**

7   Community Involvement

Objective: Encouraging and enabling local communities to become involved in and take action to share and increase the local benefits of recreation opportunities.

7.1   Community involvement is fundamental to the long-term success of recreation and access activities. Consequently the commitment to involve local communities and the opportunities for communities themselves to identify and become more active in shaping their localities have increased in recent years. When the Worcestershire Partnership agreed their 'cross-cutting themes'[20], they included both 'Community Engagement' and 'Community Cohesion' to ensure a two-way relationship between decision-makers and communities and to encourage an integrated and cohesive community.

7.2   The contribution which local organisations, District and County Councils make in the provision of access and informal recreation is recognised and welcomed.

7.3   In addressing the needs of 'the community', it needs to be recognised that there also a variety of groups within different communities. These include:

- Communities of interest e.g. walkers, horse riders, cyclists, etc.

- Communities of identity e.g. the elderly, disabled, etc.

- Geographical communities e.g. specific localities, landscapes and environmental assets, etc.

7.4   The government are clear that building a local sense of belonging needs to focus on the things we have in common - and so be inclusive - rather than place of birth or ethnicity, which are exclusive[21]. Worcestershire's Access Land and open spaces are well placed to help foster this sense of belonging.

7.5   It is now accepted practice to involve the community as an integral element of planning, with development shaped according to the views of local residents and community groups. It applies equally to creating arenas for discussion and involvement in policy and strategic matters, as well as practical and operational matters.

7.6   Volunteering is a particularly successful way of engaging people, and has a range of cross-cutting benefits. Active communities can be achieved by increasing levels of formal and informal volunteering, where members of the community work to meet local needs as well as by increasing participation across a variety of cultural and sporting activities[22]. Natural England[23] recognise the crucial input provided by volunteers, and have stated that

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[20] Sustainable Community Strategy for Worcestershire, Second Edition 2008 – 2013
[21] Guidance on Building a Local Sense of Belonging, DCLG (January 2009)
[22] Public Service Agreement Delivery Agreement 21 (October 2007)
[23] Green Infrastructure Guidance, Natural England (2009)

for green infrastructure, *"Funding requirements can be reduced by fund-raising activities and by contributions of labour and expertise from not-for-profit organisations and voluntary and community groups. These also foster a sense of local ownership of greenspaces and promote community cohesion".*

7.7 Many examples of good practice in access and informal recreation planning can be cited. However, there is still a need to ensure that these positive experiences become established practices amongst all parties. For this to happen, the following aspects of community involvement will need to be addressed:

- Community groups should be adequately supported to encourage involvement and commitment;
- Community involvement must be valued, since it makes an important and effective contribution to the process of generating alternatives and bringing an understanding of local issues and needs;
- It cannot be assumed that community involvement will always be forthcoming, or in unanimous agreement. Therefore continuous community involvement should be sustained through review and encouragement.

To ensure community involvement adds value to the process, careful and planned consideration of how to integrate the community into the process of development is required. Some guiding principles of community involvement applicable to recreation are set out in the Government Report - Green Spaces, Better Places (2002). These include:

- Commitment to change;
- Organisational culture change;
- Continuous processes;
- Links to democratic structures;
- Openness, honesty and transparency;
- Inclusion and representation;
- Appropriate processes;
- Beyond consultation – being more innovative;
- Clear measures of success; and
- Adequate resources.

7.8 A number of organisations already have the experience and capacity to support and enable community action, for example through parish councils

7.9 There are currently a number of sources from which funds can be obtained to support and develop local initiatives – including feasibility studies, as well as the cost of the projects themselves. Such information can be obtained from Community First, the BTCV, The Duckworth Worcestershire Trust and others.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Worcestershire Wardens Partnership was launched in 2006. The Partnership creates a quality volunteer experience for members of the community when they volunteer within the countryside and green space arenas.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - POLICIES

CI1.   The views and involvement of communities of interest, identity and geography should be actively sought prior to and during the planning and management of recreation and access sites, routes and projects as well as in the development and review of plans and policies through a variety of methods including:

- Running volunteer warden groups;
- Involvement in practical conservation activities such as repairing and improving footpaths, constructing stiles and bridges etc.;
- Establishing liaison and support groups for major recreation sites and keeping them well informed throughout.

CI2. Give encouragement, and where possible, resources to support community-led initiatives in the management and promotion of recreation sites and access routes that are based on research, contribute to an agreed programme of implementation and comply with other polices in this strategy

CI3. Good practice in terms of community involvement such as set out in Worcestershire County Council's Communities Greenspace Pack should be applied in the development and management of facilities for recreation and access.

8 Conflict Resolution

Objective: Manage and promote responsible land use activities so as to reduce the potential for conflict between all types of land users, communities and rural enterprises.

8.1 Land used for recreation can mean different things to different people and this can give rise to conflict. Conflict between varying recreational activities can be marked, but there are also wider issues of concern over conflict between recreation itself and other land uses (such as industry, transport, and biodiversity conservation).

8.2 A green infrastructure approach to planning for access and recreation seeks to maximise the multi-functional benefits of environmental assets, thereby avoiding many potential conflicts. By considering individual sites as part of a wider, inter-linking network, functions that were once seen as discrete can be planned together to share the same space. As an example, the primary purpose of a managed greenspace may be for recreation; but these sites can often provide valuable habitats for biodiversity and contribute to health and well-being, as well as contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation by slowing rainwater run-off to alleviate flooding. A green infrastructure approach cannot resolve all competing land interests; but where mutual benefits can be maximised, these opportunities should be considered and planned for at an early stage.

8.3 For recreational activities that take place in rural areas, it should be borne in mind that the countryside is intensively farmed and is both home and workplace to many people (30% of the population of Worcestershire live outside urban areas[24]). The needs of agriculture may take precedence over recreation, and it should be recognised that access opportunities may be limited. Where rights of way and permissive access do exist, users should maintain a respect for their surroundings and an appreciation that much of the outdoors is a working agricultural environment.

8.4 Although often very localised and limited in duration, recreational activities can sometimes be associated with unwelcome and undesirable consequences for those affected. It will therefore be important that any potential negative impacts associated with recreation can be investigated, predicted and mitigated.

8.5 In strategic terms such conflicts are generally small in scale and localised, often arising simply out of irresponsible behaviour. Yet to those affected, such conflict can be significant and unwelcome and is therefore a matter of concern to the partners in this Strategy. In addition PPG 17 (Revised) – Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation states that 'Facilities should be planned carefully to ensure that conflicts between recreational activities and other interests do not arise' (para 31).

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[24] Worcestershire County Council Research & Intelligence, 2007 statistics. 'Urban areas' are defined as settlements of 10,000 persons or greater.

8.6   Recreational-related conflicts can be categorised as follows:

- Environmental - where an activity either directly or indirectly impacts to an unacceptable or unreasonable degree upon flora and fauna, the quality and character of the landscape or damages or pollutes land, water and other natural resources either physically or aesthetically. This aspect is addressed in more detail in the Environmental Management section;

- Between users, landowners, and the local community - resulting from irresponsible behaviour or a lack of appreciation of the legal rights and responsibilities required of each interest. Transport impacts also feature in considerations, as car-borne users have the potential to intimidate those on foot, bicycle or horse. This can rise from both leisure drivers, as well as those who are simply commuting through roads or lanes that attract leisure users;

- Between users – where there is a clash between their different recreational needs. For example horse-riders and mountain bikers; canoeists and fishermen; or dogs and visitors.

8.7   It is testament to existing management planning and mechanisms that despite the many millions of visits made each year the majority of visitors are accommodated without any serious problems.

