By All Reasonable Means

Least restrictive access to the outdoors

A guide produced by Sensory Trust on behalf of Natural England, and in collaboration with Natural Resources Wales.

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What is this document about?

This is a guide for thinking about equality of access to the countryside and open spaces for people of all ages, circumstances and backgrounds.

It provides practical support to help countryside and natural resource managers improve accessibility of their sites, routes and facilities, particularly for people who have limited opportunities to enjoy these places.

The guide is focused on landscape that is less intensively managed and which the standards of guidance like ‘Countryside for All’ and ‘Easy Access to Historic Landscapes’

Who is this document for?

This document is for organisations, owners and managers who are responsible for providing public outdoor access and recreation.

Contact for queries and feedback

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Supporting this guide

Thank you to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for providing funding support towards the update of this guide.

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Introduction to the Guide

This guide is designed to help countryside and natural resource managers and owners improve accessibility of their sites, routes and facilities so they can be enjoyed by people of all ages, circumstances and backgrounds.

The guide is based on the original ‘By All Reasonable Means’ (BARM) guidance publication produced in 2005 by Sensory Trust for Natural England (then the Countryside Agency). It is a sister publication to the new edition of BARM produced by Sensory Trust and Natural Resources Wales in 2018. These are intended to be live documents that are updated annually to reflect changes in legislation and practices.

The guide responds to the Equality Act 2010, updating and expanding the original ‘By All Reasonable Means’ published in 2005 and embracing a wider and more diverse range of visitors. It is based on the principle that access improvements will benefit all visitors, as diversity threads its way through people of all ages, personal circumstances and backgrounds.

The aim is to provide a realistic, practical and effective approach to access improvements, creating more access in more places for more people. 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.

Accessibility is addressed in its widest sense, framed by an inclusive approach that embraces all the protected characteristics identified by the Equality Act (2010). It 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 uses the Access Chain to address 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.

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. In the absence of statutory standards for outdoor access improvements, it provides a framework for improving access. This encourages landowners and countryside and natural resource managers to identify those standards and techniques that are most appropriate for a particular situation.

Countryside and heritage managers can sometimes feel they need to know all about specific visitors to be able to identify what access improvements should be made. However, what is needed most is an in-depth knowledge of the full range of experiences a site could offer and communicating these well. The aim is not to ensure that everyone has access to the same overall experience, but to an equal quality of experience. Working with a diverse range of people will help ensure a more inclusive service is developed for all future visitors.

Introducing the issues

Importance of the Outdoors

There is widespread evidence to show the health and social benefits that come from spending time outdoors. Public open spaces are central features of local community life. They are where public life takes place, and where people can connect with the natural world and with each other. 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. Increasingly, the benefits of outdoor activity to health and wellbeing are being recognised and promoted.

There is evidence to show that these benefits are not equally available to everyone, and that access to the countryside, heritage and open spaces is not equally shared across society. People living with disabilities and older people are especially impacted by physical barriers to access, while psychosocial barriers such as concerns about personal safety and uncertainty about feeling welcome are often reported by visitors who are female or from a black and minority ethnic group for instance. People experiencing social and economic disadvantage have dramatically less access to such spaces, and particularly when this is linked with one of the protected characteristics.

Many people are excluded from enjoying the benefits of such spaces because of a lack of planning or awareness of their needs. Barriers relate to physical issues on-

site, such as stiles and difficult surfaces, but social and cultural barriers play a big part and need to be given equal attention.

This guide is designed to help you identify the barriers that prevent or dissuade people from visiting your sites, and how to remove or avoid them, often through small changes in design and management practices.

Understanding diversity

The Equality Act 2010 identifies nine ‘protected characteristics’ to frame its anti-discrimination legislation. While this helps identify the range of people who tend to be impacted by barriers to access, it can imply that diversity is about distinct and separate groups of people within the community.

There has been a patchy response to the Equality Act 2010 from some organisations. Facilities and services are often promoted more effectively to people with some protected characteristics than to others. Promotional materials often show families with young people enjoying the outdoors and fail to portray diversity in terms of ethnicity for example.

NRW

The reality is that diversity weaves its way through families, groups of friends, couples and individuals. A protected characteristic might relate to an elderly grandparent in a family, a pregnant partner, a friend who identifies as transgender or a group of students with learning disabilities. Many people have more than one protected characteristic, and different characteristics often benefit from the same access improvement.

Many people visit with families and friends, and access difficulties will impact on the group, not just the individual. In fact, a Visit Britain survey showed that friends and family often react more negatively than the person who is directly impacted by an access issue.

Equality isn’t about treating everyone the same, it is about respecting the differences and finding ways to make everyone feel welcome and supported. At its

root, what is most needed is a positive, open attitude and a welcoming approach combined with good communication and understanding.

Access improvements are only partly about making changes to the physical fabrics of your sites. For some people, the barriers are more to do with lack of confidence and experience in visiting the countryside and open spaces. Building closer relationships with local community groups will help you connect with a wider diversity of people. For example, working with a local inter-faith group can lead to greater understanding of how people of different faiths might be interested in visiting or volunteering, and what your site can contribute in return.

This guide encourages the application of an inclusive approach in all planning, design and management processes. This doesn't mean that there aren't times when specific differences require specific responses. A guide provided in Braille will benefit a visually impaired Braille reader, for example. But the more that inclusive practices can be adopted in the way that services are designed and managed, the more that diversity can be seen as a normal part of the day to day and not as 'special provision'.

Disability and access to the outdoors

While this guide addresses the full range of characteristics protected by the Equality Act, it recognises that the greatest barriers to access are experienced by people living with disabilities. It therefore retains a particular focus on improving access in relation to disability, especially mobility impairments.

It is estimated that one person in five in the UK is living with a disability. The number is greater if it includes all those people who experience temporary impairments, for example a broken limb, a heart condition, or general fatigue. The implications of any disability are often shared by a group of visitors including families, friends and carers. Only 5% of disabled people use wheelchairs, and a diverse range of physical, sensory and mental disabilities are experienced by people of all ages and backgrounds.

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 within the same issues outlined in this guide.

Personal circumstances may not be apparent to someone else but can be significant in access terms. Someone with a heart condition, who becomes short of breath when walking up a slope will need opportunities to rest for example. Someone with dementia may become disorientated and need clear wayfinding information to help them find their way. A child with autism might get overwhelmed and need a quiet space to recover. It means that accessibility relies not just on good quality paths and toilets, but on a careful blend of other ingredients too – seating and shelter, information in different languages, support from staff and volunteers, water for assistance dogs etc.

The aim is to ensure that everybody can have an experience that is worthwhile and enjoyable, an equality of experience. Realistically, it may well be the case that not everybody will be able to have the exact same experience. For example, someone with limited stamina might like to cycle but would choose an easy access route rather than the most challenging. This may well mean that you will need to make adjustments for some members of your community. In the same way that a restaurant caters for different diets with options on a menu, so a flexible event or activity will give people choice of how and when they can take part.

Benefits of an inclusive approach

'Inclusive' is now widely understood as a term that means that an activity or a location should be usable by as many people as possible. So, for example, rather than have separate entrances for people with disabilities, everyone should be able to come in the same way. Information that is easy to understand is beneficial to everyone, not just people with low literacy skills or without English as a first language.

The world of accessibility has changed significantly since the original guide was written ten years ago. We've seen inclusive design become increasingly supported by legislation, required in increasing detail by planning and building control systems, expected by funders and supported by freely available guidance and design specifications. And perhaps most importantly, making places and services accessible to all ages, abilities and circumstances has increasingly become recognized as simply the right thing to do.

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 shared with more people and achieves more value from the work and resources that are being invested.

Raising awareness of the importance of the countryside, open space 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.

Benefits of an inclusive approach

- New and expanded audiences
- Enriched ideas from the involvement of a wider diversity of people
- Increased visitor satisfaction and engagement, and more repeat visits
- Greater employment and volunteer satisfaction
- Delivery of political and legal requirements
- Positive relationships with local communities and greater outreach
- Effective use of resources by avoiding short-term ad-hoc measures

The legal framework

Any organisation that owns and manages outdoor spaces in England has legislative duties not to discriminate against people with protected characteristics. The three key pieces of legislation are:

- the Equality Act 2010;
- the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000; and,
- Part M and BS 8300 of the Building Regulations 2000.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 introduced the concept of 'reasonable adjustment' and this placed a responsibility on public bodies to actively promote equality, encourage greater participation and eliminate discrimination of disabled people. These duties now form part of the Equality Act. What is legally considered 'reasonable' will vary in different situations and with the results of future case law.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act brought together over 100 individual pieces of legislation, including the DDA, to legally protect people from discrimination in employment and wider society.

The Equality Act protects individuals from unfair treatment in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity (employment only), race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. These are referred to as 'protected characteristics'.

Socio-economic disadvantage is not specifically identified as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act. Nonetheless, it significantly reduces people's opportunities to explore the countryside. It also has clear links with some of the protected characteristics, such as disability. Low income can mean no access to a car, or to the money required for travel and food. This guidance therefore includes this as an issue for NRW to strive to address within the context of wider diversity.

