

By all reasonable means:

Inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people



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Introduction to the Guide

This guide is designed to help countryside and urban greenspace managers and landowners improve accessibility of their sites, routes and facilities. It focuses on work with and for disabled people, but with the understanding that many access improvements will benefit all visitors.

The framework for action in this guide is appropriate for most types of outdoor space open to the public including:

- Country and urban parks and green spaces
- Long distance and other trails, paths and rights-of-way
- The wider countryside, including open access land

The guide recognises the wide variety of possibilities and constraints that face landowners and managers, from limited resources to the importance of balancing access with the conservation of cultural and

natural heritage, as well as landscape character. Where land owners and managers are concerned with the conservation of significant historic features, they should refer to English Heritage's companion publication, 'Easy Access to Historic Landscapes' (2005).¹

Most visitors do not want to see the loss of the special qualities of a place and sometimes this will limit the amount of access that is possible. The aim is to provide a realistic, practical and effective approach to access improvements, creating more access in more places for more people.

Accessibility is addressed in its widest sense, including people with physical, sensory or intellectual impairments and mental health problems. The guide looks at how to make routes, sites and facilities more accessible and how to improve the experience at places that are already accessible. It details how to assess an existing site for access provision, how to plan access improvements and how to undertake the work.

In the absence of statutory standards for outdoor access improvements, the guide outlines a framework for improving access. This encourages landowners and countryside and outdoor greenspace managers to identify those standards and techniques that are appropriate. The guide is based on the principle of Least Restrictive Access – an approach that aims for the highest standards possible for a particular piece of work. It also sees access as a chain of events that start, for example, at home, where a decision to visit a site or route might be made, and where a visitor returns to after experiencing the outdoors.

In the wake of the enactment of a major new piece of disability legislation, the guide is seen as a 'live document'. It will be updated in the light of experience and statutory developments, especially those relating to the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA 2005).²

This couple revisit the Isle of Wight where they were married

ME/CAP



We value your feedback on this guidance. Please visit www.countryside.gov.uk/diversity to complete an online feedback form.

Introducing the issues

Importance of the Outdoors



The outdoors provides valuable experiences for many people. This man has a learning disability and chooses to visit the countryside as often as possible

Public open spaces are central features of local community life across the UK, making a significant contribution to people's well being and quality of life. These spaces are where public life takes place, and where people can connect with the natural world. Some public spaces or routes are valued mainly for recreation or educational use, while many are an important part of daily life, such as a route to the local shop. Many people, including disabled people, are often excluded from enjoying the use and benefits of such spaces because of a lack of planning or awareness of their needs.

The under-use of greenspace by disabled people has been reported by various researchers. 20% of people in the UK have impairments but surveys for the DEMOS report, 'Park Life: Urban Parks and Social Renewal' (Greenhalgh & Warpole, 1995),³ indicated that the presence of people with evident impairments never amounted to more than 0.5% of all users.

The Countryside Agency (Chesters, 1997)⁴ identified three types of countryside visitors: frequent visitors represent 20% of the nation's population and tend to be better off two-car families, well informed about what the countryside has to offer and non-disabled; occasional visitors represent 40% of the population and tend to be people on middle incomes, with one car per household, living in the towns and suburbs; missing visitors represent another 40% of the population and these people are generally on low income or state benefit, living in poorer conditions and reliant on public transport. They include some ethnic communities, older people and disabled people (Stoneham, 2001).⁵

Although there have been few studies focused on disabled visitors, it is well recognised that they are under-represented in countryside use. It is important to be aware of the barriers that prevent them using and enjoying these places.

Defining disability

This guide is based on the social model of disability. It recognises disability as resulting from barriers created by society. This is especially evident where society has planned and designed for what are seen as a set of conventional needs, abilities and behaviours. In the social model such barriers can largely be overcome by more thoughtful and inclusive planning and design of public spaces. Overcoming access barriers is therefore seen as an issue for society. The solutions should come from disabled and non-disabled people working together.

Disabled people do not have 'special needs'. But different people do need different things to enable them to enjoy the outdoors, regardless of whether or not they have impairments. Sometimes this may be achieved through a focus on the access requirements of people with specific types of impairment, making sure that everyone has an equal quality of experience. For example, someone with a hearing impairment may rely on a portable hearing loop to be able to take part in a guided tour.

Countryside managers can sometimes feel they need to know all about different impairments in order to identify what access improvements should be made. However, as Claire Tregaskis points out, "what they really needed in order to be able to work with disabled people was an in-depth knowledge of what their site had to offer its visitors, together with communication skills, both of which they often already had in abundance" (Tregaskis, 2004).⁶ In turn, working with a representative local group of disabled people is a good way of pooling countryside and access expertise, so that a more inclusive service is provided to all future visitors.

The DDA defines disability as 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [a person's] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. This includes the following:

- Wheelchair users and ambulant disabled people
- people with poor manual co-ordination or little strength
- people with sensory impairments, including impaired sight and hearing
- people who lack memory, concentration or understanding

The DDA 2005 extends this definition to include a person with a progressive condition such as multiple sclerosis, HIV or cancer.

Research conducted in Perthshire by EKOS Consultants in 1997 looked at the impact the path network around Dunkeld and Birnam had on the local economy. This research was published by The Paths for All Partnership. The results revealed that:

- Visitors to path networks spend money and so generate income in the local economy
- In Dunkeld and Birnam, day visitors spent an average of £12.40 per day
- Income generating potential can be increased by careful siting of car parks and other facilities
- Path networks can contribute to reducing seasonality
- Local businesses reported a more even spread of custom and an extension of opening hours and season. This contributes to the long-term sustainability of local businesses
- Path networks can sustain and create local jobs
- In Dunkeld and Birnam, 8 to 15 full-time equivalent jobs are directly attributable to the path network
- Path networks represent good value for money – with lower costs per visit than other leisure facilities

Paths for All Partnership
www.pathsforall.org.uk

Benefits of an inclusive approach

Developing an inclusive approach is not just about the use of outdoor sites, routes and facilities. It makes services better, involves more people as visitors and supporters, gets messages across to more people and achieves more value from the work and resources that are being invested.

The benefits of an inclusive approach include:

- Increased visitor satisfaction
- Greater staff and volunteer satisfaction
- Positive image
- Increased repeat visits
- More effective use of resources by avoiding short-term ad-hoc measures
- New audiences
- Expanding employment and volunteer opportunities
- Increased income

Raising awareness of the importance of the countryside, landscapes, greenspace and nature conservation is central to the work of many landowners and managers. Increasing the accessibility and appeal of information helps spread these messages to a bigger and more diverse audience.

It is estimated that one person in five in the UK is a disabled person (ODPM, 2003).⁷ The number is greater if the definition includes all those people who at any one time experience temporary impairments, for example a broken limb, a heart condition, or general fatigue. The implications of the resulting disability are often shared by a group of visitors including families, friends and carers.

Older people may not consider themselves disabled but can experience many of the same barriers because of a general reduction in stamina, mobility and sensory acuity. Demographic changes are resulting in a greater proportion of older people in society. Increasingly, retired people have more disposable income and time to spend on leisure. They are already likely to be a significant proportion of visitors. Their needs must be seen as part and parcel of the same issues outlined in this guide.

Disabled people spent £80 billion in the UK in 2003 (DWP). Add to this the amount spent by friends, families and carers and it is obvious that an increase in provision for disabled visitors will result in a benefit to local businesses and associated services.

The legal framework

Recent legislation requires provision for disabled people to be considered equally with that of other visitors – for example, when determining the management of access to the countryside. The most significant areas of legislation are outlined below.

Disability Discrimination Acts

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995)⁸ makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of his or her disability in connection with employment, public transport, education and the provision of goods and services. Parts II and III of the DDA 1995 apply to service providers' premises, a term that includes land.

The DDA 1995 affects all those responsible for providing access to the countryside as 'service providers' but also often as employers and sometimes as educational institutions. It covers the whole range of countryside services including guided walks, events, visitor centres, information, interpretation, signage, paths and trails and so on. The Act also covers everyone involved in providing a service to the public, including volunteers.

The DDA 1995 does not outline specific standards but requires that reasonable provision should be made. What is meant by reasonable will ultimately rely on the courts but the Disability Rights Commission's (DRC) Code of Practice gives helpful guidance (DRC, 2002).⁹

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 was passed in April 2005 and amended the existing DDA. It brings significant changes. For example, it requires public bodies to positively promote disability equality and to have Disability Equality Schemes in place by December 2006. The DRC will publish a Code of Practice and guidance on how these Schemes should be produced, promoted and evaluated. A Disability Equality Scheme will need to:

- Explain how you will promote equality for disabled people
- Challenge discrimination against disabled people
- Help remove barriers for all disabled people

The DDA 2005 covers all functions of public bodies, not just services, and therefore includes the provision of public footpaths and other rights of way.

The CROW Act 2000

In November 2000, Parliament passed the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW). This legislation improves public rights of way in England and Wales and creates a new statutory right of access on foot to mountain, moor, heath, downland and registered common land. It covers about 1.5 million hectares, 10% of land in England and Wales. CROW gives new powers, duties and responsibilities to highways authorities and others involved in countryside access management. These include:

Under Section 60, local highway authorities are required to prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and to review it not less than 10 years after publication. In developing the Plan, the needs of disabled people must be taken into consideration. It is proposed that ROWIPs will be incorporated into the local transport planning process from 2005 onwards, when the next 5-year Local Transport Plans are to be produced.