8.8   Conflicts between users often arise from competition between newer activities and more traditional users over access requirements. However, it is often the way the activity is conducted - for example its frequency, duration of use, and behaviour of users - rather than the activity itself, that determines its acceptability and compatibility. Although most activities can be regarded as being acceptable it will be necessary that some are subject to greater management controls.

8.9   Although many users do not belong to groups, governing bodies often represent their interests. Accordingly these bodies can take a lead role in helping to promote codes of practice. A key aspect of this includes responsible users finding a voice in their respective journals, newsletters, magazines and online forums to encourage responsible behaviour.

8.10   Negligent use of the land can detract from the appearance of the land but can also detract from people's enjoyment. Common issues such as dog fouling continue to impact negatively on the environment. It is important to ensure that dog owners are made aware of their responsibilities with regard to fouling, and other anti-social actions are highlighted and actively discouraged for the benefit of all those who manage and enjoy access and recreation. Access and recreation managers have a broad range of tools at their disposal to deal with anti-social behaviour (such as dog control orders), but constructive dialogue and other approaches should be exhausted ahead of more regulatory measures which are seldom effective when used in isolation and which are frequently time consuming and expensive to invoke.

8.11   There is a risk that some identified conflict situations are founded on perceptions, prejudices and misunderstandings. Responses based on these alone may be flawed. Levels of use and carrying capacity (i.e. the ability to support the activity indefinitely) are best prescribed if there is factual data obtained surveys and audits of sites, activities and users. Where a 'conflict', actual or potential, is subsequently identified it will need to be examined closely to determine its causes and the most appropriate measures for its resolution.

8.12   Priority should however be given to measures to avoid conflict before it occurs, by the preparation of management plans for sites and routes where relevant, which will include:

- an assessment of potential issues and areas where conflict may occur;
- identification of how potential conflict may be reduced or removed;
- a clear action plan of how this will be addressed both strategically (where appropriate) and on the ground in operational terms.

8.13   Where conflict is already occurring it is usually site specific and can be overcome through the adoption of a number of management measures, including:

- recording incidents and complaints to establish a clear picture of the extent and nature of the problem;
- encouraging dialogue between parties to foster understanding of each others' needs and promoting respective codes of conduct amongst user groups; and
- careful zoning of areas and prioritisation of activities to provide balance and reduce conflict.

8.14   Rangers and Wardens play a key role in minimising potential conflicts of all types and bringing together the strands of any conflict minimisation programme. They often have the most contact with differing users and are well placed to play a vital role in bringing parties together to resolve issues and identify a way forward.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Malvern Hills Conservators have helped to establish a Recreation Advisory Panel of user groups which meets twice a year. The Panel discuss recreational issues, including those concerned with conflicting uses, which can then be passed to those with land management responsibilities for consideration. The Panel currently includes part of Worcestershire within its area, and there may be scope to develop a similar scheme covering the rest of the county.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION - POLICIES

CR1. New access opportunities will be encouraged in accordance with other policies in the Strategy except where it will contribute to recreational over-use or lead to conflicts between users and local communities that cannot be resolved.

CR2. Local, site-based strategies and management plans should address conflicts of interest, where it is demonstrated that recreation activities are having an adverse effect on the local community, land-owning interests or upon other recreation users. The nature of the conflict should be identified and where possible resolved by considering suitable management measures. This may include the following:

- Encouraging consultation and negotiation between affected parties;
- Regulating use through permits and licences;
- Management agreements;
- The introduction of bylaws;
- A partial withdrawal of access rights via zoning;
- Amending promotional material accordingly;
- Closure of the site;
- The introduction or review of wardening for sites;
- Statements of co-operation between potentially conflicting activities;
- The preparation of codes of conduct for specific activities and associated training days;
- Advising and assisting landowners with understanding and interpretation of their legal responsibilities;
- Reviewing the condition of paths, signage, siting of access points, car parking, charging.

CR3. In addressing conflicts of interest local, Site-based strategies and management plans should have regard to the following:

- That public interest is served;
- Feasibility of alternative solutions;
- Public safety;
- Impacts on the local economy;
- Environmental damage;
- Level, frequency and duration of use and the behaviour of users.

9   Environmental Management

Objective: Making use of recreational opportunities whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality.

9.1   Worcestershire is a county of contrasts - offering perhaps the greatest variation of geology and soils, thereby creating the greatest range of habitats and landscapes, of any county. As a consequence, there is tremendous interest and stimulation for those wishing to explore Worcestershire. In addition to variety, the county is rich in high-quality environmental assets.

9.2   The county contains 112 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 2 Special Areas of Conservation, 4 National Nature Reserves, as well as Special Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves and Local Geological sites. It is recognised nationally and regionally for its countryside and its landscapes, particularly its grasslands, rivers and valleys, the Wyre Forest, the orchards and fruit trees of the Vale of Evesham, and the commons on and around the Malvern Hills. Worcestershire's Biodiversity Action Plan[25] has 17 different habitats and 24 species action plans, of which 26 are national priorities. A robust and healthy natural environment is vital as one of the ways of mitigating the effects of climate change.

9.3   The shape of the landscape is a reminder of past inhabitants, their land uses and their structures. Worcestershire's archaeological history is evident in the floodplains in the south (where medieval and roman remains are still being discovered), the Beacons on the Malvern Hills and the forts and moats in the north of the county. To date over 22,000 archaeological sites, historic buildings, monuments and landscape features have been recorded on the County Historic Environment Record, of which 181 have been designated Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

9.4   Worcestershire's landscapes are similarly varied, ranging from the pronounced high ground and steep slopes of the Malvern Hills, to the gently rolling plains in the south of the county associated with the rivers Avon and Severn. Worcestershire's landscapes have fascinating and contrasting histories, ranging from the timbered landscapes of central and western Worcestershire with their strong associations with Royal Hunting Forests, to the Vale of Evesham, which is thought to have been subject to intensive cultivation since medieval times. Such differences in landscape evolution and the subsequent contrasts in appearance of the countryside we see today, are described in the Landscape Character Assessment of the county[26]. The Malvern Hills and the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designations cover 9% of the county and afford national protection to their landscapes.

9.5   Worcestershire's built environment is a major draw for both residents and tourists. Urban areas, especially those with a historic core, can provide easy-access recreation through walking and cycling. This will often be a secondary consideration when the primary

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[25] Biodiversity Action Plan for Worcestershire, Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership (2008)
[26] 'A New Look at the Landscapes of Worcestershire', Worcestershire County Council (2004)

purpose of a visit is (for example) shopping, but it should be recognised that the most readily available resource is often the urban landscape of our built-up areas. With some 71% of the population living in larger towns and cities[27], this resource has a significant role to play, and further opportunities to widen urban access and recreation should not be overlooked.

9.6   Historic towns such as Great Malvern and Broadway retain a coherent feel due to the sensitive use of local stone and characteristic architectural styles. Insensitive access and recreation can undermine these qualities, and it is important to ensure that solutions to necessary access 'infrastructure' do not simply adopt a universal approach when a more locally-tailored solution is required. One example of sensitivity to the environment is through the use of locally distinctive materials and designs in outdoor furniture to ensure that development of recreation and access opportunities complements, rather than undermines the local environment.

9.7   With such a range of attractions, the degree to which recreational and access needs can be comfortably accommodated will vary tremendously. Certain landscapes are able to tolerate disturbance and have the ability to recover, others are far more vulnerable and could be irreparably damaged by even fairly low-key recreational usage. It is not surprising that the most visually attractive areas of the county are those which draw the most people. Visitor numbers can be such that the most robust landscapes can suffer degradation. Nature conservation interests can also be vulnerable and susceptible to recreation activities. This may be through disturbance to fauna; physical damage to flora and, not least, accidental fires. Some of the major monuments in the county attract very high numbers of visitors e.g. British Camp on the Malvern Hills. Great care is needed to avoid damaging such sites, as they are a finite resource and once they are destroyed their value is lost forever.