These legislative changes don't negate the good work developed in relation to laws like the Disability Discrimination Act, but requires that this work is expanded to bring it within the wider requirements of the Equality Act.

An organisation that owns and manages outdoor spaces in England has duties under the Act not to discriminate against people with protected characteristics. This is likely to involve:

Changing the way things are done. Reviewing and altering policies and routine practices to improve accessibility.

Example**:** A review of practices for installing new countryside gates reveals the need to change the design specification to take account of the increased size of self-drive mobility vehicles.

Changing physical features. Modifying sites to remove or avoid barriers, and to maximise accessibility for the widest range of people.

Example**:** Adding more frequent seats and resting points to enable visits by people living with health and disability issues that impact on stamina.

The CRoW Act 2000

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act improves public access in England and Wales through a statutory right of access on foot to mountain, moor, heath, downland and registered common land. When introduced in 2000, CRoW gave new powers, duties and responsibilities to highways authorities and others involved in countryside access management.

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 requirements of the Equality Act 2010 must be taken into consideration.

When planning improvements and new structures, highway authorities must consider the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and aim to make them as accessible as possible. For example, replacing stiles with gaps or gates as much as possible and normally to BS5709:2018 requirements. An authority may also enter into agreements with landowners to improve stiles, gates or other structures either informally or under Highways Act 1980 s147ZA.

Part M and Building Standard 8300 of the Building Regulations

The Building Regulations provide statutory minimum standards for new and adapted design and construction of virtually all buildings in England and Wales. Part M of the Building Regulations identifies minimum standards to ensure a wide range of people can access buildings and their facilities. Compliance with Part M does not mean compliance with the broader requirements of the Equality Act.

Historic landscape legislation

It is important to note that the Equality Act 2010 does not override conditions associated with planning, listed building legislation, scheduled monuments and inclusion on Historic England’s 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England'. Access improvements will require approval in relation to these designations.

Framework for action

This guide is based on the following:

Least Restrictive Access – a principle applied to all work to ensure it aspires to the highest standards possible.

Access for All standards and **By All Reasonable Means zones** – the most widely adopted advisory standards and zoning approach – along with statutory standards relating to building design

Access Chain – a tool that uses the steps of a visit to guide decisions about access improvements

Combining access with quality of experience – a principle that ensures all access improvements match priorities for visitor experience

Least Restrictive Access

The principle of Least Restrictive Access (LRA) requires that all work, whether planned work or ad hoc maintenance, meets the highest possible access standards for that piece of work. It is an approach that helps raise the overall standard of access of a site, route or facility over time.

LRA is not just about physical access and it is important to consider all accessibility issues. It will not be possible, to make all countryside fully accessible for everyone, nonetheless, LRA principles require those organisations with a responsibility for providing access to the outdoors to strive to maximise accessibility for as many people as possible.

LRA is achieved by identifying the least restrictive option for a specific feature, such as a gate or a piece of interpretation. As emphasised in BS5709 Gaps Gates and Stiles this is not just about selecting the type of structure, but also how to make and install the chosen structure in the least obstructive way.

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.

Key point: Least Restrictive Access should be the benchmark at each stage of the Access Chain.

Examples of least restrictive access in practice

A gap is less restrictive than a gate, which is less restrictive than a stile. So, when a stile needs repair or removal, the first option is to replace it with a gap. If this is not an option, it is replaced by a gate. The last resort is to replace the stile, while ensuring it is one that is compliant with BS5709. A significant number of stiles have been replaced in this way across England. The British Standard for Gaps, Gates and Stiles (BS:5709:2018) is an important reference.

A leaflet printed in 12-point text is less restrictive than one in 8-point, and interpretation panels where the messages are conveyed by both clear text and images is less restrictive than ones that rely on text only. A café menu with a good choice of food options is less restrictive than one with only limited choice.

Free public transport is less restrictive than public transport that charges a fee.

Access standards

There are no statutory standards for the improvement of access to the countryside and the huge variation in character of open spaces and countryside makes it unrealistic to seek a one-size-fits-all approach. Nonetheless, access standards are important in identifying benchmarks for access improvements.

The original By All Reasonable Means (BARM) guide used two sets of standards. One was the Countryside for All standards which remain widely used for benchmarking new access work. The second was the additional standards developed by the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) for sites where it was unrealistic to achieve the Countryside for All standards.

In this updated guide, the same standards are used but these have been combined to make it easier for countryside managers to use.

These standards were developed before the introduction of the Equality Act and have yet to be expanded to address the full range of protected characteristics.

What is legally considered reasonable provision will vary in different situations and with the results of future case law. The recommended approach is to aim that in any outdoor area, managers should provide and promote a variety of routes and places, with a good spread of location and character.

It is impractical to make all areas of the countryside accessible to everyone. The aim should be to ensure that an equal quality of experience is available to everyone. This means considering all protected characteristics, understanding what currently restricts access and for who, and prioritising improvements that give the most equitable results.

Standards for countryside and open spaces

In the absence of statutory standards that apply to access improvements to countryside and open spaces, this guide has selected advisory standards and principles that are most widely acknowledged as representing best practice. This is based on the following:

- **Countryside for All standards and guidance**: as a benchmark for physical access improvements.
- **BARM Management Zones and standards**: to identify appropriate levels of accessibility for different routes and settings, and to extend standards to unimproved sites not covered by the Countryside for All standards.

The standards and management zones relate to paths and routes and are defined primarily in terms of physical access, 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.

Standards for buildings and their approaches

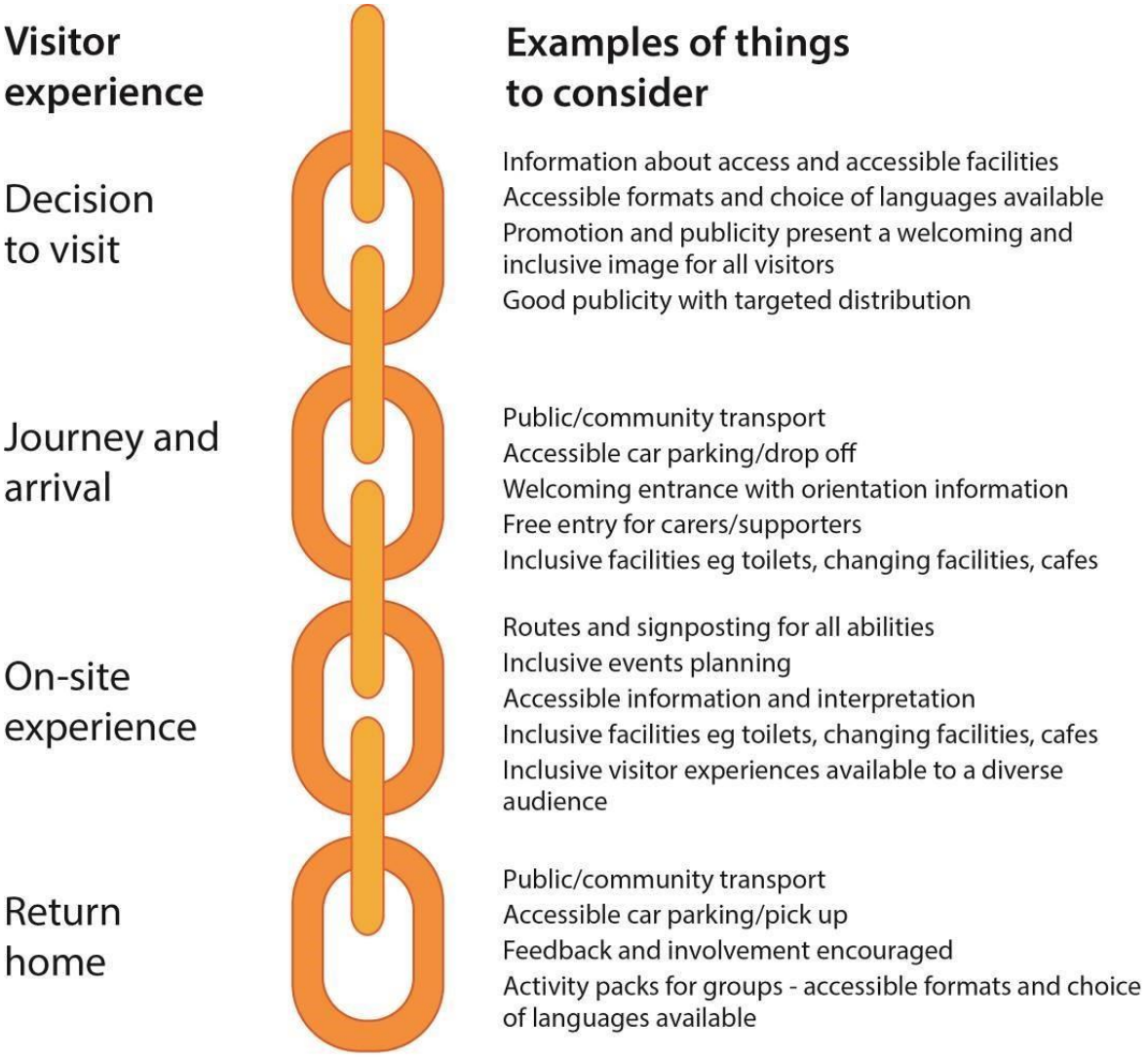
The statutory standards that relate to the inclusive design of buildings and their approaches are:

- Part M of the Building Regulations
- British Standard 8300:2009 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people. Code of Practice.