Under Section 69, highway authorities must consider the needs of disabled people when authorizing the erection of stiles and gates or other works on footpaths or bridleways. An authority may also enter into agreements with owners, occupiers or lessees of land to improve stiles, gates or other structures to benefit disabled people.

The introduction of the new rights of access in England will be completed by November 2005. The Welsh Assembly Government introduced the new access rights across the whole of Wales in May 2005.

More information

DDA

CROW

Open Access (England)

Open Access (Wales)

Disability Rights Commission www.drc.org.uk/thelaw/

Defra www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/

HMSO www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000037.htm

Countryside Agency www.openaccess.gov.uk

Countryside Council for Wales www.csaw.ccw.gov.uk

The framework for action

Example

“When we audit a path we remove any unnecessary barriers that we can, and target the next barrier to be removed from any access point (this includes steps and other things that some people have difficulty with). When a stile needs repair or removal, we first look at replacing it with a gap. If the landowner disagrees we go for a wicket gate, then for a kissing gate if a wicket gate is unacceptable to the landowner. The last resort is to replace the stile. We have been using this approach since 1993 and there is now half the number of stiles on the Pembrokeshire Coast Path that users have to cross (255 now, about 540 in 1993).” David MacLachlan, Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail

Least Restrictive Access

The Framework for Action in this guide is based on the principle of Least Restrictive Access (LRA). 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.

LRA is an approach that helps raise the overall standard of access of a site, route or facility over a period of time. It complements the management zoning approach and ensures that within a particular zone there is the opportunity to aim for higher standards of access.

Dave MacLachlan



Stiles and steps present a challenge for almost everyone and should be among the first barriers to be removed.

Access standards and Management Zones



Sensory Trust

It is widely agreed that it is inappropriate to use a one-size-fits-all approach to standards in the outdoors. Such an approach would lack sensitivity to the special and varied character of open spaces and countryside, wherever it is. But standards are important in identifying benchmarks for access improvements.

Currently, there are no statutory benchmarks for reasonable practice in the outdoors in regard to the DDA 2005 – not surprising given

A solution to an access problem. But could it have been done in greater sympathy with the setting? It is always important to consider quality of experience with access improvements

the enormous diversity of greenspace and countryside. This makes it challenging for managers and owners to know what standards to apply when planning access improvements.

Existing standards

This guide recommends the following standards, selected according to the context of the particular site or route.

- **BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards** – for more information, see Appendix 1.
- **Countryside Agency Management Zones** – see Appendix 1.
- **Part M of the Building Regulations** – the only standards currently recognised by the DDA. They relate to the built environment but provide a useful insight into what is currently considered good practice. They include valuable details on features such as car parks, toilets, handrails etc.

Some words of caution

The BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards and the Countryside Agency Management Zones relate to paths and routes and are defined primarily in terms of physical access, and predominantly in relation to people with mobility impairments. They are useful for planning access improvements, but it is crucial that any auditing process takes into account the whole range of issues, such as information, seating and shelter, as well as the widest range of people. Some useful references, in addition to this guide, may be found in Appendix 4.



Sue Woods

Improving access means giving people the opportunity to explore the outdoors using their different senses

Visitor experience

Decision to visit

Journey and arrival

On-site experience

Return home

Source: Sensory Trust



The access chain

Access is a chain of events that leads from a person’s decision to visit a site or route, through the journey, arrival, and visit around the site or route and its facilities and then the journey home. If any one of the links in the access chain is broken, then the visit may either end unsatisfactorily or may never happen. (Sensory Trust 2005).¹⁰

Things to consider

Access information in accessible formats.
 Good publicity, good distribution.
 Welcoming image.
 Information about accessible facilities.

Accessible public transport.
 Timetables and route information available.
 Close to bus stop or train station.
 Accessible car parking.
 Welcoming entrance with staff on hand.
 Free entry for essential supporter, enablers or carers.

Routes and signposting for all levels of ability.
 Accessible information, interpretation and facilities.
 Highlights of site are accessible or alternative of equal quality is provided.
 Highlights are identified in collaboration with disabled people and made accessible.

Accessible public transport.
 Timetables and route information available.
 Close to bus stop or train station.
 Accessible car parking.
 Feedback encouraged and learned from.

The decision to visit a site or route is normally made at home. If there is insufficient information, or information is not accessible, then the decision is made difficult or might not be made at all. If suitable transport is not available, then the visit is unlikely. If the site itself is largely inaccessible, then a visitor might feel frustrated and may not return. Access improvements embrace all the links that make up the access chain. Otherwise piecemeal access improvements are likely to be under-used or have little impact.

Putting the framework into practice



Policy and strategy

Inclusive practice relies on changing attitudes and the way things are done, as well as making practical changes on the ground. A policy is a set of activities directed towards general aims or goals; for example, an organisation’s commitment to improving access. A strategy outlines how these intentions will be achieved. When developing policy and strategy it is important to establish the needs and aspirations of local people and visitors, and to involve disabled people as development partners.

It will not be possible, or appropriate, to make all of the countryside and landscapes fully accessible for everyone. Nonetheless, those organisations with a responsibility for providing access to the outdoors should strive to maximise accessibility for as many people as possible. What is reasonable provision will vary in different situations and with the results of future case law.

At present this means that in any outdoor area, the authority or body responsible for it will need to provide and promote a variety of routes and places, with a good spread of location and character. Some of these may reach the highest access standards of the BT Countryside for All Standards or the Management Zoning introduced in this guide (See Appendix 1), whilst others will reach lesser standards.

For Highway Authorities, new policies are likely to be concentrated within the RoWIPs. However, other local authority policy areas should be included as amendments to policies for equal opportunities, planning, public transport, tourism, leisure and recreation, and these are also likely to be required under the DDA 2005.

It is also important to ensure that partners, such as other local authorities or voluntary organisations, have policies that support a positive approach to conservation and access. Landowners who are keen to improve access on their private land may also find it worthwhile to review local authority policies, especially if it may lead to the possibility of additional funding.

Policy development



Policies are important as they provide the context for effective working practices. They may be developed at a range of levels – for the whole organisation, or even for individual sites. It is important that all staff understand that they play an important part in forming and applying these and should engage in their drafting.

Policies should address issues relevant to those responsible for implementation and those who are to be beneficiaries. They should cover the following three components:

Why: The key reasons for improving access.

What: A clear statement of what a policy hopes to achieve.

Key issues to address:

- Ensure people, including those with impairments, have choice over where, when and how they will be able to enjoy the outdoors
- Aim for integrated services wherever possible, enhanced by specific support.

How: An indication of key areas where actions will be pursued.

These may include:

- What resources will be available to achieve the aims of the policy
- Commitment to consult with current users and non-users of paths, sites and facilities
- Commitment to training staff and, where appropriate, people from partner organisations and associated groups such as ‘friends’
- Commitment to monitor and evaluate implementation of policy and make adjustments where necessary

The draft policy should be distributed to a range of representative organisations and individuals. People should be kept informed about what has resulted from their feedback and this should include explanation of why some suggestions could not be implemented. Subsequent consultation will be valuable to keep policies up to date with changes in local concerns and interests.

Example

To find out about local needs and views, the Lancashire County Council Pilot Project distributed a questionnaire to disabled individuals and disability groups, including those listed in the Lancashire Disability Information Federation Directory, countryside related user groups such as the Ramblers Association and representatives of the Lancashire Access Forum and Public Rights of Way Forum. Replies were received from 41% of this mailing, many of whom participated in future workshops.

The Project consulted in the following ways:

- The draft policy document was placed on the council’s countryside and access web pages
- Copies of the draft policy were sent to stakeholders who had responded to the earlier letter
- Copies of the draft policy document were circulated to all countryside and rights of way staff within the County Council
- A presentation was made to the Disability Forum – made up of representatives from a wide range of disability groups – followed by a short discussion on some of the issues raised
- A copy of the draft policy was sent to all members of the Lancashire Local Access Forum. A presentation was given and some of the issues raised were discussed in the Lancashire Local Access Forum meeting
- A workshop was organised to which everyone who had been consulted on the draft policy document was invited

The consultation raised issues for further discussion and the Lancashire Local Access Forum was asked to advise on how best to consult further. In addition, a second workshop was organised to give a further opportunity to discuss issues face to face.

Strategy

An access strategy should take account of how much time, effort and money is available to implement actions. The first strategy for implementing the new policy is likely to be published at the same time as the policy and therefore consultation can be concurrent.

Strategies are likely to cover a 3 or 5 year period, whereas policy is likely to be relevant for a longer timescale. The content of a strategy will depend on where an organisation is in the process of implementing policy. If this is the first strategy for implementing policy then objectives should be broadly similar to those outlined below:

- To plan improvements to access provision
- To prioritise paths and places for audit
- To audit prioritised routes, sites and associated facilities and services
- To establish and prioritise improvements to routes and sites
- To establish and prioritise improvements to associated facilities and services
- To prioritise, produce and distribute information
- To undertake improvements to routes, sites, facilities and services
- To improve accessibility of non-prioritised routes when opportunities arise, such as during on-going maintenance
- To monitor and evaluate access improvements

Funding to implement actions outlined in the strategy should be established at the outset. However, a further objective could be to seek further funds to implement more improvements.