9.8   There can also be environmental impacts with associated visitor facilities through their incongruous appearance in areas otherwise notable for their lack of development.

9.9   It is vital that in developing and promoting recreation and access, the very attributes which attract users are not damaged or destroyed in the process. The balance of compatibility between recreation and access interests and environmental well-being is often very fine. It is, however, unacceptable to wait until damage has occurred. The implications of recreation and access upon the environment must be assessed from the outset. Should there be any doubt as to the consequences, a precautionary approach should be adopted in all instances whereby positive steps are taken to pre-empt potential environmental impacts. Green infrastructure planning takes a holistic view of environmental 'assets' and seeks to identify existing pressures, and the need for new provision. This is especially important in the context of strategic housing growth, which could overwhelm existing recreation and access opportunities. A successful green infrastructure approach will seek to ensure that needs arising are identified at an early stage to allow appropriate provision to be made; a key mechanism for delivery is through negotiations between developers and local planning authorities.

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[27] Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2009-2010, Worcestershire County Council

9.10 Although there can occasionally be very severe damaging impacts on the environment associated with access and recreation, there is a risk of impact in general being overstated. When serious impact does exist it is usually very localised. This can be addressed in the preparation of a management plan. It would be wrong therefore to give the impression that protecting the environment is a major constraint at all times. With good planning and the application of appropriate management measures, serious damage can be avoided. Indeed, recreation and access opportunities can and do bring benefits to the local environment. The direct engagement and enjoyment to be gained from the local environment can engender both public support and an increased appreciation of environmental matters through increased awareness and education. Moreover, through the provision of access and recreation arises an enhanced eligibility for attracting funds to carry out environmental improvements. The reinvestment of visitor monies for the benefit of the environment is also a possibility.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Chapter Meadows opened up for access under an environmental stewardship agreement and with a management plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT - POLICIES

EM1. In the planning and management of access and recreation initiatives, precedence should be given to the protection and retention of landscape character, ecological integrity and cultural heritage (the environmental capital). Where a site has a recognised conservation interest to be protected, any proposal should be subject to a rigorous examination of its likely impact upon the interest to be protected.

EM2. In seeking to conserve and enhance the environment, management actions should seek to ensure that:

- The location, design, size and appearance of facilities and infrastructure reflects the characteristics and individuality of the site and minimises impact on the environment;
- Pollution in all its occurrences is avoided;
- There is not a loss of tranquillity;
- Activities are directed away from sensitive areas;
- Awareness of the environmental fragility of an area is communicated to visitors in a manner likely to be understood and appreciated. For all major developments and activities the likely environmental impacts should be assessed prior to development and, where necessary, measures taken to avoid compromising the environment. If damage to environmental interests is suspected but cannot be clearly identified the precautionary principle should apply.

EM3. Wherever possible through management of existing facilities or through the provision of new facilities opportunities for the enhancement or restoration of environmental interests should be taken, having regard to:

- Any associated Management Plan;
- The Biodiversity Action Plan;
- The Landscape Character Assessment; and
- Advice of archaeological officers / historic landscape assessment / PPG 16 or recognised good practice.
- The duties required under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)

EM4. Management Plans should be prepared by site providers, in consultation with interested parties, for sites of recognised conservation importance. These should provide guidance on the recreational uses within the environmental capacity of the site.

10   Awareness, Expectations & Standards of Facilities

Objective: Provide a range of facilities of high standard to ensure that the differing demands and aspirations of users are catered for, to help people enjoy and appreciate their recreational experience.

10.1   To effectively plan and provide quality recreation opportunities it is necessary to have some knowledge of the perceptions, values and expectations of visitors. Where people go for access and recreation and what they do there is determined through a combination of factors, not least the enjoyment they perceive they will gain, the value they will receive in comparison to other leisure activities and the cost to them. It is necessary to understand the user to effectively plan and provide quality recreation and access opportunities. Not only must providers ensure there are sufficient opportunities in the right places; they also need to ensure the opportunity is of sufficient interest and quality for the user.

10.2   The task of being able to deliver a quality visitor experience for everyone will be dependent on the numbers of visitors with differing needs and values, for example differences in age, ability, and the activities being pursued. In some cases these issues will be conflicting and contradictory. For example, some people may desire areas which are remote, and quiet; others may prefer areas which are easier to get to with activities and facilities such as visitor centres and toilets.

10.3   For people unfamiliar with a particular site, their visit often "begins" when they hear or see the name and type of the site (Park, Picnic Place, Country Park, Nature Reserve, Common and so on). Although there is reasonable consensus amongst professionals as to what some site titles denote, it is less well appreciated by members of the public as to what they can expect to find at each site. For example at which sites should visitors expect to be provided with toilets, an information centre or no facilities at all?

10.4   There is a risk that without any 'common definitions' or typology of sites, potential users may be confused (or at worst discouraged) in visiting and enjoying the site. Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17)[28] provides a typology of open spaces and where possible, site names should be consistent with this guidance.

10.5   The commonplace assessment programme used to measure the quality of parks and green spaces is known as the Green Flag Award. The scheme began in 1996 as a means of recognising and rewarding the best green spaces in towns and the countryside. This scheme is managed by Keep Britain Tidy and a consortium of partners for the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and operated through the application of 8 criteria. These assess standards of management and promote the value of parks and green spaces as social places and for contact with the natural world. The award has been very successful, with over 1,000 sites being recognised. Visitors are drawn to the idea that they can easily find local facilities, and through the Green Flag website, 'postcode

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[28] Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, Department for Communities and Local Government (2002)

lookup' enables people to find convenient local award winners, and to have confidence over the quality of the site when they visit. As part of the Green Flag scheme, the Green Pennant Award is given to high-quality green spaces managed by voluntary and community groups, and provides a valued means of recognising not only the qualities of the green spaces, but also the efforts of the receiving communities.

10.6 Alongside the Green Flag award, Natural England provides an opportunity for Country Parks to become 'Accredited'. Accredited Country Parks are those which meet 15 essential criteria and at least 10 from a menu of 24 desirable criteria[29]. The criteria relate to the characteristics of the site and the provision of core services and facilities rather than their quality, which is addressed in the Green Flag Award. It is important to recognise that the various standards and accreditations are complementary, rather than mutually exclusive. Where applicable, it is appropriate for qualifying sites to seek, for example, both the Green Flag award and the Country Park Accreditation.

10.7 Natural England is currently considering the introduction of an accreditation scheme for Local Nature Reserves based on the Country Parks model. It is anticipated that any such scheme would recognise the intrinsic difference between most Local Nature Reserves and sites where there is a greater emphasis on informal recreation such as Country Parks.

10.8 It will not always be appropriate or practicable for all access and recreation sites to satisfy the requirements of a particular 'award' or accreditation regime. It should be recognised that for many sites, their inherent qualities will mean they cannot provide the range of services necessary to achieve recognised accreditation, but they nevertheless provide a valuable resource.

10.9 The internet is increasingly used to research recreation and access opportunities, and many people will look to search engines for ideas and information. Where possible, online information should be structured in such a way that it is easily accessible through internet searches, for example through the inclusion of prominent keyword 'tags'.