These are important for the design of facilities like cafes and visitor centres. Even in situations where the building regulations do not apply, they provide valuable details on features such as car parks, toilets, handrails etc. The standards relate to the DDA, not the wider requirements of the Equality Act, so it is important to recognise this when using them, even in situations where the building regulations apply.

The Access Chain

The Sensory Trust developed the Access Chain[1] to address accessibility from a visitor's perspective. 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. Community engagement with individuals, groups and organisations is recommended at all stages of the Chain to ensure that decisions are informed by a rich mix of experiences and perspectives.



Source: Sensory Trust

[1] More information about the Access Chain http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/factsheets/access-chain.html

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 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.

Key point: When planning access opportunities all stages of the 'Access Chain' need to be considered.

Combining access with quality of experience

Access improvements made without considering the quality of visitor experience they lead to can be a waste of resources. For example, creating a wheelchair accessible route that leads away from a site's popular highlights will make the route possible, but not necessarily inviting. Encouraging a greater ethnic mix is unlikely to succeed if the interpretation is solely focused on stories that fail to embrace a wider cultural perspective.

The following ingredients are key to a successful inclusive visit:

Inviting and engaging

Good access to the range of experiences on offer requires a good understanding of the qualities of a site offers and the different ways in which people want to engage with it. It helps to do the following:

- Work with local community groups, perhaps by facilitating some of their events and activities, inviting people to feedback on your plans and invite people to join as volunteers.
- Consider experiences that engage the different senses, providing highlights for visitors with sensory impairments and enriching the experience for people in general.
- Think more widely about the stories of a place and how different ones might relate to people with different backgrounds and experiences.
- Provide opportunities for people to enjoy a site as part of a group, as well as chances for individual and family use. This can help welcome people who are unfamiliar with exploring the outdoors and who need the reassurance of visiting as part of a wider social group.

Comfortable

While some of your visitors may be adrenaline-seeking fans of extreme activities who are keen to explore wild countryside, the majority will want an easier time of it. Minimising slopes and steps, providing easy routes to highlights and a choice of route distances will help widen a site's appeal.

Considering shelter from the elements, enough seating and resting spots to enable people to explore some of your site, along with accessible toilets and changing facilities will all support an enjoyable experience. A changing Places facility

provides toilet and changing space for families and groups with older children or adults with profound and multiple disabilities (see www.changing-places.org).

Sociable

Many visitors will want to share their visit with friends and relatives so it's important to plan for groups of different sizes when planning facilities like picnic facilities, seating and shelter. Being open to a wide range of social events will help engage a greater diversity of groups.

Case Study: PEDALL Inclusive cycling in the new forest

PEDALL provides inclusive cycling in the New Forest and makes cycling available to all people no matter what challenges they may face. It was set up by the New Forest National Park Authority and New Forest District Council, with council funding and more recently from the National Lottery Community Fund.

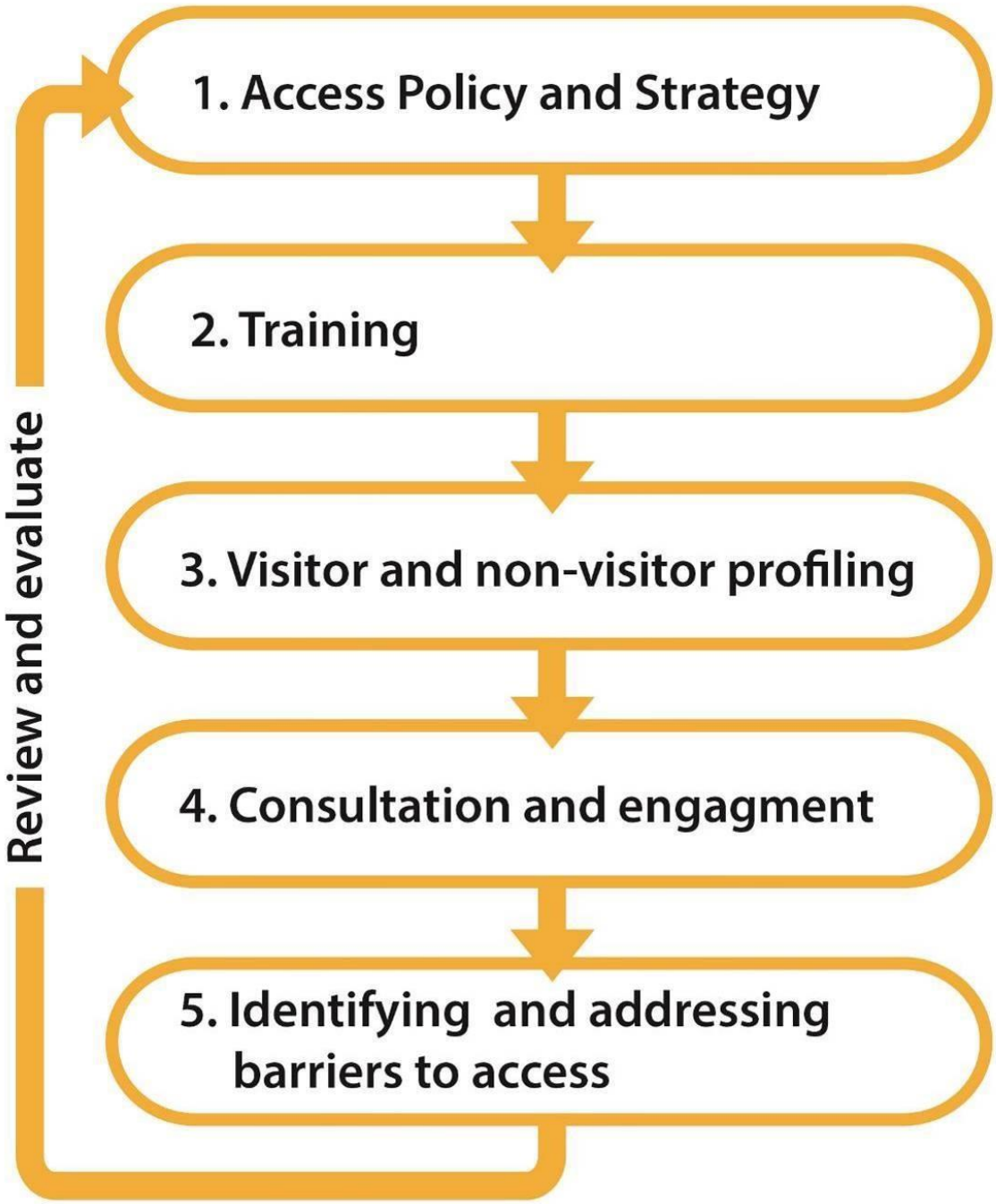
A variety of bikes are on offer, with different seating and steering, and many with extra wheels for stability.

Starter sessions ensure people familiarise themselves and feel confident using the bikes. Guided rides are led by qualified leaders and supported by assistants, and families, carers and friends are encouraged to join in.

The New Forest has path networks that provide accessible routes and ideally a choice of route lengths so they can be tailored to different needs.

https://www.pedall.org.uk/

Putting the framework into practice



1. Access Policy and Access Strategy

Inclusive practice relies on changing attitudes and the way things are done, as well as practical changes on the ground. An Access Policy outlines an organisation's commitment to improving access and a strategy shows how these intentions will be achieved. It is important that both reflect the needs and aspirations of local people and visitors and involve a diversity of people as development partners.

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, Active Travel, tourism, leisure and recreation, and these are also likely to be required under the Equality Act 2010. It is important to ensure that partners, such as other local authorities and 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

Access Policies are important as they provide the context for effective working practices. They may be developed for the whole organisation, or 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 and regular review. 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 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 countryside 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.

A draft Access Policy should be distributed to a representative range of organisations and individuals. Appendix 5 has suggestions for national contacts, but local ones should also be included. 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.

Access strategy

An access strategy should take account of how much time, staff resource and money is available to implement the policy. 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 sites, associated facilities and services.
- To prioritise paths and places for audit.
- To audit prioritised routes, sites and associated facilities and services.
- To establish and prioritise improvements to routes.
- 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.

Equality Impact Assessment

An equality impact assessment (EqIA) reviews the impact of a policy or service on different groups of people. An EqIA should be included as part of the development and review of policies and practices.

Design and Access Statements

Since 2009 there has been a legal requirement for a Design and Access Statement as part of most planning applications. This explains how the development will maximise accessibility within the context of the design, the site and surrounding area.

2. 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. Diversity and equality training is therefore essential.

Training should be ongoing and linked with other forms of skills development, such as Health and Safety and sustainable natural resource 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 Equality Act 2010 and CRoW for countryside owners and managers
- How to involve and consult with local people
- 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 people of different ages, abilities and backgrounds.