Review of policies and strategy

It is recommended that action plans contained in the strategy are reviewed annually, and strategies and policies every three or five years in light of monitoring and evaluating success. For Highways Authorities, ROWIPs are likely to be a useful mechanism. More generally, Local Access Forums can play a valuable role in reviewing information.

Training

Raising awareness and understanding amongst staff and volunteers is one of the most important investments an organisation can make to sustain access improvements. Staff involved in developing policies and strategies need to understand access issues before starting to plan the process of improving access opportunities in the countryside. Disability equality training is therefore essential.

Training should be ongoing and linked with other forms of skills development, such as Health and Safety and conservation management. All staff and external contractors involved in delivering actions contained in this strategy will require similar training before their involvement in the process begins.

Training courses are likely to include sessions about:

- Implications of DDA and CROW for countryside owners and managers
- Communication with Disabled People – how to involve and consult
- Management zones and standards
- Access audits
- Access Plans and the Planning Process
- Information provision
- Evaluation

Some of the most effective training is gained by working and consulting with disabled people. Good ideas for access improvements also often come from wardens, guides and others who have regular contact with visitors. It is useful to find ways that people can share their ideas and experiences; for example, through meetings or an e-mail forum.



Dave MacLachlan

Visitor, non-visitor and use profiling

No site or route exists in isolation, and establishing the location and nature of surrounding communities – residential areas, schools, sheltered housing and so on – provides a useful picture for likely patterns of use and the development of accessible path networks and sites.

It is important to review how the site, route or path network is currently used. It is equally important to consider who is not visiting and the reasons why. Some people enjoy the experience of walking or wheeling, others enjoy exploration, others are drawn by an attraction or destination. For many people, public footpaths or cycle paths may be routes to work, school or the local pub. It is important to find out how much sites and routes are currently used and how much people value them.

Existing visitors can provide valuable feedback on access barriers as well as the qualities they most enjoy about a route or site

Issues to include in a review:

Local communities

Groups that could get involved as volunteers, focus groups or become future visitors, such as retirement communities, schools, day centres, healthcare centres.

Techniques

Obtain information from local authority community team.
Consult to find out how people would like to use the site or area.

Existing users

Who is currently using the site, route of network, why they are visiting and what they use it for? How well do these people reflect the local community in terms of age and disability?

Techniques

Plot these communities on a map and make contact.
Consult to find out how people would like to use the site or area.

Patterns of use

Are there current users or types of use which are a challenge to integrate, e.g. bike use and horse riding? When and how is the place used?

Techniques

On-site survey on different days, times of day and seasons.
Consult with local people, including all types of use.

Non-users

Who is not currently using the site, route or network and the reasons why.

Techniques

Questionnaire survey distributed locally (and more widely for sites that attract tourists).
Consult with local people.

Further information

BT Countryside for All Standards & Guidelines

Sensory Trust Evaluation Toolbox www.sensorytrust.org.uk

Consultation and Engagement



Sensory Trust

Disabled people involved in a site review to identify existing highlights, barriers to access and potential improvements

Seeking the views of people with an interest in a particular route, site or facility is an effective way of making sure that plans and actions target the real needs and wishes of local people. It is also a good opportunity to explain the importance of balancing improved access with other objectives, such as nature conservation and landscape character. Good consultation is a hallmark of the projects described in this guide.

It is important to involve a range of people that is representative of the local community, as well as the wider population if the site or route attracts people from further afield. This should include disabled people with different impairments and from disability organisations. Involving potential visitors can help build a sense of ownership and involvement at an early stage, helping to encourage people to make full use of the facilities when they are in place.

Engaging with disabled people will help identify access barriers and generate ideas for improvements and can help build support from the local community. It is important to consult as widely as possible, from the earliest stages of planning to the implementation of physical works and subsequent evaluation and review. It is important that consultation is not treated as a token effort and that contact is maintained with people afterwards so they know their input was valued. One of the most common criticisms from people who have given time to share their views is that they never heard what happened as a result of their contribution.

Access should always be considered together with quality of experience. Inviting a representative group of disabled people to assess the site's interest with you will be a cost-effective means of doing this. This will result in a more complete picture of the site which will show how best to make its riches available. It should also help identify which barriers should be tackled first.

Visitors and potential visitors should be consulted on what they do or would like to do on a site, and to discover the site's or route's highlights. Different visitors will have different experiences. For instance, a view from a craggy hilltop may not be available to a visually impaired person, but they may enjoy the sense of space there and the feel of the rocks on the scramble to the top. An inclusive approach will take this into account when planning access improvements.

A useful resource at the planning stage is the knowledge that already exists amongst land management staff and in partner organisations, particularly front line staff such as rights of way staff, rangers and wardens, site managers and trail managers. They will have a good understanding of:

- Which paths are already well used and by whom
- The topography of the area
- The current condition of the path and associated routes
- Landscape constraints
- The land use and land manager's attitude to access
- Local associated facilities

Recording decisions is important and often overlooked. It is important to know why approaches were taken, how decisions were made, who was consulted and what guidance was used. This working record is also useful for new staff, and to support decisions should these be challenged at a later date.

Sources

Potential sources of contacts for local disability groups and disabled people:

- Local authority access officer (www.access-association.org.uk)
- Local Council for Voluntary Service (www.nacvs.org.uk)
- Shopmobility centre
- National disability organisations
- Local disability or access forums

In addition to the owners, managers and users of the countryside, professional input is valuable to lend specialist insights on design and

Example

The Hadrian's Wall National Trail Pilot Project listed the following benefits of consultation.

- Inputs local and specialist knowledge on behaviour and preferences
- Creates goodwill amongst user groups
- Provides good contacts that can have application elsewhere
- Raises awareness amongst potential users

Effective consultation relies on setting clear parameters, including:

- Why the consultation is taking place and what is expected as a result
- Identifying areas that have special heritage value and that have limited options for removal or adaptation of physical features
- The level of resources available to support new ideas and improvements.
- Realistic estimates of the cost of capital works

Example

In 1996, Monmouthshire County Council Countryside Services set up the 'Monmouthshire Countryside Disabled Project' with the aim – agreed in consultation with local disability groups – of ensuring that countryside sites in Monmouthshire meet appropriate disabled access requirements. Various works followed in partnership with and guidance from disabled people and their representatives.

This included:

1. Countryside site access audits and subsequent programmes of improvements
2. Rights of Way inclusive access projects
3. The Access Guide to Monmouthshire Countryside
4. A site guide to Old Station Tintern

management possibilities, to explain the heritage value of an area and to interpret the implications of different suggestions.

Professionals consulted may include:

- Historians
- Highway Authority officers
- Engineers
- Conservation professionals
- Landscape architects

Planning should include building relationships with other landowners, transport companies, highway departments and other agencies to facilitate access improvements along the length of the access chain.

It is important to consult with the widest range of people, including those whose needs or desires may conflict with another group's needs. If there are obvious conflicts, these can sometimes be resolved, and compromises be reached, by conciliation meetings between these groups.

Identifying barriers to access

Auditing or reviewing the characteristics of a site or route is essential to identify barriers and what improvements would bring the greatest benefit in enhancing opportunities and experiences for disabled visitors. It is important to work with disabled people as development partners and to maintain a dialogue throughout a project. This ensures that expectations remain realistic and the project delivers real benefits.

Being aware of barriers to access is essential to identify priorities

for improvement. The most common barriers to visiting the outdoors are:

- Physical barriers, such as steps, steep gradients, stiles and gates
- Lack of accessible information
- Lack of accessible toilets
- Lack of confidence, low expectations, not feeling welcome, fear over safety or of getting lost

Physical barriers are only part of the story. The success of this ramble relied also on good planning and management



Sensory Trust

- Too far to walk
- Lack of convenient and accessible public transport
- Inaccessible café, shop or visitor centre
- Lack of seating and opportunities to rest or take shelter
- Cost of transport, parking fees and refreshments
- Lack of staff awareness of the needs of disabled visitors
- A limited range of activities
- Poorly maintained environment

This order of significance was identified in Sensory Trust's Making Connections survey of disabled people. (Price & Stoneham, 2001).¹¹

Issues to include in an audit or review:

Topography

Challenges relating to the landform, such as steep slopes or areas with poor drainage.

Techniques

Access audit to provide detailed information on barriers.

Landscape constraints

Areas with conservation or heritage significance or where access restrictions are required, e.g. to safeguard nesting sites.

Techniques

Conservation assessment to identify significant features and areas.

Land use constraints

Landowners' requirements, e.g. gates required for stock control.

Techniques

Access audit briefed to include these issues.
Consult with landowners.

Wider context

Relationship to a wider network, e.g. part of a national trail.

Techniques

Mapping exercise.
Consult with relevant landowners and agencies to explore opportunities for collaboration.