10.10 In relation to strategic provision this has tended to be opportunistic with assessment of opportunities for visitor use being reliant upon the informal knowledge and experience of field staff and rangers, rather than in response to any comprehensive research assessment. In many ways these professional judgements have served us well. Guidance in PPG17 and its associated companion guide 'Assessing Needs and Opportunities'[30] has primarily an urban focus, but many of the issues are relevant to both urban and rural access and recreation issues. The guidance expects recreation and open spaces to be protected and provided where it can be shown that they meet the needs of residents and visitors; that they are fit for purpose; and that they are economically and environmentally sustainable. Quality standards for the provision of recreation sites should be developed following assessments of local needs and audits of provisions, and should include:

- A quantitative component – how much new provision may be needed;

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[29] Further information on Country Park accreditation is available at www.naturalengland.org.uk.
[30] Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG17, Department for Communities and Local Government (2001)

- A qualitative component – against which to measure the need for enhancement of existing facilities;

- An accessibility component – including distance thresholds and consideration of cost of using a facility.

This process forms part of a wider green infrastructure approach. It is important for access and recreation providers to engage fully in green infrastructure strategies and planning at all stages, to ensure that future developments are planned and delivered to maximise the multi-functional benefits of green spaces.

10.11 The advent of computerised mapping of multiple sources of data greatly aids the collection of data and assessment of quality. Such Geographical Information Systems (GIS) enable layers of information to be overlain with each other, enabling sets of data to be accessed and interrogated to assist decision-making at the strategic level. The rise of internet-based applications, e.g. 'Google Earth' probably offers the greatest opportunity to bring together layers for detailed analysis.

10.12 In collecting visitor feedback on aspirations, experience, etc., it is important to have a framework to enable robust data analysis and to ensure that performance can be benchmarked. 'GreenSTAT'[31] is a system that gives local residents the opportunity to comment on the quality of their open spaces and how well they feel they are being managed and maintained. It allows site managers to compare the results with others up and down the country to give a truly national voice of what visitors think about their open spaces. Site operators, managers and owners can use the results to inform their planning.

ACHIEVEMENTS

There are 10 Green Flags in Worcestershire, which represents a quarter of all the awards in the region. All but one District has achieved at least one award.

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[31] 'GreenSTAT' is operated by GreenSpace, a registered charity working to improve parks and green spaces by raising awareness, involving communities and creating skilled professionals. More information on GreenSTAT is available at: visit www.greenstat.org.uk

AWARENESS EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS OF FACILITIES - POLICIES

AESF1. The management practices for each recreation site should be determined according to its primary purpose and classified using standard naming.

AESF2. The minimum quality standards, (commensurate with its location and scale) that sites and routes should be expected to achieve will be those from the Green Flag Award Programme, and the Country Parks Accreditation Scheme, as appropriate. Where sites are eligible to apply for both standards, these should be seen as complementary, rather than alternatives.

AESF3. As part of the co-ordination and provision of access and recreation opportunities, pre-visit information and on-site interpretation should be developed and promoted through joint partnerships involving public, private, voluntary and community interests.

AESF4. Survey, assessment and monitoring of recreational activities should be undertaken in order to help develop an integrated and comprehensive source of information on recreation and access issues in the County. Providers should compile information in an open format that can be stored locally and can be aggregated so it can be searched and compared by any user. This would operate in a manner not dissimilar to a comparison website, where users would receive data in relation to specific queries.

- An inventory of sites and routes;
- The establishment of trends and future needs;
- The identification of opportunities available;
- Details of the facilities available and their condition and quality;
- Value to the community. The availability and details of recreational opportunities in the County should be made easily available to a wide audience and also reviewed and updated regularly.

AESF5. A programme of Equality Impact Assessments should be implemented for services and sites.

11   Health and Well-being

Objective: Contributing to and promoting the health and well-being qualities associated with access and recreation activities.

11.1   The health of the nation has a huge effect on the economy and government spend on health services. Estimates for the annual costs to the NHS as a result of physical inactivity are between £1 billion and £1.8 billion[32]. Indeed, the Department of Health has stated that *"the return on investment in physical activity can be significant and in some cases can be realised in the short term. Individuals can gain benefits from becoming more active, even if they have previously been inactive until middle age and beyond"*. Seven in ten people do not follow the recommendations of the Chief Medical officer and fail to take enough exercise to benefit their health. Obesity levels for children aged six have doubled in the last ten years, and have tripled in 15-year-olds. 22 per cent of adults are obese and about 40 per cent are overweight. Being overweight or obese accounts for as much as 30 per cent of heart disease and 80 per cent of diabetes and costs the UK £2.5 billion a year.

11.2   It is now widely accepted that access to the natural environment has benefits to health and well-being, from reducing the likelihood of disease, to helping someone recover from illness and preventing mental health problems. Numerous studies show a correlation between health benefits and access to the outdoors. A green infrastructure approach to planning access and recreation makes the most of the health benefits arising from green spaces, through providing space for informal exercise and through improving air quality. These green spaces can be interlaced through both rural and urban areas, and can help to 'soften' more built-up development by providing a more relaxing environment to reduce stress levels. Physical benefits of having access to the outdoors include:

- A decreased risk of cardiovascular disease mortality in general and coronary heart disease in particular;

- The prevention or delay in the development of high blood pressure;

- A reduced risk of osteoporosis;

- A reduced risk of certain types of cancers;

- A reduced risk of Type 2 diabetes;

- Regulating weight and as a controlling factor of obesity.

The benefits of an active lifestyle can be enjoyed in both urban and rural settings, and the opportunities around Worcestershire's city, towns and villages are the most immediately accessible for most people. The Department of Health has stated that: *"The opportunity to explore safe, attractive and interesting parks or streetscapes can be a significant motivator*

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[32] Be Active, Be Healthy – A Plan for Getting the Nation Moving, Department of Health (February 2009)

for recreational walking and cycling. Equally, good urban design that takes account of the needs of cyclists and pedestrians, offering safety and convenience, helps tip the balance in favour of active travel for shorter journeys". Opportunities are available for a range of users who may suffer a lack of confidence; as well as catering for 'high energy' pursuits, the county's network of rivers and canals also provides an ideal resource for those seeking a gentler recreation experience. DEFRA has stated that: *"Canal towpaths are often flat and level, enabling their use by a wide range of people of all ages and abilities to improve their physical fitness through moderate regular exercise"*.[33]

11.3 The issue of 'health and well-being' is strongly linked with the issue of providing 'access for all', particularly in overcoming barriers to increasing recreation activity that may be due to age, illness or poor health. However, it is not just physical health benefits that are associated with access and recreation. For many people the enjoyment of their activity can be connected to a sense of achievement. It may also provide opportunities to relax, to find peace and inspiration and for contemplation, thus improving people's sense of well-being. For some people, the sense of wilderness of some rural areas is of paramount importance, and consideration should be given to maintaining tranquillity and an 'unspoilt' experience when considering future recreation and access provision. Further information on tranquillity, including maps showing the most and least tranquil areas of Worcestershire, is available from the CPRE[34].

11.4 The Local Government Act 2000 required the preparation of Community Strategies which set out how authorities are going to improve community well-being. In doing so the legislation allows for local councils to have more scope to take action, including working closely with bodies such as health authorities. The Worcestershire Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2013 recognises the policy connection between the health of communities and the need to increase physical levels of activity for people of all ages, in particular children.

11.5 For children, recreational activity is especially important. The majority of studies of young people indicate declining participation in physical activity, not least through a combination of the attractions of TV and personal computers, and the fears of parents for the child's safety outdoors. It is important to further develop the opportunities for children to enjoy access and recreation; many young people already take part in outdoor activities through local organisations such as Scouts and Guides, or Young Farmers Clubs. Developments in school, such as 'Forest Schools', together with an increasing emphasis in early years on learning outdoors can help instil a positive attitude towards the benefits of informal recreation from a young age.