Induction training

The induction training can't hope to cover diversity issues in detail but it can demonstrate organisational commitment. New employees and volunteers need to know that at the most senior level an inclusive approach is seen as essential to the organisation, not an add-on but an integral part of everyone's work. Induction training should inspire people, give them permission to take the issue seriously and set a level of expectation across the project.

Diversity training

We suggest this focuses on the visitor experience so it helps teams recognise the diversity of ages and abilities of visitors and practical ways in which they can help ensure everyone can have a great visit.

It's important to prioritise teams who have frontline responsibility for managing the visitor experience, so particularly rangers/wardens, activity leaders, retail and management, but also senior managers. Sessions should be participatory, guiding the teams through a process of identifying and resolving issues themselves, with the idea that this will help give them the tools to continue the approach within their work.

The ideal is to involve people who can represent the perspectives and experiences of the different protected characteristics.

Sign language training

British Sign Language (BSL) is the third most widely used indigenous language in the UK, after English and Welsh. It is estimated to be used by 250,000 people in the UK and it is a distinct language, not a version of English or Welsh with gestures. Investing in BSL training will welcome and encourage greater involvement of people with hearing loss as visitors, volunteers and staff.

Training in Stage 1 BSL will give sufficient skills to hold basic conversations with BSL users. While this doesn't replace the need to hire in BSL translators for special events, it can be an effective approach to increasing the welcome for people with hearing impairments. Training in Stage 2 BSL will enable staff to converse more fully and shows great recognition of BSL as a supported language.

It is important to remember that while BSL is a primary language for a significant number of people with hearing loss, along with families and friends, it isn't used by the majority of people with hearing loss, especially people who have lost their hearing later in life. Other inclusive design considerations are therefore important. For example, providing accessible information, avoiding reliance on acoustic information (eg fire alarms) and creating good visual and tactile cues in wayfinding and interpretation.

3. Visitors, non-visitors and patterns of use

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.

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 a gentle stroll, others enjoy exploration, others are drawn to engage with an attraction or destination. For many people living in rural areas, public footpaths or cycle paths may be routes to work, school or the local pub. It is important to find out how sites and routes are currently used and how much people value them.

Aspects to include in a review	Description	Techniques
Local communities	Groups that could get involved as volunteers, focus groups or become future visitors, such as retirement communities, schools, day centres, healthcare centres	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 or network, why are they visiting and what do they use it for? How well do these people reflect the local community in terms of age, disability and background?	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 that are difficult to integrate, e.g. bike use, horse riding? When and how is the place used?	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 why	Questionnaire survey distributed locally (and more widely for sites that attract tourists). Consult with local people

4. Consultation and Engagement

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.

It is important to involve a range of people that represents the local community, as well as the wider population if the site or route attracts people from further afield. 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.

Community engagement 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.

Effective consultation relies on:

- Making the consultation events accessible
- 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 and/or revenue works.

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 highlights. Inviting people with different characteristics 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.

Good ideas for access improvements also often come from staff and volunteers who have regular contact with visitors. They will have a good understanding of:

- The range of people who currently use the site, often with insight into how this reflects the local population.
- 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.

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.

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.

How to find people

Potential sources of contacts are listed in Appendix 5. In addition to the owners, managers and users of the countryside, professional input is valuable to lend specialist insights on design and 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 and 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.

Benefits of consultation

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.

5. Identifying and addressing barriers to access

Barriers can reduce or prevent access for some visitors, particularly people with limited mobility or who aren't confident about visiting unfamiliar places. Barriers to access identified are numerous and varied, from a lack of information and poor signage to steep gradients, uneven surfaces and long distances.

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 visitors. It is important to work with different people as development partners and to maintain a dialogue throughout a project. This ensures that expectations remain realistic and the project delivers real benefits.

There are three types of barrier that commonly reduce visits to the outdoors:

1. Psychosocial barriers

These relate to people's perceptions of a place, and to interactions with other people. They include concerns about personal safety, lack of confidence, not feeling welcome, not being able to walk far or of getting lost. They can be compounded by negative experiences, for example anti-social behaviour from other visitors.

Response**:** Provide trustworthy, relevant information so people can judge on the basis of real, not assumed, knowledge. Connect with local groups to build trust and raise awareness of what is on offer.

2. Physical barriers

These relate to the characteristics of a site, such as steps, steep gradients, stiles etc. It also includes lack of seating, accessible toilets, cafes and other visitor facilities. They can be compounded by poor maintenance.

Response: Access review and overcoming barriers, together with good information so people can assess what is appropriate to their interests and needs. Involvement of people of different ages and circumstances to identify priority improvements.

3. Organisational barriers

These relate to organisational practices, and cultural systems. For example, activity programmes that offer a limited range of opportunities, cost of parking fees, café food etc., lack of convenient and accessible public transport and lack of support from volunteers and staff.

Response: Diversity awareness training for staff and volunteers, diversifying activity programmes, working with local community groups

Priorities for removing barriers

When planning to improve physical access, and with limited capital budgets, it is important to identify the following –

- which barriers can be avoided (eg by creating an alternative route)
- which barriers can be mediated by other actions (eg adding seating alongside a gradient)
- which barriers are most significant and a priority for action (eg an inaccessible gate at the entrance)

Good visitor information can also help overcome barriers by enabling people to make informed decisions before they visit. For example, someone who is pregnant and not able to walk long distances, may be reassured to hear of a walk with a gentle grade and lots of seating. Someone who is wary of going somewhere unfamiliar on their own may welcome news of community activities they could join.

When prioritising the removal or avoidance of barriers, it is important to keep a focus on visitor experience. The overall aim is to offer different visitors an equally satisfying experience so a route that appears to lend itself to being easier access because of its lack of barriers, may not be the priority in what experiences most people want to enjoy. Consulting with local people is key and needs to include both existing users and nonusers.

Action Planning

This section follows the steps of the Access Chain to highlight the key barriers to access and suggestions for how to remove them. It also includes indicators of good practice which can be used a reference point for site reviews, and to guide new development work.

1. Decision to visit

It is important that the principles of Least Restrictive Access are applied to all the links in the Access Chain. An action plan should consider each link, from the decision to visit, through journey and arrival and on site experience, to the return home.

A decision to visit is the first step in the Access Chain and usually relies on obtaining information. Lack of accessible off-site information is one of the most significant barriers limiting use of the outdoors by disabled people who often need to plan more carefully to make sure a visit will be enjoyable. It also relates to visitors who lack confidence and need reassurance of a site's welcome and accessibility.

A decision to visit may be made solely by an individual, 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 friend or supporter may also break the Access Chain for the person who is directly impacted by barriers to access.

Indicators of good practice

Information welcomes all visitors	Websites and leaflets show a wide range of visitors, stories and activities. Information is designed to principles of inclusive design and Cymraeg Clir/ Plain English. Local groups have been involved in the development of new information. Information is shared widely with local community groups and networks and invites people to get involved in addressing accessibility. Information is checked regularly to ensure it is kept up to date. Videos are captioned for the benefit of people with hearing impairments.

Information is accessible	Website is designed in line with Web Accessibility Initiative standards and user-tested with people with different sensory and intellectual disabilities. Off-site information is in different formats to allow a wider audience to access it. Eg, printed information is available in large print, audio and Braille for people with visual impairments (available from the Customer Enquiry Team). Symbols and pictures support people and people with learning disabilities and help convey messages to visitors without English as first language. Off-site information is in languages that reflect local community and tourism needs.
There is information about site accessibility	People can find out general information about the site before they visit; such as opening times, facilities, nearby public transport, and provision of play areas. Off-site information provides information on the accessibility of site facilities, accessible routes on site, accessible parking, forthcoming events, opening times of facilities and travel options. Policies are clear about free entry for carers and personal assistants, seniors, low income.
Information is easy to find	Community venues, groups and networks are actively sharing information with new audiences.
There is virtual access to experiences that are too challenging to get to	People can gain a virtual experience (eg of a remote cave, or a steep hill fort) through video, webcam, audio, images etc.
There is a policy for developing inclusive information	An information policy is regularly reviewed to ensure that all new information takes on board highest standards of inclusive design.

Developing off-site information

What information to provide: Detailed, objective off-site information about paths, sites, facilities, barriers, access points and so on will allow a potential visitor to make a decision on whether to visit or how to shape their visit accordingly. It can be tempting to wait until 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.

Information about the highlights a site offers, and how different people can enjoy it is important for everyone, but especially for people who aren't confident about whether a place will welcome them, or be appropriate for their interests.

Only provide time-limited information if you can be sure to update it.

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 (available from the Customer Enquiry Team), 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).

Test it first: 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 user testing before it is completed. 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.

Share it widely: Visitors need to find information easily. For example, if leaflets are shared in venues that aren't themselves accessible this will reduce the number of people who can use them. Equally, only providing information in the usual places – Tourist Information Centres and other tourism venues for example – won't help reach people who are less aware of what is on offer. This can be remedied by distributing through local community venues, post offices, churches, pubs etc.