Further guidance and sources of audit expertise

BT Countryside for All Standards & Guidelines www.fieldfare.org.uk

Joint Mobility Unit Access Partnership www.jmuaccess.org.uk

National Register of Access Consultants www.nrac.org.uk

Centre for Accessible Environments www.cae.org.uk

Sensory Trust Evaluation Toolbox www.sensorytrust.org.uk

Action Planning



Sue Woods

Decision to visit: Off-site Information

Lack of accessible off-site information is one of the most significant barriers limiting use of the outdoors by disabled people. It is also one of the most straightforward to resolve. A decision to visit usually relies on obtaining information. Therefore access work to any site must consider the production and distribution of information that is appropriate, current and accessible. Such a decision may be made solely by a disabled person, or in conjunction with a supporter, enabler or carer. The information should be inclusive to take all these people into consideration. A poor experience by a supporter may also break the access chain for a disabled person.

Access is not just about good paths. The removal of social and psychological barriers is often important to open up opportunities for people with mental ill health and carers to benefit from the outdoors

Issues to include in a review

(See also On-site Information):

Website

Is your website accessible to Web Accessibility Initiative standards? Does it contain access information and highlight points of interest about the site or routes? Is the website promoted through leaflets, guide books etc.?

Techniques

Website audit. User-test website with disabled people.

Leaflets etc

Are they accessible? Do they follow Plain English guidelines? Do they have reasonable font size and clarity, and good colour contrast between font and background? Do they contain objective access information and details of points of interest? Do they contain inclusive images, especially of disabled people?

Techniques

Review existing information.
User-test existing information, and new drafts, with disabled people.

Distribution

Where can people get information? Are these distribution points or methods accessible?

Techniques

Review current distribution strategy: Locations used; Identify key communities of interest and modes of access to them.

Advice & information

Can visitors obtain information from your organisation or site?
Is this accessible to all visitors?

Techniques

Review current advice and information.
Get specialist advice on equipment like Minicom and hearing loops.
Consult with disabled people.

Developing off-site information

Types of information

Objective information allows people to make their own decisions and judge their visit against their own abilities. For example, to help a visitor decide which route to take, a sign indicates the length of the route, maximum gradient and type of surface they can expect.

Subjective information does not allow a visitor to make a decision. For instance, a sign that indicates a route is 'not suitable for wheelchairs' does not take into account the variety of different wheelchair users, and their interests. Fit wheelchair users may have no difficulty with the path and may relish the challenge while others may not. The sign provides insufficient information for visitors to make a decision.

What information to provide: Access information should include information on type and length of routes, seating, accessible transport to the site, accessible car parking and so on. Providing detailed objective off-site information about paths, sites, facilities, barriers, access points and so on will allow each potential visitor to make a decision on whether to visit or how to shape their visit accordingly.

It can be tempting to wait until major access improvements have been made before producing publicity and information. It is important to note that although a site might not be completely accessible, information should be produced as soon as possible that highlights where a site is accessible and to what standard. Consider producing information in a format, such as a web page or word processing document, that can be easily updated as access improvements are made.

Formats: This information should be provided in formats that are accessible, such as large print and audio. Making information available on the internet as clear images and downloadable plain text files allows users to customize the presentation to their particular requirements. This can reduce the need to store and distribute numbers of Large Print or Braille guides, although it will not replace them.

Web sites should be designed to conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) set by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI). Guidelines are only half the story, however. Different visitors require different types of information in order to enjoy their visit and any information, in any media, should be developed in partnership with representatives of the intended audience. It is useful to carry out usability testing before it is completed.

Test it first: Research by BT Countryside for All also showed that disabled people are more likely to trust access information that has been vetted by other disabled people, so invite a local representative group of disabled people to check the information before going to print.

Keep it current: Confidence is important for many people visiting the wider countryside. For this reason, information must be as detailed and up-to-date as possible so that it may be trusted. Information should include potential issues related to seasonal changes or weather.

Further information

Informability Manual www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

See it Right pack www.rnib.org.uk

Improving signs for people with a learning disability, DRC (see Appendix 5)

BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards & Guidelines www.fieldfare.org.uk

Sensory Trust Evaluation Toolbox www.sensorytrust.org.uk



Journey and arrival

A key factor when disabled people choose to visit a destination is how easy it is to get there and home again. Lack of accessible public transport can be a major barrier to people without a car. Equally, lack of accessible car parking can prevent visits by people with limited mobility, wheelchair users and older people. The most accessible routes, sites and facilities are usually those that offer a range of different options for travelling to the site.

Accessible public transport?

Issues to include in a review:

Public transport

Is it possible to reach the route or site by public transport?
Is the transport accessible and convenient? Is there potential for linking with local transport providers to improve services?

Techniques

Contact local Highways Authority and transport providers.
Consult with users and non-users to identify issues and demand for improvements.

Cars & parking

Is there accessible parking at the start or joining points of routes, and near site entrances? Are car parks well signed from approach roads?

Techniques

Consult with Highways and Planning authorities.
Consult with relevant landowners and agencies to explore opportunities for parking provision.
Consult with users and non-users to identify issues and demand for improvements.

Arrival

Are the arrival points welcoming and informative? Are there facilities such as accessible toilets and refreshments? Is staff support and information available?

Techniques

Access audit.
Consult with users and non-users to identify issues and demand for improvements.



Partnership with public transport can bring visitors safely onto your site

Improving transport and arrival

Public transport is likely to be the responsibility of the local authority or a private company, but there may be opportunities to explore options to liaise on issues like timetables, routes and even the type of transport provided. The DDA 1995 has implications for providers of public transport and some have already introduced accessible buses and taxis.

It is also important to consult with local people to find out what kinds of access improvement would be most beneficial. It is important for ROWIPs to be co-ordinated with Local Transport Plans as this would help resolve barriers associated with transport.

Many disabled people rely on cars to visit the countryside, and some will not be able to venture far from their cars once they get there. Such visiting relies on the provision of accessible car parking sufficiently near to attractive destination points.

Car parking can be a sensitive issue, particularly for routes and sites that are vulnerable to damage from excessive visitor numbers. The 'honeypot' effect of car parks is well recognised (where most visitors do not venture far from their cars) and this can be useful for keeping visitor pressure away from areas of high conservation value.

Arrival points may be where some disabled people make decisions about what they are going to do on site, so it is a key opportunity to inspire people to explore.

Further information

Hadrian's Wall Bus Partnership www.hadrians-wall.org

DPTAC www.dptac.gov.uk

Highways Authorities

Transport companies

BT Countryside for All Transport Guidelines www.sensorytrust.org.uk

Part M Access and Facilities for Disabled People (see Appendix 4)



Accessible cafes contribute to a positive experience

On-site Experience: Facilities

Facilities are an essential consideration for some people when planning a day out. When planning new or adapted facilities, like toilets, cafes or ticket sales, take into account existing or planned access improvements to sites. Situate facilities where they will be of most benefit and may increase the use of accessible routes.

Often there are accessible toilets and refreshments available in nearby pubs, cafés or town centres and the task is simply to include this in the publicity and information about the site or route.

Provision of refreshments should be accessible. This can be more of a challenge if they are provided by a contractor or external agency, but such enterprises must be aware of the access standards they are expected to meet. This applies to the quality of customer service as well.

Issues to include in a review:

Toilets

Are there accessible toilets near entrances, car parks or starting points?
Are these highlighted in access information?

Techniques

Consult with local authority to identify plans for local improvements. Consult with users and non-users to identify issues and demand for improvements.

Visitor Centres, Ticket sales, Shops, Cafes etc.

Are these facilities accessible? Are opening times convenient?
Are they promoted in access information?
Have staff undertaken disability equality training?

Techniques

Access audit. Consult with staff, users and non-users to identify issues and ideas for improvements.

Seating

Are there frequent opportunities for visitors to rest along routes, or on site? Is there shelter?

Techniques

Access audit. Consult with users and non-users to identify issues and ideas for improvements.