11.6 Alongside the more tangible health benefits of greater access to recreation opportunities, there is a significant educational and creative value in recreation opportunities in both rural and urban settings.

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[33] Waterways for Everyone - The Government's strategy for the inland waterways of England and Wales, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2007)
[34] www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns/landscape/tranquillity

11.7 To address the health and social inequalities between areas, recreation providers should seek to co ordinate their approach with the Primary Care Trust and their partners. In addition, health professionals and local communities should be encouraged to help inform recreation providers of 'locality profiles'. In particular, localities with high incidences of health problems are associated with low physical activity levels. Further evidence and guidance on this issue is available in Worcestershire's Health Improvement Strategy[35].

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Walking the Way to Health initiative (WHI) is run by the largest national body promoting and setting the standards for led health walks. It is a Natural England initiative which aims to encourage people, particularly those who take little exercise, to do regular short walks in their communities. Over 525 local health walk schemes are run nationally, with over 22 groups active in Worcestershire.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING - POLICIES

HW1. The benefits of participating in recreational activities and pursuits should be promoted wherever possible, working in partnership with doctors, health bodies and other interested parties as appropriate.

HW2. Recreation providers should take the opportunity to work with schools and other similar groups to increase awareness amongst younger generations of the health benefits of recreation and to set out opportunities available to them, to help contribute to their long-term health.

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[35] The Health Improvement Strategy for Worcestershire 2008-2013, Worcestershire County Council & Worcestershire Primary Care Trust

12   Economic Benefits

Objective: Raise awareness of the opportunities and benefits of access and recreation for the diversification of the urban and rural economy, in particular in its support for local tourism.

12.1   Green infrastructure research[36] has demonstrated that green spaces can make a substantial contribution to the local and regional economy, and that *"Environmental attractiveness draws in investment and jobs and enhances the value of property"*. Worcestershire's urban and rural areas benefit from a thriving informal access and recreation culture, and the county's recreation resources are not only valued for their intrinsic benefits, but also for their ability to contribute to the county's economy.

12.2   Economic benefits stem not only from the direct income to sites and attractions through car-parking, refreshments, etc., but also from numerous related businesses. The AIRS is concerned primarily with those access and recreation opportunities that are free at the point of use; however, many visitors to more formal attractions, such as national trust properties, combine leisure visits with other recreational activities. Indeed, the visit itself may simply be a focal point at the start, middle, or end of a walk or cycle ride.

12.3   The potential to combine experiences can be enhanced through considering signposting to walks, attractions, etc. from car parks, bus/rail stations, and at key points along footpaths, where appropriate. Similarly, informal access and recreation routes and sites can be signposted from more formal attractions to help generate mutual benefit.

12.4   Worcestershire's hospitality industry can benefit from informal access and recreation through providing food and drink, places to stay, and shops and services, either as a planned part of peoples' recreational experience, or as spin-off result. Many popular walks are focussed around a visit to a public house; in recent years internet-based and written guides specifically linking pubs to recreation routes have become popular. In some areas, especially those more isolated parts of the county, the pub-walk provides valuable passing trade – possibly extending to bed and breakfast accommodation - that might not otherwise occur.

12.5   The county's environmental quality is a major attraction for residents and visitors alike. Visitors are drawn to the historic city, towns and villages, and the varied landscape of the rural area. 'Honeypot' destinations such as Broadway village form a focal point for particular concentrations of visitors.

- The number of visitors to Worcestershire increased from 9.8 million to 10 million between 2002-04[37].

- The value of tourism in Worcestershire as a whole increased steadily from £349 million in 2002 to £370 million over the period 2002-04[38].

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[36] The Economic Value of Green Infrastructure, Natural Economy Northwest (2008)
[37] Economic Impact of Tourism in Worcestershire 2002-04

▪ Across the county approximately 12,679 jobs are supported by recreation and tourism visitor activity in the countryside with an additional 1,988 dependent upon multiplier spend.

12.6   The contribution of tourism and recreation to the local economy is very much dependent upon the quality of the natural beauty of the landscape, which is a major determinant in attracting visitors. Research undertaken by the National Trust has shown that between 60 – 70% of employment in rural tourism depends directly on a high quality environment. Hence the recognition in this Strategy of the continuing vital role to be played by agriculture in the regeneration of the rural economy.

12.7   Beyond tourism, agriculture has historically been a dominant feature of the rural economy of Worcestershire. It has also been the key determinant in shaping and influencing the appearance of the rural landscape. However in the 21st century the role of agriculture is changing. Despite still dominating the land area, 'agriculture and fishing' accounts for just 0.3% of the county's employment.[39] Whilst agricultural diversification remains an important opportunity for many who own and manage the land, and can have multiple environmental and economic benefits, it is important to recognise the continuing importance of farming itself. Climate change is increasingly placing greater demands on agriculture to provide local produce, and it may be that the diversification of agricultural land for recreation declines - and even reverses - as demand for food and non-food crops continues to grow.

12.8   Access and recreation opportunities frequently pass through agricultural land. This provides benefits for recreational users (primarily walkers), and can also generate financial rewards for farmers. This can be through incidental benefits, such as income from farm-based bed and breakfast accommodation and farm shops, or through structured agri-environment schemes. Alternative forms of income to mainstream farming through Environmental Stewardship schemes[40] require land managers to safeguard the natural beauty of the countryside, but can also require benefits to access, and one of the primary objectives of Environmental Stewardship is to 'promote public access and understanding of the countryside'. Natural England (2009) have stated that providing access is *"an important way of enhancing public enjoyment of the countryside"* and that *"open access and linear access options complement the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network by providing areas of open access or creating new footpaths, cycle and/or bridleways to allow people (including the less mobile) to enjoy more of the countryside"*. It needs to be recognised, however, that access opportunities provided under Environmental Stewardship do not form part of the definitive Public Rights of Way network, and opportunities maybe withdrawn when a scheme ends.

12.9   Although new paths are likely to be the simplest means of extending access, considerable scope exists to meet the need for the provision of other access facilities that

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[38] Ibid
[39] Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2009-10
[40] Environmental Stewardship (ES) is an agri-environment scheme that provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England who deliver effective environmental management on their land. More information on environmental stewardship is available at www.naturalengland.org.uk.

could generate income. For example diversification of the farm enterprise may be able to generate income from a number of sources such as camp sites, riding centres, mountain biking areas, fishing, shooting and sailing, etc.

12.10 For recreation and tourism to be a stimulus for the local economy it is imperative that approaches are adopted that do not destroy the very asset on which its success depends. Diversification of farm enterprises to include tourism and recreational facilities should involve consideration of a number of other policy frameworks, including planning requirements when considering land use changes. Where there is a demand for new development, proposals should be in accordance with the local development plan. National Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, 2002) places significant emphasis on promoting the reuse of previously developed land and the selection of areas close to existing population centres.