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 can be trusted. Information should include potential issues related to seasonal changes or weather.

Allow people to make their own decisions: Try to avoid information that doesn't allow a visitor to make a decision. For example, a sign that says a route is 'not suitable for wheelchairs' fails to consider the range of wheelchair users and how some may enjoy the challenge while others may not. Information that tells people about the essential details (eg gradient and distance) will allow people to decide for themselves.

2. Journey and arrival

A key factor when choosing 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.

Indicators of good practice

It is possible to reach the route or site by public transport	Explore scope to work with local transport providers to improve services, including community transport schemes. Transport options are available on site (as well as in off-site information). Wheelchair accessible bus and taxi services are available. Reduced price and alternative route options have been agreed with local transport providers**.**
Walking and cycling are supported	There are good routes for walking or cycling to site. Accessible cycling opportunities are available. Accessible showers, lockers and cycle storage provided on site.
Accessible car parking and drop-off are clearly identified	Accessible parking is clearly signed from approach roads and located near to entrances and key highlights (eg café). At least 5% of spaces are designed and designated for disabled visitors. Electric charging points are accessible to wheelchair users. Drop-offs for public and private transport are accessible, near the entrance, and on the same side of the road to avoid having to cross traffic.
Entrances are welcoming and clearly signed	Arrival points have good visitor information, such as an accessible map and wayfinding details. Facilities like cafes, visitor centres and toilets are accessible and easy to find. Entrances are shared by different visitors (ie not separate for wheelchair users).

Choice of visitor experiences are clearly highlighted	Visitor information is available to show people what experiences are on offer so they can choose what best suits them.
Portable equipment is available	Equipment such as wheelchairs, portable seats, puncture-repair kits and audio materials are available for loan.
Remote and challenging visitor experiences are reflected in the visitor/ learning centre or cafe	People can link to more remote and challenging experiences, eg video footage, audio material, webcam of bird nest. Materials are available to explore through touch – eg a touch table with interesting objects and materials.
Staff and volunteers provide good support	Staff and volunteers are trained in diversity awareness. Access Volunteers are available to provide support.

Improving transport and arrival

Improve public transport: Lack of accessible, reliable and affordable public transport is a significant barrier for many disabled people, especially in rural areas. Where public transport is in place, timetables are often not accessible. For example, small font size often makes it difficult for people with visual impairments to read, and complex layouts make it difficult for people with multi-sensory impairments to use.

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 introduced duties 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.

People living on low income may not be able to afford to run a car, or to pay for public transport. It is important to explore options for community transport, perhaps in collaboration with a local volunteer organisation or linked with community activities. This could include working with local community organisations to organise dedicated community transport schemes with set dates for guided talks/walks, bringing communities together and creating a support network.

Improve access for cars: 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. People with multisensory impairments, for example, often rely on support from someone to drive them, or taxis. Such visits rely on the provision of accessible

car parking and drop-off 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. Arrival points may be where people make decisions about what they are going to do on site, so it is a key opportunity to inspire people to explore.

Encourage walking and cycling: There is greater emphasis on the benefits to health of walking and cycling. Accessible routes and associated features (eg seating, accessible bicycles, reliable information) are important if these opportunities are to be open to the widest range of people. They can be a good focus for community activities, eg setting up walking and cycling groups.

3. 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. However, it is important to recognise that many public toilets are closing and in some areas this will increase the importance of providing such facilities on site.

Provision of services and facilities, such as refreshments, by a contractor or external agency can be more of a challenge, 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.

Indicators of good practice

Toilets cater for all visitors	There are accessible toilets near entrances, car parks and starting points. Toilets are highlighted in access information and include details of accessibility.
Facilities such as visitor centres, cafes, ticket sales, bird hides are accessible	Opening times are convenient for different people. Accessibility is promoted in visitor information. Staff have undertaken diversity awareness training.
Good provision of seating and shelter	There are frequent opportunities for visitors to rest along routes. Seating is prioritised alongside more challenging gradients and surfaces. Shelter is available, particularly in places where visitors are likely to linger (eg pickup points).

Improving facilities

Toilets: The choice of most appropriate facilities needs to relate to the specific site, the profile of visitors and what is possible within budgets and physical space.

Aim to provide wheelchair accessible toilet and baby change facilities and, if space allows, provide these separately. Increasingly, venues are widening the scope of accessibility to include people with hidden disabilities (such as bowel conditions and weak bladder syndrome). Prioritising gender-neutral facilities will be welcomed by people who identify as transgender, and will help avoid the queues building outside the ladies' during busy times.

In all toilets, aim to provide good colour contrast between fittings and backgrounds for the benefit of people with visual impairments. Easy-to-use locks, taps and driers are valued by people with arthritic hands or people who find new techniques confusing, for example people living with dementia.

Note that new designs of personal mobility vehicles require larger manoeuvring spaces and it is a good idea to take this account with any new design work.

Cafes, bird hides, classrooms etc.: Buildings, where planning and building regulations apply, should be designed to comply with Part M standards. These standards can help guide other structures too, such as bird hides, where entrances, door widths, manoeuvring space and viewing heights will all be important details to pay attention to.

Seating: Seating is essential for visitors with limited stamina and who need to rest regularly. Seats can help reduce the impact of slopes and distances. They also enable people to enjoy a place at their own speed, to linger and to socialise. Seats with arm rests and backs provide important support for older visitors, and people with limited upper body strength, and a range of seat and perch sizes cater for a diversity of visitors.

Reviewing your current events and activity programmes and coming up with a policy for fundamental aspects (eg portable seating, temporary signage, toilets) will identify aspects that need improving – eg a stage that only has stepped access so wouldn't be usable by anyone with a mobility issue. Third party organisers should be required to demonstrate consideration of accessibility and inclusion in their application to use the site.

Case study: Changing Places facility

Transgender staff[1] and their allies within both Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales discussed the fact that it can be quite distressing to be forced to use either the men's or women's toilets. This distress is mainly due to not feeling comfortable, or confident enough to use a gender binary[2] facility.

Fortunately, where these staff are based, there is a mixture of facilities including multi-user female and male toilets and solo or single-user toilets which are situated in pairs and individually signed again as male or female. The only exception to this are the accessible toilets which aren't 'gendered'.

The solution to providing facilities appropriate for all staff and visitors was to convert the single user toilets by re-signing with gender-neutral icons (female/non-binary/male) and providing additional sanitary disposal units in the former "men's".

Through collaboration with Welsh Government, similar moves were being taken to increase provision.

A series of meetings were held with local facilities management staff who had a keen interest in moving in this direction, but as a trial so the organisation could gain experience of the issues of moving towards gender-neutral provision before rolling out to all of the single user toilets across the NRW estate.

The benefits of making this low-cost change include:

- The proposal could be implemented quite quickly and at low cost
- The impacts of changes particularly on users with accessibility needs were not negatively impacted
- There are some benefits for all staff around increased availability
- Identification of particular benefits for transgender staff and visitors not yet formally transitioning or non-binary

[1] http://www.gires.org.uk/terminology#Transgender

[2] http://www.gires.org.uk/terminology#Gender Identity

Indicators of good practice

Diverse range of activities and events	Community activities are supported, eg the local LGBT walking group now uses the site as a venue. Activity plans take account of diverse interests.
Event spaces cater for all visitors	There are accessible toilets nearby, car parks or drop-off and plenty of seating. There is step-free access to event/activity spaces, including performance spaces.
Diverse range of food and drink on offer	Food offer takes account of most common food intolerances (eg gluten) as well as dietary options such as meat-free. Specific diets and intolerances can be catered for by arrangement.
Alternative languages are available	Interpreters can be booked. Sign Language is planned for large-scale events.

Improving events and activities

Diversity of interests: Making the events programme more inclusive includes widening the range of activities and interests on offer. If a site only offers opportunities to engage in physically active pursuits, like cycling, it will have limited appeal for people who are interested in more social activities. A good way forward is to work with local communities to find out how they would like to engage with your site and collaborate with groups and organisations to use your site as a base for the activities they already run.

Providing options: Ensure that activities can be completed without the need to overcome potential access barriers. For example, ensuring that a scavenger hunt activity can be completed within a reasonable distance of facilities bearing in mind that grandparents might be visiting with grandchildren.

Appeal to the senses: When planning activities such as family trails try to include sensory opportunities such as texture rubbing, colour matching rather than relying just on text-based questions and answers.

Relaxed sessions: These are quieter sessions for people who find general events and activities overwhelming, eg people with Autism. Key ingredients include reduced number of attendees, planning sessions at quieter, less busy times of day, avoidance of strong and sudden changes in sound, lighting and other sensory stimuli and providing ‘time out’ space.

Sport and recreational pursuits: There are increasing examples where outdoor pursuits can be shared with people with mobility issues. For example, adapted bicycles and boats that extend access to wheelchair users. Companion cycling, running and other physical activities open up access for visually impaired visitors.

Case Study: dementia, walking and new connections

A series of local walking groups set up by the Sensory Trust encourage people living with dementia and carers to get outdoors, make new friends and spend time in the countryside, exploring heritage venues and visiting gardens open to the public.