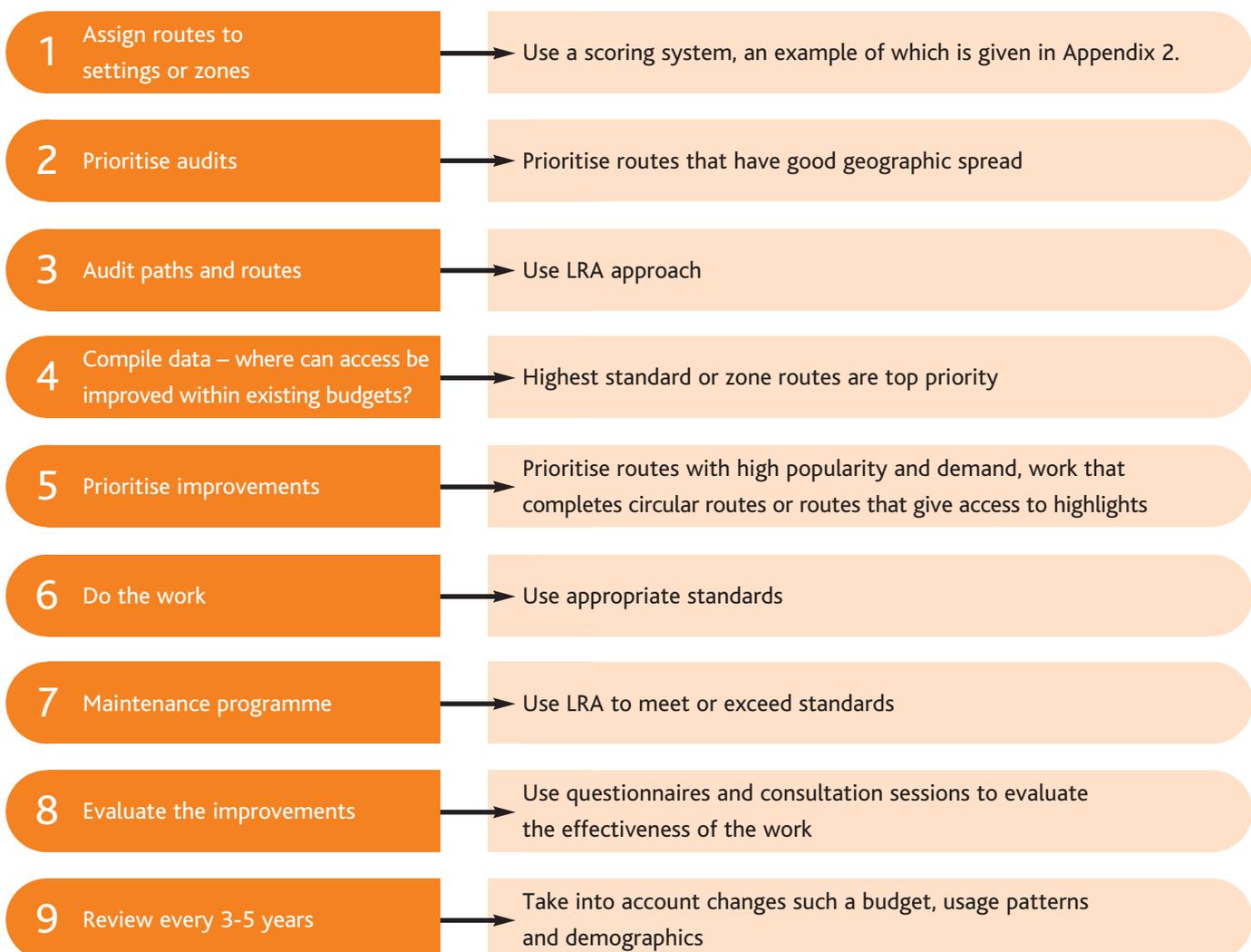
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On-site experience: Paths and Routes

Well planned and managed paths can improve access for all

When reviewing paths and routes, the aim is to identify how to facilitate access to as much of the network as possible by as many people as possible, and to prioritise actions. The first step is to identify which setting or zone is most appropriate to the path or route that is to be audited. Adopting the LRA approach requires that all work must reach the highest possible standard. It is necessary to decide which set of standards are most appropriate to the route, always bearing in mind who the actual and potential users are, or might be, and what they need. The BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards have been widely used, whilst the Countryside Agency's Management Zoning approach has also been included in this guide (See Appendix 1).

The stages



Auditing a route or path

A route can be a single path or a network of paths, bridleways, roads and other rights of way. For the purpose of assigning management zones, a route will need to have a defined start point, such as a car park or village green. It may also have an end point – for example, a picnic area or viewing point. This is to ensure that improvements result in a complete and usable route.

1. Assign routes to settings or zones

Maps will show networks of footpaths, bridleways and other public rights of way. The first step is to identify routes within these networks, in line with the definition above, and assign them to the highest possible appropriate setting or zone. An example of how to use a scoring system to assign routes using Countryside Agency management zones is included in Appendix 2.

2. Prioritise paths and routes for audit

Paths with the following characteristics would typically be a high priority for audit and would be audited against the highest standards:

- Paths leading to popular destinations and well used local walks, for example from a village to its church or shop
- Paths that local people already use or would like to use
- Paths in sites such as country parks and open spaces, where paths accessible for all are desirable and where there are, or in future will be, accessible toilets, refreshments and formal car parking facilities available
- Paths in locally important recreational sites, such as community woodlands
- Paths that can be reached by accessible public transport, or where there is potential to develop accessible public transport
- Paths that give access to designated historic sites, habitats, high quality scenery or other features of interest
- Those that lead to, or are part of, a longer accessible route

Paths with the following characteristics would typically be assigned to lower standards and audited accordingly:

- Paths in sites where accessible facilities are not present, or where it is inappropriate and economically unviable to provide such facilities
- Isolated paths where few people are likely to use the route (those in areas of significant heritage value may be an exception to this rule)
- Paths where accessible public transport or parking places are unlikely to be provided
- Paths where the natural site constraints do not allow for fully accessible paths
- Paths in locations with high landscape value, where the visual impact of a fully accessible path cannot be overcome

Example

The Abbotsbury Pilot Project selected a network of paths at the Sub Tropical Gardens, the Swannery, the Smuggler's Barn and routes between these attractions and to the village. Given the naturally hilly terrain of Abbotsbury, the landscape and land use, the majority of paths were assigned to Countryside Agency Management Zones B and C. However, paths at the Swannery and a circular route at the gardens currently recommended for people with mobility problems were assigned to Zone A.

- Paths where the cost of improving and maintaining to the highest access standards cannot be justified
- Paths in open countryside/wild land

Note that approaches which apply sets of standards in the countryside should be regarded as a management tool only. They should not be used for promoting paths and places in the countryside to the public so as to avoid any misunderstanding.

3. Audit paths and routes

Once paths have been prioritised they should be audited using the Least Restrictive Access approach, against the highest possible standards that are appropriate for the particular type of route.

Auditing is critical since the data collected will be used in two ways: to identify work required to bring paths up to standard; and for providing detailed information to users. The auditing standards for Countryside Agency Management Zones are included in Appendix 1.

4. Compile data

Look at your audit results for routes assigned to the highest setting or zone. Divide these routes into groups according to the amount of work needed to bring them up to the highest standard for the assigned setting or zone. Do the same with routes assigned to other settings or zones.

5. Prioritise improvements

Identify those routes that have highest demand or popularity. These should be a priority for action. Next look at the other routes and work out a programme of improvements based on budget and how much work would be needed to bring each route up to standard.

Then look at routes that have been assigned to other settings or zones to see if they could be brought up to the highest standards. For instance, a path may be very important to local people and have a high level of use, but, because of the lack of parking and topography, it has only scored a Zone B rating. A path such as this should be flagged up as a possible priority and be revisited to see how much work it would require to improve it to Zone A standards. The remaining Zone B and C routes should be managed using LRA (see stage 7).

6. Do the work

Use the appropriate standards for each route.

7. Maintenance programme

Use the principle of LRA to meet or exceed the setting or zone standards for each route that requires maintenance. Used in this way, LRA is a tool to gradually improve the quality of routes over time. Improved routes may become more popular and this will be highlighted in future evaluations.



Forestry Commission

Clear signage is helpful for all visitors, but especially people with visual impairments or learning disabilities

8. Evaluate the improvements

Use questionnaires and consultation sessions to evaluate the effectiveness of the work, having ideally involved disabled people in planning and managing it. Use the results to influence and improve the on-going improvement programme.

9. Review every 3-5 years

Review the process from the beginning every 3 to 5 years. Take into account changes such as usage patterns, demographics, budget changes, funding for special types of work and changes in the way some routes are valued by people you consult with.

On-site experience: information and interpretation

Issues to include in a review:

A review of existing information and interpretation should include the following:

Involvement

Have disabled people been involved in planning information and interpretation?
 Are information and interpretation delivered in accessible ways?

Techniques

Review existing information.
 Consult with users and non-users to identify issues and ideas for improvements.

Practical information

Is there information at arrival points to let people know where they can go, what their choices are and access details. Are portable maps and leaflets available and accessible?

Techniques

Review existing information.
 User-test existing information, and new drafts, with disabled people.

Interest

What makes a site or route interesting and enjoyable to visit, and are these highlights promoted through accessible information and interpretation?

Techniques

Review current advice and information.
 Consult with disabled people.

Producing on-site information

Example

Kent County Council published a pack of leaflets titled *Walks for All in Kent and Medway*. The following advice resulted from this project:

- When employing a graphic designer, try to find one that has experience of designing for people with visual impairment and/or brief designers in relation to the RNIB 'See it Right' pack
- Strong contrast between text and background is essential. Photocopying a colour leaflet in black and white can quickly show if information is difficult to read.
- Terms such as 'easy access' and 'wheelchair accessible' should be avoided. KCC found that statements of 'ease' could raise unrealistic expectations and consequently cause disappointment among some visitors

The key to effective information is the inclusion of critical, current and accurate information in a format that is easily understood. Much of the required access information will be provided by a site or route audit. Information can be produced in a number of formats: print, signage, web sites, audio and so on. A variety of formats must be available to make the information as accessible as possible.

Reinforcing pre-visit information helps people to make decisions about routes. Distances and estimated times of completion of different routes are important for decision making. On-site information can also cover changing information, such as conditions caused by weather, seasons and so on or by unexpected events such as storm damage. Something as simple as a blackboard can keep visitors up to date with recent news.