12.11 More generally, recreation-based tourism proposals should be underpinned by the principles of sustainable tourism:

- Relating supply to demand – based on the identification of need;

- Adding value locally – such as through the use of local materials, produce and labour and promoting local attractions;

- Promoting quality of experience – active visitor management in ways that are based on local distinctiveness not bland standardisation;

- Maintaining attractive urban and rural areas – not least through reinvestment in the quality of the natural and built environment;

- Taking decisions locally – encouraging interpretation and implementation to take place at the local level.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Wychavon Way: A partnership of District and County Officers and Members have been reviewing the route of the Wychavon Way (a medium distance recreational path running from Holt Fleet in the north to Winchcombe in the south). Proposals to align the route with strategic and sustainable access and economic benefits have been subject to extensive consultation with Parish Councils and other interested parties. This has resulted in a partially new route which will begin in Droitwich Spa and end in Broadway, passing through Pershore. Affected landowners are being consulted on the detailed changes and work has begun on a new guidebook. Upgrading of the furniture and new waymarking will continue with a view to launching the new route in 2010.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS - POLICIES

EB1.   Access and informal recreation should be promoted as a means of sustainable tourism to stimulate the tourism industry and bring financial benefits to the urban and rural economy and local communities. This should be achieved in accordance with other policies in the Strategy and the principles of sustainable tourism.

EB2.   Proposals for, and management of, recreation sites and routes will be encouraged to make a positive contribution to the local economy. This may include:

- Subject to adopted planning policies, proposals for new economic development in rural areas will ideally be located at a local service centre (country town, large village or group of villages), whilst recognising that some developments may be located beyond these areas;
- The use of local material in construction and repair;
- The use of local skills and labour;
- The use of local produce;
- The re-use and regeneration of previously developed land and buildings where appropriate;
- The provision of convenient linkages, access points and signage from sites and routes to local services such as pubs / shops / historic churches / accommodation and producers;
- Providing details of local facilities within promotional material; and
- Complementing existing services through the addition of new facilities. To avoid proposals causing any disadvantage to the vitality and viability of existing nearby retail enterprises they should ensure that non-local produce or non-recreation related products are not the predominant element of their sales.

EB3.   Submissions for grant aid and/or self funding schemes that provide for an element of permissive access, should be strongly supported where they meet the requirements of other policies in the strategy and where they satisfy the following criteria:

- Provide for a recognised need;
- Provide for the needs of users and resolve potentially conflicting uses; or
- Ensure there is no damage to the environment and preferably that they contribute to environmental targets; or
- Ensure no disadvantage to existing local enterprises; or
- Where schemes are supported by an active management programme, meeting the objectives of the grant scheme.

13. MAKING IT HAPPEN

13.1 This Strategy is not the end of the process – in many ways it is just the beginning. The actions will now be taken forward by the relevant partners, working together and individually. The strategic perspective and collaborative approach to the preparation of this Strategy should continue, in order to monitor its effectiveness, to take advantage of potential funding packages and to work in a cost-effective manner.

13.2 The Strategy has sought to cover a wide range of issues regarding recreation and access faced by users, interest groups, local communities and organisations. It reconciles many of these interests and promotes a co-ordinated approach in addressing them. It is intended that this document will be accompanied by an Action Plan, which will set out how this 'co-ordinated approach' will be implemented. It is perhaps worth reiterating the common thread running throughout the Strategy - that is, actions will not be imposed on areas, but rather implemented through agreement with landowners and communities and preferably in partnerships between organisations, communities and local groups.

13.3 The Action Plan will be the main vehicle for the implementation of the Strategy. Accordingly the Action Plan will be reviewed, updated and amended every two years in relation to its achievements. This aims to retain flexibility and to respond to funding opportunities. Individuals or organisations wishing to be involved, help develop or simply propose actions, will be encouraged to be involved in the preparation of the Action Plans.

13.4 An additional means of implementing the objectives within the Strategy will be to influence the policies and proposals in other plans and strategies, notably statutory documents, so that they reflect the policies of this Strategy. It is hoped that the Partners in the Strategy will choose to develop their own organisational Action Plans, setting out how they will incorporate the objectives of the Strategy into their own work areas.

Monitoring and Review

13.5 A mid-term review of the Strategy will be undertaken in 20xx to account for changes in public opinion, government legislation and resources. Any recommendations made will be incorporated in the subsequent Action Plans. The review will be aided by the Annual update bulletins, which will report on the successes and difficulties in implementing the Strategy. To assist the monitoring, indicators have been set out within each objective. The indicators have been determined according to the availability and accessibility of current information sources in relation to each of the objectives and with regard to Government's sustainable development indicators.

14 THE PARKS & COUNTRYSIDE TASK GROUP

14.1 Both the annual monitoring process and the preparation of an Action Plan every two years will require a co-ordinated approach. The Parks & Countryside Task Group will therefore continue to have a role to play in contributing its collective knowledge, expertise, experience and resources to the preparation of the monitoring reports and Action Plans, and to the promotion of the messages within this Strategy. As and when required, additional partners will be invited to assist the Task Group in the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy. Worcestershire County Council will continue to act as the co-ordinator for the group and prepare the Action Plans and annual summaries based on the submissions received from the partners.

Finance and Resources

14.2 It is clear that to achieve the objectives of the Strategy a financial commitment will need to be made by all partners to undertake actions. This may necessitate, where agreed by Partners, the redirection of current resources. This could involve the allocation of additional funds and/or tapping into funding streams from other bodies as well as making use of other funding avenues such as the National Lottery, Landfill Tax, European funding, etc.

Access & Recreation: Opportunities in Worcestershire

Legend:

- ★ Village Greens
- Country Parks
- Worcestershire Boundary
- Rivers
- Canals
- Sustrans
- National Trail
- Agri Environment Access Paths
- Agri Environment Access Fields
- CRoW Section16 Land
- CRoW A7 Land
- LNR
- Accessible NNR
- Doorstep Greens

Recreation Use

- ✳ Nature Reserve
- Picnic Site
- ♣ Park and Open Space
- Community Site
- ✺ Commons

Waymarked Walking Trails

- – – Severn Way
- – – Worcestershire Way
- – – The North Worcestershire Path
- – – Wychavon Way
- – – Illey Way
- – – Cotswold Way

Circular Walks

- O A, Habberley
- O B, Ribbesford
- O C, Abberley
- O D, Martley
- O E, Eckington Wharf
- O F, Pershore Bridge
- O G, Royal Hunters Walks