Evidence shows a range of benefits from participating in these activities. Mental health benefits are linked with reduced social isolation and building new social networks. Physical health benefits, improved sleep patterns and appetite are associated with more regular activity outdoors.

Many people who enjoy nature and the countryside want to continue their enjoyment of walking but feel they and their loved ones would benefit from doing so in the company of others who understand the issues they have to deal with after a dementia diagnosis. These walks are self-sustaining and run by the groups themselves. It is something that a venue could easily facilitate.

On-site experience: getting around

The ease with which visitors can get around is dependent mostly on the physical nature of a site or route. Gradients, narrow path widths, distance and uneven surfaces can all present barriers to visitors, particularly people with limited mobility or stamina, but also families with young children.

Improvements to the fabric of a site or route will be one of the main ways of opening up access to the widest range of people. It is therefore given greater focus in this guide, and the following pages provide guidance on planning, reviewing and implementing physical site improvements.

Identifying and promoting attractive routes with the easiest access will benefit a wide range of visitors, for example families with young children and pushchairs, people with health conditions that reduce physical exertion, older visitors and people that aren't used to walking in the countryside. This avoids 'easier access' being seen as something related specifically to disabled visitors, and instead related to people in general.

Indicators of good practice

Toilets cater for all visitors	There are accessible toilets near entrances, car parks and starting points. Toilets are highlighted in access information and include details of accessibility.
There is regular review of accessibility and positive response to issues raised	Disabled visitors are involved in regular access reviews. There is a clear process for reporting and responding to accessibility issues.
Regular and high quality maintenance	There is regular repair to surfaces, cutting back overhanging vegetation, removing obstacles. Maintenance team are trained in diversity awareness.
Choice of routes in terms of distance, challenge and visitor experience	Short return routes are included as easier options for visitors with limited mobility or stamina.
Good wayfinding	There is good information at key decision points so people can find their way around.
Seating	Regular seating provides resting points, particularly to reduce impact of gradients and distances.

Improving paths and routes

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.

In line with the Least Restrictive Access approach, 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.

Auditing a route or path

A route can be a single path or a network of paths, bridleways and roads. 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 will 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.

The stages


1. Assign routes to zones
Use scoring system in Appendix 2
2. Prioritise audits
Zone A routes are top priority. Prioritise routes that have good geographic spread.
3. Audit routes against zone criteria
Use management zone criteria.
4. Compile data - where can access be improved within existing budget
Zone A routes are top priority.
5. Prioritise improvements
Prioritise routes with high popularity and demand, work that completes circular routes or routes that give access to highlights.
6. Do the work
Use appropriate standards for zones.
7. Maintenance programme
Use LRA to meet or exceed zone standards.
8. Evaluate the improvements
Use questionnaires and consultation sessions to evaluate the effectiveness of the work.

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 and assign them to the highest possible appropriate setting or zone. The management zones are shown in Appendix 1.

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, 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 priority 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 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 disguised or is undesirable
- Paths where the cost of improving and maintaining to the highest access standards cannot be justified
- Paths in open countryside/wild land

Lower priority should not be seen as a reason to apply low standards in remedial works. As emphasised in BS5709, any new works should aspire to the highest standards and this is crucial as a way of increasing the accessibility of all routes over time.

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.

4. 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 6).

5. Do the work

Use the appropriate standards for each route.

6. 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.

7. Evaluate the improvements

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

8. 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

Well-designed information will help visitors find their way around, make informed choices and engage with the place they are in. Accessible information ensures that information is available to all visitors.

Visitors want to be able to access information throughout their visit. From where to go and what to see, health & safety issues on site, what facilities are available and forthcoming events, to the location of the nearest train station or bus stop.

They expect this information to be in a format that is accessible to them. Visitor expectations may vary depending on the type of setting and landscape. On more rural, sometimes unstaffed, sites some concentration of information provision can be expected at entrances but once within a site or on a route little information may be provided. In this case, visitors would expect to be able to carry information via leaflet, audio guide or mobile phone text.

Indicators of good practice

Key information is accessible to all visitors	Information is designed to principles of inclusive design and Cymraeg Clir/ Plain English. Information uses appropriate terminology and promotes diversity through the range of people portrayed and the issues highlighted, eg gender-neutral toilets, Changing Places facility, visitor guides in different languages. Symbols and pictures accompany text. Hearing loops are installed in visitor centres, and portable ones used by guides and educators
Alternative formats are available	Information is available in alternative formats to text such as Braille, Large Print, audio and Widgit symbols (available from the Customer Enquiry Team),. Interpretation in other formats beyond text, including tactile.
There is an Access Guide	An Access Guide contains key details about the accessibility of a site, or collection of sites.

Information is well positioned	On-site information, such as display boards, are at a height and angle where they can be accessed by children, wheelchair users and people of short stature. Leaflets and other portable information is in accessible locations, eg counters reachable by wheelchair users. Leaflets contain a map with indications of distances, gradients, position of seats and any obstacles or hazards. Symbols, names of features and other information should be mirrored in the site's signage. A clearly designed leaflet with good information could reduce the need for signage.
Good wayfinding	There is good information at key decision points so people can find their way around.
Guided tours are accessible	Basic British Sign Language and hearing loops are available for guided tours.

Developing on-site information

Create an accessible information policy: This is a commitment to accessible design and to ensuring that visitors with different needs have access to information that meets those needs. It needs to be accompanied by design guidelines that are shared with internal and external designers, and included in Brand guidelines, Website design briefs etc. An important principle is to aim for all information to be as accessible as possible, by using larger fonts and clear layouts for example, and to supplement with alternative formats, such as Large Print and Widgit symbols.

Wayfinding: 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. It doesn't always need to be signs and clearly defined paths and good route descriptions also help people find their way. Get someone who doesn't know the site to test your signage!

Carry out regular maintenance checks: Check that signs and interpretation remain clear from plant growth, obstacles and obstructions, visual clutter and deterioration. Check that information is current, eg that website links still work.

Use more non-textual signs and interpretation: Use symbols, pictograms, sketches and photographs to help reduce reliance on text. Aim to interpret through wider techniques, eg tactile exploration of objects, sound recordings and immersive experiences.

Work with local communities: It is important to work with local groups to tailor your information to your local community. For example, this might highlight particular languages that most closely reflect your local cultural diversity.

Create a mini access guide: It is important to have something that people can pick up on arrival that doesn't rely on staff providing information. This isn't just to provide information, it will also indicate to visitors that they are expected to be

there. This would cover key access information like toilets, cafes, information points, wheelchairs etc.

Braille and Large Print: Braille and Large Print hard copies could be available for loan, although as reading this guide will take up time on a visit it may be more useful to make available also as copy to be sent out before a visit. This can be done through free request through the Articles for the Blind scheme (Royal Mail).

Print-on-demand information: This is a flexible option that uses a print-on-demand approach. Location depends on where staff/facilities can be made available, most likely in a Visitor Centre but perhaps a community centre would collaborate. Providing information in a range of formats would also have the benefit of making visitors feel more welcome, with their needs having been considered. This could include Large Print, Easy English and Widgit versions of interpretation, trails and educational materials. Content can be easily updated and it avoids the need for investment in, and storage of, hard copies.

Audio materials: Availability of audio can to some extent mitigate the need for other materials (an obvious exception is information for hearing impaired visitors). This offers significant scope for enhancing visitor information and it is important to ensure that apps and other audio materials address accessibility issues.

Communicators: People such as guides and rangers are great sources of information.

Diversity and equality training can help staff offer the best service and advice to visitors.

Symbols and names

Names influence how easily a visitor can find their way around. Names tend to be more memorable if people can associate them with how something is used (eg café) or the feel of a place (eg Hidden Cave). Other names have to be learnt, and this is easier if they are short and straightforward. For visitors with intellectual challenges, such as dyslexia or memory loss, it's simply adding an extra layer of complexity.

- Avoid overly wordy or complex names (long names will also be harder to use on maps and visitor information) and try to use names that be easily conveyed through images/symbols and not just text
- Keep it consistent – use the same names across all visitor communications, from website to printed materials and signage
- Minimise changes to names that have become well established
- Try to ensure names have an association with function or sense of place to help people relate and remember them.

Example: visitor information

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

- When employing a graphic designer, try to find one with experience of designing for people with visual impairment and/or brief designers in relation to the advice provided by the UK Association for Accessible Formats (www.ukaaf.org)
- 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 cause disappointment among some visitors.

4. Return Home

A positive final experience when leaving a destination is important for all visitors. It is particularly important in relation to positive word of mouth – research has shown that many visitors who are impacted by barriers to access use word of mouth recommendations (and increasingly online reviews) to help them decide where and when to visit.

Exit routes need careful thought, making sure that all visitors can find their way out easily. Issues like access to toilets, timing of public transport, comfortable spaces where visitors can be picked up by taxi or car, and information that people can take away with them are also important to consider.