People such as guides and rangers are great sources of information. Disability equality training can help staff offer the best service and advice to visitors.

Getting lost is a concern for many people when visiting the countryside. Wayfinding can help people feel secure on a trail or in more remote parts of a site. Wayfinding need not be signs. Clearly defined paths and good route descriptions also help wayfinding.

Sensory Trust



Tactile waymarking systems can help visually impaired visitors

Implementation and Review

Example:

From existing staff knowledge, it is evident that a car park in the woods with good views, an accessible picnic area and accessible toilets is already an attraction. Publicity and information should promote this. Road signage should make it easier to find.

If a Countryside Agency 'Zone A' circular route from this car park through the woods is developed, then new information must be produced to promote this. It may be that the number of disabled car parking spaces should be increased to cater for the expected increase in visitors. The location of the disabled parking bays may have to be changed to be closer to the start of the route. Local transport companies should be contacted with a view to improving services to this part of the site. This circular route gives access to interesting wildlife. Accessible interpretation should be planned that enhances the experience for visitors.

This section covers the most common issues that need to be addressed when making access improvements. Once improvements have been costed, they should be prioritised and can be phased over a period of years. An example action plan from the Forestry Commission is in Appendix 2.

Setting priorities

There may be local circumstances that help set priorities, such as partnership funding for paths or facilities, or plans to provide accessible public transport to new locations. Those consulted earlier in the process should be consulted again. If this approach is adopted then an organisation can be certain that the priorities it makes are made on the basis of local people's needs.

This guide has emphasised that access is a chain of events, and that access works need to be seen as part of that chain to be most effective. It is important when developing an action plan to look at the order in which access improvements are made. For instance, it makes sense to improve the access from the bus stop to the site before improving the bus service. It is important to plan access improvements as packages of work and to look at the possibilities that existing or planned improvements present.

Undertaking the work

Having established the priorities for improvements to routes, sites and facilities that have a budget awarded, work can be included in annual action plans. All projects will then be carried out in the same way that an organisation arranges its regular programme of works and activities.

If works are contracted out, it is important that contractors are aware of access issues for all disabled people and that they receive the necessary training. It may be appropriate to insert a contract clause to cover this.

Many disability groups may volunteer to help out with work (e.g. with the BTCV) and including volunteer groups in this way can help build a sense of ownership and subsequently increased use of the improved site.



Sensory Trust

Accessibility is often affected by heavy rain. Visitors need to be kept informed

It is important to join up the different pieces of access work as it is often the transitions between different areas that create some of the greatest barriers. Transitions between areas under different management should receive particular focus, for example the transition between a car park owned by a local authority and a nature reserve owned and managed by a Wildlife Trust.

Maintenance

Maintenance of routes, facilities and information should use the principle of LRA.

Where routes or sections of routes need to be maintained, the highest standard should be applied. LRA maintenance should be used to gradually improve paths that are in lower settings or zones by maintaining them to a higher standard. The standard will be determined by a number of factors including route importance and budget. Reasons for not using the highest standards should be documented.

Where facilities need to be maintained, they should be improved to the highest appropriate standard. Most building work should meet or exceed the standards provided in Part M of the Building Regulations.

Part M Approved Document and BS8300 contain useful design guidance.

Note that comprehensive guidance on the selection of the most appropriate surfacing for shared use routes in England is contained in the Countryside Agency's (2005) 'Surface Requirements for Shared Use Routes: Good Practice Guide'.¹²

Evaluating and monitoring

Considering the needs of disabled people should not be an afterthought in management, nor should the evaluation process. Evaluation should be considered during consultation at the planning stage, so that procedures are agreed at the outset.

Two reasons for evaluation are to:

- Review the success of improvements to paths, sites and facilities, and the information provided
- Review how to continue to improve access

Evaluation measures the effectiveness of something against specific objectives. It can therefore be applied to the effectiveness of:

- Improvements to an individual route, open space or the overall improvements to access within an area
- Improvements to facilities
- Newly produced information
- Staff and organisation's awareness of access issues

Those involved in undertaking an evaluation will require training in the different methods that can be used. These could include:

- Indirect observation of users
- Interviews or questionnaires. To evaluate information, a feedback form with a postage paid envelope can be included in publications.
- Use of websites to obtain feedback
- Data, e.g. increase in volume and value of visitors
- Qualitative methods using structured focus groups and analysis of people's experiences, perceptions and feelings

Analysis of the results from such methods will provide honest, clear and accurate information. This is essential for making decisions about future improvements.

Monitoring is a repeat of the process of evaluation at regular time intervals to ensure management objectives are met, that path and facility conditions are maintained and information is up to date. Monitoring might involve biannual/annual evaluations depending on the changing nature of the path and the amount of its use.

Appendix 1: Standards, Settings and Management Zones

One of the most significant efforts to create a national system of standards for physical access in the countryside was the BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards (Fieldfare Trust, 1997 and 2005).¹³ User-led research was developed into the concept of identifying different standards for different countryside settings. These settings were defined as ‘urban and formal landscapes’, ‘urban fringe and managed landscapes’ and ‘rural and working landscapes’ – with a fourth setting, ‘Open Country, semi-wild and wild’ not being subject to defined technical specifications. The Standards are reproduced in Table 1.

Although the Standards have been widely applied, some countryside professionals have also found the ‘Rural and working landscape’ setting to be more appropriate in more formally managed countryside sites – where sealed paths are appropriate, and where financial resources allow for regular maintenance of unsealed surfaces to keep paths up to standard. Many countryside routes cannot achieve these standards because of natural features such as gradients, or because of the large investment that would be needed.

As a response, the Countryside Agency’s (2001) Sense and Accessibility¹⁴ project created two additional standards aimed at the wider countryside. The project consulted with a large number of disabled people, predominantly those with mobility impairments, none of whom expressed a desire for the universal introduction of formal surfaces. Many expressed concern that the natural characteristics they most loved about a path might be removed. What they did want was the removal of man-made barriers, such as stiles, inaccessible gates and steps which prevent access for so many people.

Further research by the Countryside Agency, since 2001, led to the development of three management zones – termed Zone A, B and C – to replace those in Sense and Accessibility. These zones tend to focus predominantly on physical access on paths and routes, especially for those people with mobility impairments.

The zones may be helpful when reviewing existing access, and planning improvements. However, full access for all disabled, and non-disabled, visitors relies on maintenance of all links in the access chain, such as information and transport, as outlined earlier in this guidance.

Zone A

Provides access for **most** people, especially those with mobility impairments

Zone B

Provides access for **many** people, especially those with mobility impairments

Zone C

Provides access for **some** people, especially those with mobility impairments

Table 1 - BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards

	Path Surfaces (see note 1)	Path Widths (see note 2)	Width restrictions (see note 3)	Barriers (see note 4)	Maximum distances between passing places (see note 5)
Urban and formal Landscapes. For example countryside areas with a lot of man-made features	Hard, firm and smooth surface with very few loose stones and none bigger than 5mm	1200mm	At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along the path. 1,000mm for no more than 1,600mm along the path	There should be no steps, stiles, and hedges or walls to restrict access	50 metres (m)
Urban fringe and managed landscapes. For example, countryside areas near towns or managed recreation sites	Hard and firm surface with very few loose stones and none bigger than 10mm	1,200mm	At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along the path. 1,000mm for no more than 1600mm along the path		100m
Rural and working landscapes. For example, farmland and woodland with public rights of way	Hard and firm with some loose stones and chippings not covering the whole surface. The stones should be no bigger than 10mm	1,000mm	At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along the path. 1,000mm for no more than 1,600mm along the path		150m
Open Country, semi-wild and wild land. For example, mountains, moorlands and remote countryside	People expect to make their own way, not to have this environment changed to provide access. If paths and trails are provided in this setting, they should meet the standard for the rural and working landscapes setting (as shown in the row above)				

In Table 2 (overleaf), the ‘Ideal’ is the standard beyond which there are unlikely to be appreciable gains in accessibility. This is therefore based upon the first two outdoor settings in the BT Countryside for All Standards. Despite the ‘ideal’ being seen to be of limited application in the wider countryside, there may be situations where it can be achieved in order to provide a higher standard of access. For example, a path in its entirety might be classified Zone A or B, but there may be specific features where it is possible to exceed these standards.

Maximum distances between rest areas (see note 6)	Maximum steepness of ramps (see note 7)	Maximum height rise between landings on ramps steeper than 1:20 (see note 8)	Maximum slope across a path (see note 9)	Maximum step levels (see note 10)	Surface breaks (grills, boardwalks) (see note 11)	Clear walking tunnels (see note 12)
100m	1 in 12 (for example for every 12 metres you travel you can rise one metre)	750mm (for example landings should be every 9m along ramps of 1 in 12)	1 in 50	5mm	The largest break in the surface of the path should be no more than 12mm measured along the line line of the path	1,200mm wide x 2,100mm high
200m	1 in 12	830mm	1 in 45	10mm		1,200mm wide x 2,100mm high
300m	1 in 10	950mm	1 in 35	15mm		1,000mm wide x 2,100mm high

Adjusting management zones

Once the audit of a path has been completed and the data analysed, it may be apparent that a path has been assigned to an inappropriate setting or zone. For example, if the audit of a path assigned to Zone C reveals that it already reaches a higher standard, then it should be reassigned to a zone with higher standards, thereby providing access for more people. If several paths are reassigned to different zones, it will be necessary to revisit the overall plan for the area to ensure a reasonable provision is provided for everyone.