Scale: 1:220,000

Note: In addition a permissive right of access is provided through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Information on the location of these access sites can be reviewed at http://cwr.naturalengland.org.uk/
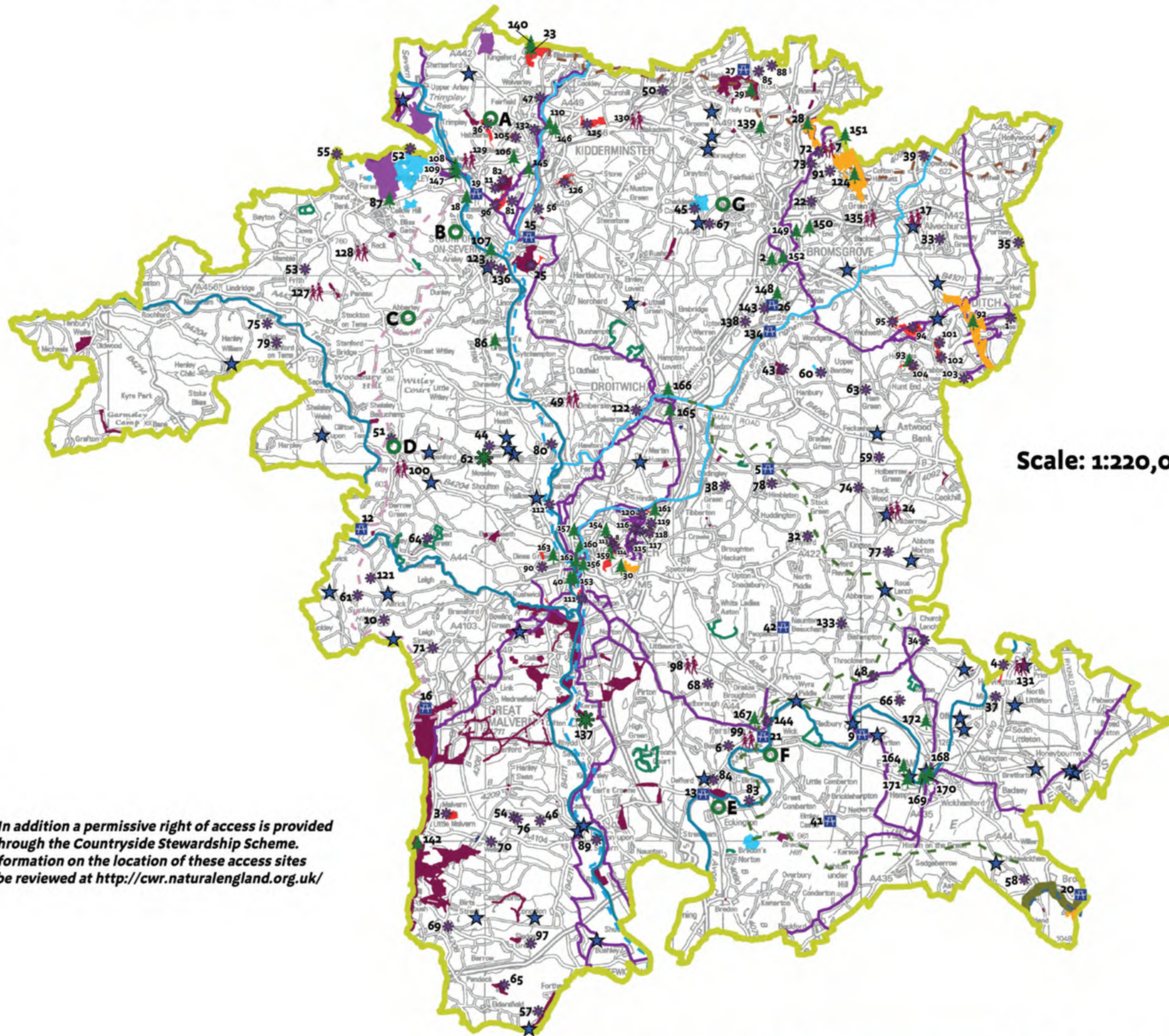
Map Produced by Sukhy Toora Natural England West Midlands GI Unit

NATURAL ENGLAND

worcestershire county council

APPENDIX 2

MEMBERS OF THE PARKS & COUNTRYSIDE TASK GROUP

Parks & Countryside Task Group Members	Members' responsibilities
Birmingham City Council **0121 303 2004** **www.birmingham.gov.uk**	Birmingham City Council provides a range of services and functions which contribute to, and will benefit from this strategy. In particular, through the Parks, Sports and Events Service, they are responsible for the management of The Lickey Hills Country Park and a partner in several environmental and biodiversity working groups.
British Waterways **01564 784634** **www.britishwaterways.co.uk**	British Waterways manages and cares for 2,000 miles (3,219km) of canals, rivers and docks, buildings, structures and landscapes.
District Councils **Bromsgrove 01527 873232** **www.bromsgrove.gov.uk** **Malvern Hills 01684 892700** **www.malvernhills.gov.uk** **Redditch 01527 64252** **www.redditch.gov.uk** **Worcester City 01905 723471** **www.cityofworcester.gov.uk** **Wychavon 01386 565000** **www.wychavon.gov.uk** **Wyre Forest 01562 820505** **www.wyreforest.gov.uk**	District Councils have the following responsibilities: · The day to day management of some Local Nature Reserves and SSSI's within their powers; · To ensure through the planning process that developments within the district are ecologically appropriate and where possible promote the district's biodiversity and access to the countryside; and · To encourage people to appropriately use the countryside through a variety of environmental education mediums.

Environment Agency 01684 850951 www.environment-agency.gov.uk	**The Environment Agency has the following statutory duties for recreation:** · A general duty to promote the use of inland coastal waters and land associated with them for recreational purposes to the extent that it deems desirable; · To take account of recreation and have regard to amenity and natural beauty in carrying out all the agency's functions; · To ensure that land or water in the Agency's control is made available where appropriate for recreational purposes in the best manner; · To ensure that the needs of the sick and disabled persons are taken into account when carrying out any recreation duties; and · To have regard to preserving freedom of access to areas of natural beauty, building or objects or archaeological interest.
Forestry Commission 01905 761220 www.forestry.gov.uk	**The Forestry Commission seeks to protect and expand Britain's forests and woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment. Our objectives are to:** · Protect Britain's forests and woodlands; · Expand Britain's forest area; · Enhance the economic value of our forest resources; · Conserve and improve the biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage of our forests and woodlands; · Develop opportunities for woodland recreation; and · Increase public understanding and community participation in forestry.
Malvern Hills Conservators 01684 892002 www.malvernhills.org.uk	**The Malvern Hills Conservators have a statutory duty to:** · preserve the natural aspect of the Hills and Commons; and · keep the hills and commons as open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public.
National Trust 01562 712848 www.nationaltrust.org.uk	**The National Trust acts as a guardian for the nation in the acquisition and protection of threatened coastline, countryside and buildings. We are constantly looking at ways in which we can improve public access and on-site facilities. They are a registered charity.**
Severn Trent Water 0121 722 4563 www.stwater.co.uk	**Severn Trent Water is a leading environmental service provider supplying water and treating wastewater, we want as many people as possible to enjoy the leisure opportunities our reservoirs, Visitor Centres and wildlife habitats offer. There's something for everyone, whether you're into active water sports, entertaining the kids, or just out for a relaxing stroll by the water.**

Worcestershire County Council **01905 763763** **www.worcestershire.gov.uk**	**Worcestershire County Council provide a number of services in relation to the objectives within the Strategy including Strategic Planning and Transportation. Most importantly, the Countryside Service manage a range of sites and recreational routes and help to develop and promote other environmental and countryside issues.**
Worcestershire Wildlife Trust **01905 754919** **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk**	**Worcestershire Wildlife Trust is a charitable body that has the following aims:** **· Increase public awareness, appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of wildlife;** **· Increase the Trust's influence with those whose actions could have a significant impact on wildlife;** **· Enrich the quality of life for all through access and engagement in an enhanced natural environment; and** **· Develop and offer lifelong learning opportunities to enable people to understand and have access to wildlife and the natural world.**

APPENDIX 3

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Term	Definition
Access Land	Part I of the CROW Act grants a general right of public access to 'access land' for the purposes of open-air recreation. In England, this has given the public open access to approximately 865,000 hectares (6.5% of the country). The rights are for access on foot. Other activities, such as camping or horse riding, are not permitted under the CROW Act, although they may be permitted locally or through other legislation applying to the land. There will sometimes be local restrictions on the new access rights for reasons such as land management, public safety, nature and heritage conservation.
Agri-Environment Scheme	Agri-Environment schemes, also known as 'Environmental Stewardship' provide funding to farmers and other land managers in England who deliver effective environmental management on their land.
Citizens Panel	A twice-yearly survey of approximately 2,000 Worcestershire residents, carried out by Worcestershire County Council, which asks questions about the county Council, our policies and the services that we deliver. The purpose of the Panel is to give residents the potential to influence decisions that are made to help the County Council to plan and improve services.
Green Infrastructure	Green Infrastructure (GI) is a strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Green Infrastructure includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens.
PPG/PPS	Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) (and their predecessors Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs)) are prepared by the Government after public consultation to explain statutory provisions and provide guidance to local authorities and others on planning policy and the operation of the planning system. They also explain the relationship between planning policies and other policies which have an important bearing on issues of development and land use. Local authorities must take their contents into account in preparing plans. The guidance may also be relevant to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.