Indicators of good practice

Exits are clearly signed and easy to use	Exit points are clearly marked on maps and visitor information, and well signed on site. Facilities like cafes, visitor centres and toilets are accessible and easy to find. Exits are shared by different visitors (ie not separate for wheelchair users).
Exits are within easy reach of parking and public transport	Accessible parking is located close to exit points. Public transport and pick-up points are within easy reach of exits.
Good provision of seating and shelter	Seating and shelter are provided at pick-up points and other places where visitors are likely to wait.

Implementation

This section is about making access improvements. Planned improvements should be prioritised and costed, enabling them to be phased over a period of years. An example action plan is shown in Appendix 3.

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 confident 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 should 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. It is important that low priority items are not forgotten and that they are subject to regular review.

An example of setting priorities

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 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 accessible car parking spaces should be increased to cater for the expected increase in visitors. The location of the accessible 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.

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 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 and that they receive the necessary training. It may be appropriate to insert a contract clause to cover this. It would be important at this stage for contractors to liaise with local groups, such as an access group, to ensure that all intended works meet the requirements of different visitors. Local community groups may volunteer to help out with work (eg with the TCV) and including volunteer groups in this way can help build a sense of ownership and subsequently increased use of the improved site.

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 (see Appendix 1). LRA maintenance should be used to gradually improve information, facilities and paths that are in lower settings or zones by maintaining them to a higher 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.

Evaluation and monitoring

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 site, route or to the overall improvements to physical 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
- ‘Walk and talk’ survey of key routes by local access or community group in partnership with relevant authority officers
- 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 should 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 or site and the amount of its use.

Appendix 1: standards and zones

Access standards and management zones relate principally to physical barriers to access and their impact on people with limited mobility, including wheelchair users. Even within the wider remit of the Equality Act, this continues to be an effective way of addressing accessibility of routes and settings, but it is essential to also consider the social and psychological barriers that have been highlighted in the early sections of the guide. It should be noted that statutory standards or specifications do not exist for the countryside and open spaces. The standards used here are based on the most widely agreed technical standards.

BARM Access Standards

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). This identifies different standards for three countryside settings - '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.

Although the Standards have been widely applied, some countryside professionals have found the standards for the 'rural and working landscape' to be unrealistic for many countryside routes because of natural features like gradients, or because of the large investment that would be needed. In response, the original 'BARM' guide included two additional standards from the Sense and Accessibility project[6].

The BARM Management zones

This guide identifies standards in relation to three Management Zones – A, B and C - to help you review existing access and plan improvements. It is important to remember that full access for all disabled, and non-disabled, visitors relies on all links in the Access Chain, such as information and transport, as outlined earlier in this guidance.

These zones have been aligned as far as possible with those used in the BT Countryside for All standards and the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group (VSCG)[7]. It is important to note that the VSCG has a primary focus on safety, while C4All and BARM focus principally on access, so while they are complementary there will be instances where it is not possible to completely align the standards.

The zones also broadly align with the Miles Without Stiles[8] scheme that uses the following approach:

A: Provides access for **most** people, including those with mobility impairments
B: Provides access for **many** people, including those with mobility impairments
C: Provides access for **some** people, including those with mobility impairments

BARM zones	C4All zones	VSCG zones
A Urban, formal, managed landscapes (eg visitor centres, recreational hubs)	1&2 Urban and formal, and urban fringe and managed	Heavily developed
B Rural landscapes (eg land with public rights of way, country parks, urban fringe)	3 Rural and working landscapes	Moderately developed
C Open country without major barriers	Not included	Lightly developed
Some areas of wild, open countryside and forest will be outside the zoning system (eg VSCG 'undeveloped') but if paths and trails are planned they should aim to meet zone C standards.		

[6] Sense and Accessibility was a report produced by the Countryside Agency in 2000 that contained new policy guidance for routes and trails in relation to the DDA

[7] The location zones from the Risk Control Matrix developed by the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group http://vscg.org/guidingprinciples/risk-control-matrix

[8] 'Miles Without Stiles' routes are being developed by national parks in England as ones that are identified as accessible for people with limited mobility. http://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/thingstodo/walking/mileswithoutstiles

Table 1: Access standards for different management zones

	Zone A Urban, formal and managed landscapes	Zone B Rural landscapes	Zone C Open country without major barriers
Barriers[1]	No steps or stiles or other physical barriers restricting access.	No steps or stiles or other physical barriers restricting access.	No steps or stiles or other physical barriers restricting access.
Path surfaces[2]	Hard, firm, smooth with very few loose stones (no bigger than 5mm).	Hard and firm with very few loose stones (no bigger than 10mm).	Path possibly modified (not necessarily hard and firm in all weathers) with some larger stones, occasional tree roots, potholes and short stretches of rutting.
Path widths[3]	At least 1.2m	At least 1m	At least 815mm
Width restrictions[4]	At least 900mm for no more than 300mm along the path, 1m for no more than 1.6m along the path. Any gates to comply with BS5709.	At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along the path, 915mm for no more than 1.6m along the path. Any gates to comply with BS5709.	At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along the path, 915mm for no more than 1.6m along the path. Any gates to comply with BS5709.
Maximum gradients[5]	1:12	1:10	1:8
Landings on ramps steeper than 1:20[6]	Maximum rise of 750mm between landings (for example landings should be every 9m along ramps of 1:12).	Maximum rise of 950mm between landings.	Maximum 950mm where feasible and information is provided.
Surface breaks[7]	No more than 12mm measured across the line of the path.	No more than 12mm measured across the line of the path.	No more than 75mm measured across the line of the path.

	Zone A Urban, formal and managed landscapes	Zone B Rural landscapes	Zone C Open country without major barriers
Maximum cross camber (slope across a path)[8]	1:50	1:35	1:25 but cross slopes caused by tree roots/potholes/ruts may be greater.
Maximum distance between passing places[9]	50m	Not formalised or surfaced, but at least every 150m.	Not formalised or surfaced, but at least every 300m.
Distance between resting places[10]	Maximum 100m	Maximum 300m	Not formalised
Step levels[11]	Maximum 5mm	Maximum 15mm	Maximum 100mm
Clear walking tunnel[12]	At least 1.2m wide x 2.1m high	At least 1m wide x 2.1m high	At least 1m wide x 2.1m high
Edges[13]	Clearly visible	N/A	N/A

Table 1: Notes

1 Barriers: Some barriers cause significant restrictions for people with limited mobility, especially stiles and other similar obstructions. These will prevent a path from reaching any of the standards and will often be a priority for improvement, either to remove or avoid.

2 Path surfaces: The ideal is non-slip, well-drained, level path. Trip hazards like tree roots and protruding stones should be minimised, and at least have the option of walking/wheeling around them. Loose material on the surface increases risk of slips and trips, is painful for arthritic feet and challenging for wheelchair users. Layers of loose material are difficult and often impossible for wheelchairs, mobility vehicles and buggies.

3 Path widths: The width of a path or trail impacts on how easily people can pass each other, and whether people can walk together. This is especially important for people who need to walk with a companion alongside, and for wheelchairs and mobility vehicles. Widths here refer to the usable section (which is often the hard-surfaced section) and must be considered within the context of the route. Where practicable, paths should have space on either side (eg a verge) to make them more flexible than a path bordered by a fence or hedge. Equally, a busy path will need to be wider than a quieter one.

4 Width restrictions: Some restrictions are limited by permanent features like gates, or gaps bordered by trees and walls but these may be a reason for seeking alternative routes or plans. Access improvements should aim to meet the least restrictive guidance provided by the British Standard for Gaps, Gates and Stiles (BS 5709:2018).

5 Gradients: Steep slopes will impact on many visitors but especially people who tire easily (such as someone with a heart condition) and wheelchair users. Downslopes can sometimes be more hazardous for people than upslopes.

6 Landings: Landings are the level areas that provide resting points along a sustained gradient. These are important for people who find it challenging to walk or wheel up and down slopes.

7 Surface breaks: Gaps in the path surface from drainage channels and other structures can present a complete barrier to wheelchair users, and can be difficult for people with walking aids.

8 Cross camber: Cross-slopes are challenging for wheelchair users and people with poor balance or coordination. Significant slopes can be hazardous if they lead to areas of open water or steep-sided drops along the side of a path.

9 Passing places: These are important to ensure that people have room to pass each other, especially people with wheelchairs or pushchairs, and for well-used paths. These should aim to be at least 2m x 2m.

10 Resting places: Seats and perches are important to all visitors and essential for people who cannot walk long distances without resting. Wheelchair users also need places where they can stop and rest.

11 Step levels: Small steps present trip hazards to walkers, or barriers to wheelchair users, and can result from exposed roots, protruding stones, irregular surfaces and stepped levels.

12 Clear walking tunnel: Overhanging vegetation can be uncomfortable, or hazardous, for people with visual impairments. A priority is thorny and spiny vegetation at eye level.

13 Edges: Visible edges (well contrasted against their background) are navigation aids for people with visual impairments. It can also help avoid people tripping over path edges when venturing off the formal routes. This is a new addition to the standards.

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 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 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'. 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	3
Moderate	2	Moderate importance	2	Medium	2	Medium	2	Medium	2
Strenuous	1	Not important	1	High	1	Low	1	Low	1

Score:

12 – 15 Zone A

8 – 11 Zone B

5 – 7 Zone C

Source: By All Reasonable Means (2005).