Standards, Settings or Zones?

In deciding which approach to use, it should be noted that statutory standards or specifications do not exist for the outdoors – countryside and urban greenspaces. The Countryside Agency Management Zones are a new tool, the BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards being the most widely agreed technical standards.

Table 2

	IDEAL	ZONE A
Barriers	No physical barriers	No steps higher than 15mm or stiles, fences or hedges and walls to restrict access
Path surfaces	Hard and firm with no loose material, non-slip surface and well draining	Hard and firm with some loose stones (no bigger than 10mm) not covering the whole surface
Path widths	2,000mm or 1,500mm with passing places	At least 1,000mm
Width restrictions	As Zone A	At least 900mm for no more than 1,600mm along path and any gate at least 1,000mm
Surface breaks	No surface breaks	No more than 12mm measured across the line of the path
Path gradients	Maximum of 1:20	Maximum of 1:10 for natural and built gradients
Height rise between landings on built ramps steeper than 1:20	As Zone A	Maximum of 950mm
Cross slopes	Maximum of 1:50, level where possible	Maximum of 1:50
Clear walking tunnel	As Zone A	At least 1,000mm wide and 2,100mm high
Passing places	At least every 50m unless path width exceeds 2,000mm	At least every 150m
Rest areas	At least every 100m	At least every 300m
Edges	Clearly visible	N/A
Platforms	At least every 950mm of vertical rise in any slope	N/A

ZONE B	ZONE C
No steps higher than 40mm, or stiles, fences or hedges and walls to restrict access	No steps higher than 100mm, or stiles, fences or hedges and walls to restrict access
Path possibly modified (preferably hard and firm in all weathers) with some stones up to 40mm and occasional tree roots, potholes and short stretches (<10m) of rutting up to 100mm	Path possibly modified (not necessarily hard and firm in all weathers) with some stones up to 100mm. Occasional tree roots, potholes and short stretches (<10m) of rutting up to 100mm
At least 900mm	At least 900mm
Any gap at least 900mm and any gate at least 1,000mm	Any gap at least 900mm and any gate at least 1,000mm
No more than 12mm measured across the line of the path	No more than 75mm measured across the line of the path
Maximum of 1:10 for natural gradients. Maximum of 1:8 for built gradients	Natural gradients not limited. Maximum of 1:8 for built gradients
Maximum of 950mm where feasible and information is provided	Maximum of 950mm where feasible and information is provided
Maximum of 1:35	Maximum of 1:25 but cross slopes caused by tree roots/potholes/ruts may be greater
Cut vegetation to at least 1,000mm wide and 2,100mm high	Cut vegetation to at least 1,000mm wide and 2,100mm high
Not formalised or surfaced, but at least one passing opportunity (2m x 2m) every 150m	Not formalised or surfaced, but at least one passing opportunity (2m x 2m) every 150m
At least every 1,000m	Not formalised
N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A

Appendix 2: Auditing paths and routes

It is preferable to audit all selected paths and routes against the highest possible standards – in line with a Least Restrictive Access approach – as this provides a complete dataset of their condition. This will help identify where paths or routes assigned to one setting or zone are better than their relevant standards and those that don't reach those standards.

Where resources for auditing are more limited, paths can be audited against the standards of the particular setting or zone applied to them. This may be quicker and therefore less costly than auditing paths against the highest standards. The amount of recording is reduced as the audit only records where a path does not meet the standard, by how much and where this occurs. For example, for a Countryside Agency Zone B path, an auditor will only need to record where the path is narrower than 900mm rather than 1000mm and so on.

The disadvantage of this approach is that the audit will not establish where the path is better than the standard, and by how much. It is therefore important that auditors also make general notes if the path appears to be considerably better than the standards of the zone assigned to it. Once the audit is complete, such a path may be reassigned to a setting or zone with higher standards (see, for example, 'Adjusting management zones' in Appendix 1) and may require a further audit against these new standards.

Auditing is not easy; there is a lot to think about and many decisions to make, such as where a path surface changes sufficiently to need to record a change. Auditing is also time-consuming with an average distance of about 6km to 8km being audited in a day.

Considering the significance of the quality of the data, it is essential that well trained people carry out the audit. They must be fully aware of why the audit is being undertaken, of the standards they are auditing against, and the importance of ensuring consistency by auditing in the same way all the time. There is an element of subjectivity with auditing, such as making the decision as to where the stones on a path change from 'occasional' to 'some' for instance. To obtain data that is as consistent as possible, it is recommended that this task be undertaken by relatively few members of staff in consultation with a representative group of disabled people who concentrate on auditing over a period of time.

Combinations of path criteria

When certain path criteria occur together their joint effect can make the path more difficult to use than when they are found alone. For example, the combination of a step or tree root on a gradient on a corner, where all are within the standards for the relevant setting or zone, may lead someone who can normally use a path in this setting or zone (when path criteria do not combine) to find the path too difficult to negotiate.

Good practice should only allow a single path criterion to be at the limit of the standard, and require remedial action otherwise.

Given the large number of likely combinations, it is impossible to provide information on the effect of them in reducing accessibility to a path. However, when analysing data from the audit the potential impact of path criteria where they occur together should be taken into account. Before deciding the improvement works required to bring a path up to a standard, it is advised that disabled people, or professionals representing them, are consulted on site so that the impacts of combined criteria, and ways to reduce them, can be established.

An example of assigning routes to settings or zones

The following is just one example of a scoring system that could be used to assign zones to routes.

Route/ terrain	Connectivity	Conservation or landscape impact	Demand	Popularity
Easy	3 Between important locations	3 Low	3 High	3 High
Moderate	2 Moderate importance	2 Medium	2 Medium	2 Medium
Difficult	1 Not important	1 High	1 Low	1 Low

Score	12 – 15	Zone A, or to higher standard of BT zones 1 or 2
	8 – 11	Zone B
	5 – 7	Zone C

Source: Simon Melville, English Nature.

Routes and terrain – assess the overall standard of the route using maps and existing knowledge. Walk the route if necessary.

Connectivity – identify the locations and features that the route gives access to, using maps and existing knowledge. A route will score higher if it gives access to important places, has good links to transport and parking or has facilities such as toilets and pubs.

Conservation or landscape impact – assess the likely impact of access improvements on heritage or landscape value, using specialist knowledge if necessary. Higher impact will mean a lower score.

Demand – this requires surveys of, and consultation with, route users and with people who would like to use the route but are currently unable to. Establish which routes have highest demand from existing and potential visitors, for example through catchment surveys.

Popularity – the amount of use that a route receives can be assessed through visitor surveys, staff knowledge and consultation.

Audit techniques

There are two main techniques for auditing paths: using a hand-held computer linked to a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver or undertaking a paper audit.

Time of year to audit

There are advantages and disadvantages for auditing either during winter or summer, but it is appreciated that where a large number of paths need auditing, restricting this activity to either time of year will be difficult.

If audits are undertaken at a time of year when paths are not in their worst condition, it is important that this fact is taken into account when analysing the data and when providing information based on this data.

Appendix 3: Example of an Action Plan

This section from a Forestry Commission Action Plan is a summary of suggested work that should be carried out and links to more detailed guidance. This example can be used as a basis to build action plans for other sites.

Work area and action	Notes
Visitor Centres	
Audit buildings with building surveyor/land agent/building manager and prepare improvement plan if necessary Raise awareness of staff in dealing with disabled people	
Toilets	
Check all toilet facilities have separate unisex accessible toilet. Prepare a plan for replacement if they have not.	– See BS 8300:2001
Car Parks	
All car parks, associated with any accessible facilities, for example toilets and/or easy access trails, should have designated parking bays for disabled visitor	– 3.6m width recommended, minimum 3.2m, layout of bay also crucial. See BS 8300:2001
Trails and wider access	
Carry out an audit to establish what paths are currently accessible; other physical barriers to access and set priorities for improvements Be prepared to provide keys or use RADAR locks where barriers must be locked and gaps or accessible gates cannot be used.	– Use or adapt Forestry Commission access audit process. – It is not acceptable to charge for these keys although a deposit may be requested.
Play	
Carry out access audit of all play structures/areas and surfaces	– Use or adapt Forestry Commission checklist or contract NPFA*/RoSPA** to do work
<p>* National Playing Fields Association ** Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents</p>	

Work area and action	Notes
<p>Complete an action plan based on audit to improve existing play structure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure paths to/within play areas are as accessible as possible and that some play equipment has accessible features
Providing information	
<p>Check existing printed information against guidance and improve where necessary at next print run</p> <p>Review on site signage and information and prepare a plan for improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – See Countryside for All Interpretation guidelines and RNIB See it Right pack – Use Countryside for All guidelines
Education	
<p>Ensure activities are available/ provided for disabled people</p> <p>Provide information in a range of formats</p> <p>Check groups needs and any assistance required in advance of visits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – See Countryside for All Interpretation guidelines – See RNIB See it Right pack – See Recreation Access and Safety Guidance on FC Intranet
Events	
<p>Review guided walk and event programmes to ensure activities cover a range of abilities</p> <p>Review big event plans to ensure disabled facilities are provided</p> <p>Ensure booking staff understand the nature of the events to help the customer make an informed decision whether the event is suitable for them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – See Countryside for All Events guidelines – HSE guidance on big events – Disability etiquette guidance – Disability Wales
Consultation	
<p>Involve a range of disabled groups and individuals in consultations about recreation and education facilities and services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider people’s needs in terms of meetings (sign/audio loop) and information (large print, Braille, audio) and support requirements

Appendix 4: Published work

BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines: A good practice guide to disabled people's access in the countryside, Fieldfare Trust, 1997

This guide provides extensive guidance on networking with disabled people, and other practical issues including accessible transport, information, interpretation and events management. The final section of the Guide is a design manual, containing a range of technical information on the design and production of inclusive countryside furniture. The project also set physical access standards for paths and routes that can be audited in a series of landscape zones. www.fieldfare.org.uk

Countryside for All Good Practice Guide: A Guide to Disabled People's Access in the Countryside. Extended CD Edition, Fieldfare Trust, 2005

An updated version of the Guide, which includes new sections on Least Restrictive Access, Countryside Path Networks, Accessibility Surveys and Access Audits, and the DDA 1995.