Recreation	In the context of the AIRS, recreation encompasses all activities, both formal and informal, undertaken for pleasure or relaxation in the rural and urban environment.
Right of Way	Public rights of way and other access network, including canal towpaths, country parks and urban greenspace, nature reserves, permissive paths, etc.
Sustainable Development	Development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

APPENDIX 4

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ACCESS AND RECREATION TO NATIONAL INDICATORS

The table below illustrates some of the ways that the AIRS can contribute to national indicators. However, it should be recognised that the AIRS can also make a valuable impact on a range of national indicators not covered in the table, relating to health, climate change, flood risk, and biodiversity. These less tangible benefits are often more difficult to quantify, but partners' experience has shown that the benefits can be wide-ranging. It is important to recognise that informal access and recreation delivers across a broad range of policy aims, and the valuable contributions this can provide for meeting Local Area Agreement targets should not be underestimated.

National Indicator (NI)	Examples of how access and recreation planning and provision can help deliver measured benefits
NI 5 - Overall / general satisfaction with local area	This indicator is populated through the Place Survey[41]. It measures the percentage of people who are very or fairly satisfied with various services in their local area, including: ▪ Local transport information ▪ Local bus services ▪ Sport/leisure facilities ▪ Parks and open spaces Although access and recreation providers alone cannot deliver the full range of benefits in all areas, a joined-up, strategic approach to planning and maintain sites, routes, and accessibility can make a valuable contribution to each of these criteria.
NI 6 - Participation in regular volunteering	This indicator is populated through the Place Survey and is defined as giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations which support social, environmental, cultural or sporting objectives. Partners within the Parks and Countryside Task Group play a key role in facilitating volunteering opportunities (see 'Achievement' in Chapter 7 of this strategy for example).

[41] The Place Survey has been developed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) to measure how satisfied people are with their local area. The survey provides data for 18 National Indicators of these indicators are collected through a single Place Survey administered by, or on behalf of, each local authority. The Survey takes place every two years.

NI 8 - Adult participation in sport and active recreation	This indicator is populated from the Active People Survey[42] and measures the percentage of the adult population in a local area who participate in sport and active recreation, at moderate intensity, for at least 30 minutes on at least 12 days out of 4 weeks. Along with more 'formal' sports this includes walking, cycling, mountaineering, canoeing and equestrian activities. By considering the needs of these users, the AIRS helps facilitate greater engagement across all (adult) sectors of society.
NI 55 - Obesity in primary school age children in Reception	PCTs coordinate with schools to weigh and measure all eligible children in Reception. The government has published Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives[43] to set out how healthier lifestyles for children can be achieved. This includes the need for 'Building physical activity into our lives'. The opportunities provided by informal access and recreation in Worcestershire can make a valuable contribution to getting young people involved in the outdoors and enabling them to exercise.
NI 56 - Obesity in primary school age children in Year 6	PCTs coordinate with schools to weigh and measure all eligible children in Year 6. The government has published Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives to set out how healthier lifestyles for children can be achieved. This includes the need for 'Building physical activity into our lives'. The opportunities provided by informal access and recreation in Worcestershire can make a valuable contribution to getting young people involved in the outdoors and enabling them to exercise.
NI 188 - Planning to Adapt to Climate Change	Worcestershire County Council, as lead local authority, must report the level of preparedness reached by all Worcestershire local authorities in adapting to climate change. Local authority providers of access and recreation have a key role to play; access and recreation sites need to be planned and managed to take into account the risks of climate change, including greater potential flooding on land, and the need to ensure buildings and structures are resilient to extreme weather. Advice on potential impacts is provided to service/department heads by the lead authority.

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[42] The Active People Survey is administered by Sport England. It provides by far the largest sample size ever established for a sport and recreation survey and allows levels of detailed analysis previously unavailable. It identifies how participation varies from place to place and between different groups in the population. More information is available at http://www.sportengland.org.
[43] 'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A Cross-Government Strategy for England', Cross-Government Obesity Unit, Department of Health and Department of Children, Schools and Families (2008)

NI 195 - Improved street and environmental cleanliness (levels of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly-posting)	This indicator measures the percentage of relevant land and highways that is assessed as having deposits of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly-posting that fall below an acceptable level. Relevant land includes recreation areas, defined as wide range of open spaces that are freely accessible to the public and which are maintained by a local authority. Sites include parks, picnic sites, canals, lakes, riversides; municipal cemeteries (but not churchyards) and some cycleways. Where the *ownership* of Recreational Land has been transferred from a Borough or District Council to a Town or Parish Council, this is no longer relevant land for the purposes of BVPI 199, and should be excluded. However, where Town or Parish Councils only manage land on behalf of the local authority (which retains ownership), then such land remains relevant land and should be included in the NI 195 return.
NI 199 - Children and young people's satisfaction with parks and play areas	This indicator has not yet been published by government and is still to be finalised. It is anticipated that the policies and guidance set out in this Strategy will make a valuable contribution towards this indicator.

APPENDIX 5

FURTHER READING

A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise, Countryside Recreation Network (2005)

A New Look at the Landscapes of Worcestershire, Worcestershire County Council (2004)

A Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Worcestershire 2007-2017, Worcestershire County Council (2007)

Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG17, Department for Communities and Local Government (2001)

Be Active, Be Healthy – A Plan for Getting the Nation Moving, Department of Health (2009)

Biodiversity Action Plan for Worcestershire, Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership (2008)

By All Reasonable Means: Inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people, Countryside Agency (now Natural England) (2004)

Countryside Agency Diversity Review and Recommended Outline Action Plan, Countryside Agency (now Natural England) (2005)

Economic Impact of Tourism in Worcestershire 2002-2004, Heart of England Tourist Board

The Economic Value of Green Infrastructure, Natural Economy Northwest (2008)

Geodiversity Action Plan for Worcestershire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust

Green infrastructure: A prospectus for the West Midlands region, West Midlands Woodland & Forestry Forum (2007)

Green Infrastructure Guidance, Natural England (2009)

Guidance on Building a Local Sense of Belonging, DCLG (January 2009)

The Health Improvement Strategy for Worcestershire 2008-2013, Worcestershire County Council & Worcestershire Primary Care Trust

Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A Cross-Government Strategy for England, Department of Health and Department of Children, Schools and Families (2008)

National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions, Department for Communities and Local Government (2008)

Open space strategies: Best practice guidance, CABE/Mayor of London (2009)

Outdoors for All? The Action Plan, DEFRA (2008)

Planning for a Multi-Functional Green Infrastructure Framework in Worcestershire technical research paper, Version 1, Worcestershire County Council (2009)

Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, Department for Communities and Local Government (2002)

Public Service Agreement Delivery Agreement 21: Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities, HM Government (2007)

Social Exclusion in the Countryside, Dr B Slee, University of Aberdeen, Countryside Recreation, Volume 10, Number 1 (2002)

A Sustainable Community Strategy for Worcestershire, Second Edition 2008 – 2013, Worcestershire Partnership

Under-represented Groups and usage of the Rights of Way Network in Worcestershire, Centre for Rural Research (2006)

Waterways for Everyone - The Government's Strategy for the Inland Waterways of England and Wales, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2007)

Worcestershire Citizens Panel Survey, Worcestershire County Council (2009)

Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2009-2010, Worcestershire County Council (2010)

Worcestershire Cultural Strategy 2009-2013, Worcestershire Partnership (2009)

Worcestershire Play Strategy2007 – 2010, Worcestershire Partnership (2007)