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 example of an Action Plan shows how priority areas of focus can be identified and matched with corresponding actions. Timescales and costs are useful additions. The example can be used as a basis to build action plans for other sites.

Work area	Action
Visitor Centre	
Improve access to facilities (toilets, seating etc), signage, visitor information, services (shop, café etc) and physical fabric, for all visitors.	Audit with building surveyor/manager and prepare improvement plan. Arrange community feedback sessions with local groups and individuals.
Staff and volunteer awareness	
Ensure that staff and volunteers have the skills and experience to support all visitors. Create an ongoing system for existing staff to share these skills with new staff and volunteers.	Work with groups and organisations to run equality and diversity awareness training. Arrange training in Sighted Guiding to support visitors with sight loss. Review recruitment and employment policies.
Toilets	
Prioritise the provision of a separate unisex accessible toilet.	Prepare a plan for replacement. Refer to Part M and BS 8300:2001 standards.
Car Parks	
Ensure that car parks have clearly designated parking bays for disabled visitors, and drop-off facility.	Renovate existing markings and signage so bays can be clearly seen. Add seating and shelter to drop-off point. Refer to Part M and BS 8300:2001 standards.

Routes and wider access	
Identify and promote routes that provide easiest access, while also high quality visitor experience. Establish priorities for repair and improvement of existing routes.	Assign routes to zones – see scoring system in Appendix 2 Carry out an audit to establish which paths are currently accessible and other physical barriers to access. Set priorities for improvements.
Play	
Improve access to play facilities.	Carry out access audit of all play structures/areas and surfaces. Ensure paths to and in play areas are as accessible as possible and that some play equipment has accessible features.
Providing information	
Improve accessibility of visitor information, including more information about site accessibility and alternative formats of information.	Develop online Access Guide to share with full range of visitors. Consult with local groups to identify priorities for information in different languages.
Improve site signage and wayfinding.	Undertake audit of existing signage and wayfinding and identify priorities for improvement.
Interpretation	
Ensure interpretation relates to different ages, abilities and cultural perspectives. Increase opportunities for multi-sensory engagement.	Involve variety of local groups in reviewing interpretation and informing priorities for development. Use this as an opportunity to invite stories and other material to feed the interpretation.
Events	
Review guided walk and event programmes to ensure activities cover different interests, abilities and cultural perspectives	Review accessibility of facilities and timetabling. Work with local groups to run new walks and events for people that wouldn't normally participate
Building relationships	
Strengthen and widen links with local individuals, groups and organisations.	Identify groups and schools that don't normally participate and organise community events to invite new audiences to engage with the site.

Appendix 4: Published guidance

Access to the outdoors and inclusive design

A good practice guide to countryside access for disabled people (2005) Fieldfare Trust

Guidance to help countryside managers maximise opportunities for disabled people to access the countryside. The associated access standards continue to be used as a benchmark and the guide has been extended to cover Least Restrictive Access, path networks, access surveys and audits. Free to download from Paths for All:
https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/mediaLibrary/other/english/countryside-for-all-guide.pdf

Plain English Campaign

A-Z of alternative words to help produce clearer writing (www.plainenglish.co.uk/A-Z.html)

Easy Access to Historic Landscapes (2015) Historic England

Advises on improving access in heritage settings and while it responds to the Equality Act 2010 it focuses on visitors with disabilities. Its companion publication 'Easy Access to Historic Buildings' provides valuable information for buildings.

Free to download from the Historic England website:
https://historicengland.org.uk/imagesbooks/publications/easy-access-historic-landscapes/

Inclusive mobility: A guide to best practice on access to pedestrians and transport infrastructure Department for Transport, 2002

Relates mainly to the urban environment, and the higher access standards outlined in this guide, but provides valuable information about inclusive design guidelines and specifications.

Free downloads – English, Welsh .pdf and .rtf versions available
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-mobility

Sensory Trust Access Guidance

Guidance on all aspects of inclusive design and accessible practices, from paths and routes, to seating, play and interpretation. Free to download from the Sensory Trust website: http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/factsheets/index.html

The Sign Design Guide, a guide to inclusive signage. Peter Barker and June

Fraser, Sign Design Society and RNIB.

Essential guidance for the development of clear signage and wayfinding. http://www.signdesignsociety.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54%3Athe-sign-design-guide&catid=10&Itemid=19

Legislation and policy documents

Building Regulations 2010. Approved Document M: Access to and Use of Buildings. NBS (National Building Specifications), 2004 edition with 2010 changes. https://www.planningportal.co.uk/info/200135/approved_documents/80/part_m__access_to_and_use_of_buildings

BS 8300:2009+A1:2010. Design of Buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people: Code of Practice. British Standards Institute. https://www.thenbs.com/PublicationIndex/documents/details?Pub=BSI&DocID=295005

BS 5709:2018. Gaps, gates and styles. British Standards Institute. https://www.thenbs.com/PublicationIndex/documents/details?Pub=BSI&DocID=320915

The Pittecroft Trust has produced a useful guide explaining the key rules of BS 5709:2006 http://www.pittecroft.org.uk/5709.pdf

CRoW, the National Archives http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents

Statutory legislation and HMSO documents www.legislation.gov.uk

Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice: Services, Public Functions and Associations Statutory Code of Practice. London: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

DEFRA Good Practice Guidance on Public Path Structures - guidance for local authorities on compliance with the Equality Act 2010 http://www.pittecroft.org.uk/structureguidance.pdf

Understanding the DEFRA Guidance on Public Path Structures – an overview by the Pittecroft Trust http://www.pittecroft.org.uk/understanding.pdf

National Planning Policy Framework. Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012 http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/

Appendix 5: Contacts

These national and regional organisations promote and support equality and diversity across the range of protected characteristics. They are valuable sources of guidance, examples of good practice and networks. These can also provide useful connections if you are planning community consultation and may be able signpost local groups and organisations.

General equality and diversity

Changing Places http://www.changing-places.org/

Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com/en

Department for Works and Pensions
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions

Widgit https://www.widgit.com/

Age equality

Age UK www.ageuk.org.uk

Street Games www.streetgames.org

Disability equality, including dementia and mental health

Action on Hearing Loss www.hearingloss.org.uk

Disability Rights UK www.disabilityrightsuk.org

Disabled Ramblers www.disabledramblers.co.uk

Euan's Guide https://www.euansguide.com/

Experience Community http://www.experiencecommunity.co.uk/

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/learning-disabilities

Mencap www.mencap.org.uk

Mind www.mind.org.uk

National Autistic Society www.autism.org.uk

Sense www.sense.org.uk

Gender equality

Chwarae Teg www.cteg.org.uk

Gender Identity Research and Education Society www.gires.org.uk

LGBT Foundation https://lgbt.foundation/

Stonewall www.stonewall.org.uk

Unique Transgender www.uniquetg.org.uk

Wipe Out Transphobia www.wipeouttransphobia.com

Equality in religion and belief

Network of Buddhist Organisations www.nbo.org.uk

Hindu Council UK www.hinducounciluk.org

Roman Catholic Archdiocese www.rcadc.org

Evangelical Alliance www.eauk.org

The Interfaith Network www.interfaith.org.uk

Baháí Community www.bahai.org.uk

Muslim Council of Britain www.mcb.org.uk

Racial equality

Black Environment Network (BEN) www.ben-network.org.uk

Displaced People in Action (DPIA) www.dpia.org.uk

Race Equality Foundation www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk

Race Equality First www.refweb.org.uk/

Outdoor access advice and guidance

Accessible Countryside for Everyone www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Age UK www.ageuk.org.uk

Black Environment Network http://www.ben-network.org.uk/index.asp

Centre for Accessible Environments www.cae.org.uk

Centrewire (specialist gates) www.centrewire.com/

Fieldfare Trust www.fieldfare.org.uk

Mind www.mind.org.uk

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

Open Spaces Society www.oss.org.uk

Paths for All www.pathsforall.org.uk/

Pittecroft Trust www.pittecroft.org.uk

Play England www.playengland.org.uk

Ramblers www.ramblers.org.uk

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) www.rnib.org.uk

Scope www.scope.org.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage www.snh.org.uk

Sensory Trust www.sensorytrust.org.uk

Thrive www.thrive.org.uk

Tourism for All www.tourismforall.org.uk

Visit Britain www.visitbritain.com

Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group www.vscg.org

Web Accessibility Initiative www.w3.org/wai

Acknowledgments

The original ‘By All Reasonable Means’ guide was published in 2005 by the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) and Countryside Council for Wales (now Natural Resources Wales). It was designed within the context of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005.

An updated guide for Wales was produced in 2017 by the Sensory Trust in collaboration with, and on behalf of, Natural Resources Wales. It is part of a wider collection of policies and codes of practice being developed by Natural Resources Wales to demonstrate its positive commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion within all areas of its work.

The publication has been updated to align with the Wales guide, while reflecting policies and practices in action in England. It responds to the wider remit of the Equality Act 2010.

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