The Informability Manual, Wendy Gregory, 1996

Advice on how to create accessible information in a wide range of media for a wide range of different users.

See It Right pack, RNIB, 2002

Guidance on the development of accessible information.

Sign Design Guide: A guide to inclusive signage, JMU/Sign Design Society

A practical and authoritative guide for those commissioning, designing and installing signs.

Good Signs: Improving Signs for People with a Learning Disability, Disability Rights Commission, 2003

This guide supports the development of understanding, and the implementation of good practice, in the provision of signage for people with a learning disability. Further guidance could be sought from Mencap, especially regarding the use of Total Communication as a means to communicate with and therefore involve people with a learning disability.

Plain English Campaign

A-Z of alternative words (www.plainenglish.co.uk/A-Z.html)

The Countryside Access Design Guide, Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002

Provides detailed advice on furniture.

Gates and fittings designed and supplied by Centrewire Ltd. were tested and recommended by the Countryside Agency pilot projects.

Sense and Accessibility: How to improve access on countryside paths, routes and trails for people with mobility impairments, Countryside Agency (CAX 26), 2000

This work was undertaken to advise managers of the four National Trails in the southeast of England on how to improve access to their Trails for people whose mobility is reduced by disability, age, illness, or other factor, such as having a young child in a pushchair. Endorsed by the Countryside Agency, Sense and Accessibility recognises the practical difficulties for managers, especially with regard to path surfaces, together with landscape and land use constraints, to achieve the fully accessible standards developed in the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines. It therefore proposes standards, which can be audited, for a further two zones (at the time termed Interim Zones 4 and 5) applicable to the wider countryside that provide access for considerable numbers of people with mobility limitations, but not for all.

Through the consultation process, two of the major barriers identified by those with mobility problems are man-made structures such as stiles, many gates and steps, and the lack of objective, comprehensive and up to date information. The document recommends that guidelines should be set for a national standard of provision of information to users.

Paths without Prejudice, Countryside Agency 2001

In light of the recommendation in Sense and Accessibility for a national set of guidelines for the provision of information to users, this publication provides a guide to collecting and providing improved countryside information suitable for users of all abilities. Paths without Prejudice gives guidance on auditing, producing and distributing information in both printed and website form, and provides a set of appropriate symbols.

Access for All – The User Perspective

Undertaken on behalf of Kent County Council and the Environment Agency Southern Region, and reported in January 2003, this project investigated the attitudes of disabled people and others with mobility restrictions to countryside, riverside and coastal paths in Kent.

Making Connections: A Guide to Accessible Greenspace, The Sensory Trust 2001

This publication helps greenspace managers open up their sites to a wider audience. It combines survey results with existing literature and examples of good practice to identify barriers to access, and highlight possible solutions in a variety of greenspace sites. It covers issues such as what motivates people to visit sites, how people can be encouraged to use and get involved in sites, relevant legislation and policy, and aspects relating to site layout, information and interpretation.

www.sensorytrust.org.uk

The Breakfree Scheme

Breakfree is a scheme providing information about outdoor sites and walks accessible to the public for recreation. It provides information on barriers to access, features of interest and a range of other relevant information.

Dartmoor for All

Run by volunteers, many of them disabled, this project is keen to improve access throughout Dartmoor for those who are less mobile. It has produced the Easy Going Dartmoor guide, enabling people to make an informed choice of which site is best for them.

National Route Evaluation and Classification System (NatRECS)

The aim of this initiative is to work towards the agreement of national best practice and a standard for the collection, management and dissemination of trail information. The system has drawn its inspiration from the Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) developed by Beneficial Designs in the USA. UTAP emphasises the provision of 'objective trail information', particularly to cater for people with specific needs such as those with mobility limitations or novice walkers.

Paths to Prosperity: The economic impact of path networks, Paths for All Partnership

Factsheet 1.3 provides a summary of an economic study of the Dunkeld and Birnam path network in Perthshire, carried out by EKOS Consultants in 1997, and considers the economic impact of the development of local path networks.

The Thames Path National Trail Online Information Project

The first project to attempt to implement the NatRECS approach by providing detailed information about the trail on the internet to enable visitors to make their own decisions as to whether they are able to use sections of the Trail and associated routes. The website at www.nationaltrails.gov.uk/thamespathonline aims to encourage and enable people to use the trail as a means of transport around London. It provides details about accessibility for 123 individual sections of the Trail, all the pedestrian bridges crossing the Thames and routes to attractions from the Trail.

Easy Access to Historic Landscapes, English Heritage, 2005

A comprehensive guide to improving access to historic landscapes for disabled people. This is produced in conjunction with the Heritage Lottery Fund, and is a companion publication to this guide.

Sensory Trust Evaluation Toolbox

The Evaluation Toolbox is a suite of tools that can be used by countryside owners and managers, along with visitors groups, to assess the accessibility and quality of experience that a site or route offers.

The toolbox addresses the issues involved in planning access improvements, including policy, training and consultation, site or route review and implementation.

Appendix 5: Contacts

Age Concern England

Astral House, 1268 London Road, London SW16 4ER
Tel: 0208 765 7200 www.ageconcern.org.uk

Beneficial Designs Inc

1617 Water Street, Suite B, Minden, NV 89423-410
USA www.beneficialdesigns.com

Break Free

Stockton Shopmobility, 3-5 Bridge Road, Stockton on
Tees TS18 1BH Tel: 01642 861211

British Standards Institute, 389 Chiswick High

Road, London W4 4AL. Tel: 0208 996 9000
www.bsi-global.com

Centrewire Ltd, PO Box 11, Wymondham NR18 0XD

Tel: 01953 602085 www.gatesandstiles.co.uk

Countryside Agency

John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham
GL50 3RA
Tel: 01242 521381 www.countryside.gov.uk

Countryside Council for Wales

Maes-Y-Ffynnon, Penrhosgarnedd, Bangor, Gynedd
LL57 2DW Tel: 0845 1306229 www.ccw.gov.uk

Dartmoor for All

The High Moorland Business Centre, Old Duchy
Hotel, Princetown, Yelverton PL20 6QF
Tel: 01822 890414

Disabled Ramblers, 14 Belmont Park Road,

Maidenhead SL6 6HT
Tel: 01628 621414

English Heritage, PO Box 569, Swindon, SN2 2YP

Tel: 0870 333 1181 www.english-heritage.org.uk

English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough

PE1 1UA
Tel: 01733 455000 www.english-nature.org.uk

Fieldfare Trust, 7 Volunteer House, 69 Crossgate,

Cupar, Fife KY15 5AS
Tel: 0334 657708 www.fieldfare.org.uk

Joint Mobility Unit, 105 Judd Street, London

WC1H 9NE
Tel: 0207 391 2002 www.jmuaccess.org.uk

MENCAP, 123 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0RT

Tel: 020 7454 0454 www.mencap.org.uk

The National Trust, Rowan, Kembrey Park, Swindon

SW2 8YL
Tel: 01793 462693 www.nationaltrust.org.uk

NatRECS, Kent County Council, Recreation & Access

Environmental Management, County Hall, Maidstone
ME14 1XX
Tel: 01622 221562 www.kent.gov.uk/countrysideaccess

Paths for All Partnership

Inglewood House, Tullibody Road, Alloa FK10 2HU
Tel: 01259 218888 www.pathsforall.org.uk

RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation)

12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF
Tel: 0207 250 3222 www.radar.org.uk

Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)

105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE
Tel: 08457 023153 www.rnib.org.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage

Publications Section, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth
PH1 3EW
Tel: 01738 444177 www.snh.org.uk

Sensory Trust

Watering Lane Nursery, Pentewan, St Austell PL26 6BE
Tel: 01726 222900 www.sensorytrust.org.uk

Thames Path National Trail

National Trails Office, Cultural Services, Holton,
Oxford OX33 1QQ
Tel: 01865 810224 www.nationaltrail.co.uk



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