



KENT COUNTY COUNCIL
**Countryside Access
Improvement Plan**
2007-2017

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FOREWORD

Welcome to Kent County Council's Countryside Access Improvement Plan. The plan sets out the county's aspirations for the countryside access network over the next ten years.

Kent's vast network of public rights of way and areas of open green space have played an important role in the county's past. However, the needs and demands upon this resource have changed.

The network has a new and important role in addressing current issues, such as increasing concerns over traffic congestion and public health, whilst at the same time providing great opportunities for outdoor leisure and recreation. Making Kent a healthy and enjoyable place to work, live and visit are prime objectives of the County Council.

The aim of this Plan is to address these new challenges and prepare Kent for the future.

The Plan is founded and builds upon the feedback of both members of the general public and interested stakeholders, who have contributed through a series of consultations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Ferrin". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Keith Ferrin
Cabinet Member for Environment,
Highways & Waste

VISION

“The purpose of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan is to increase the usage and enjoyment of public rights of way and open green space in Kent. The network of paths should be a gateway for visitors and residents to explore Kent’s heritage, wildlife and iconic landscapes. The Plan supports the regeneration of Kent by delivering improvements which contribute to reducing congestion, support rural business and economy, education, health and, most importantly, the quality of life of the people of Kent”.



1 WHY PRODUCE A COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS IMPROVEMENT PLAN?

1.1 Introduction

Kent people are rightly proud of the county in which they live. The 4200 miles (6700 kilometres) of Public Rights of Way (PROW) are essential for gaining access to its glorious countryside. This historic network of paths, consisting of footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways, and byways is legally protected public highway. These routes form an integral part of the county's transport network, allowing residents and visitors to move around on foot, on bicycle, on horseback and by vehicle. The network provides vital access to services, links between settlements, access from towns and villages into the countryside, and opportunities for quiet recreation, exercise and sport.

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), highway authorities are required to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan by November 2007. This is a new duty placed on local highway authorities and aims to transform a purely reactive service into a visionary, forward-thinking, proactive one, whilst enhancing the value of local rights of way. Improved management, combined with better information provision and the creation of new routes in carefully chosen locations, will make a significant difference to local people. In areas where rights of way area fragmented, new short links between existing routes would provide a wider, more useful local network.

Kent County Council's Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) is written in accordance with the guidance issued to Local Authorities by DEFRA and is Kent's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

1.2 The Plan

This Plan sets out a 10-year strategy for improving access to the countryside based on local and national research. The Plan brings together existing research and new, detailed consultation with members of the public and a wide range of organisations, including the Kent Countryside Access Forum; a statutory advisory body to the County Council on countryside access issues.

The Plan will:

- Evaluate the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- Assess the opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of Kent;
- Assess the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems;
- Provide a strategy for the future proactive management of countryside access in Kent to put in place a more meaningful and sustainable network;
- Support bids for external funding by demonstrating links to a wide range of local and national strategies, in order to maximise opportunities for funding;
- Provide a catalyst for actions that both improve the countryside access estate and raise its profile.

The Countryside Access Improvement Plan is Kent's strategic countryside access development strategy.

All the aspects contained within this plan are designed for making Kent a great place to Work, Live and Visit.

1.3 Methodology

The Improvement Plan Project was split into three phases outlined below:

Research: September 2003 – June 2006

- Literature review (over 300 research papers, strategies, plans, documents and files)
- Public consultation and Use and Demand study
- User group consultations (Including, walking, cycling, equestrians, vehicular access, land managers and younger residents)
- Demonstration projects and promotional literature (on-going)

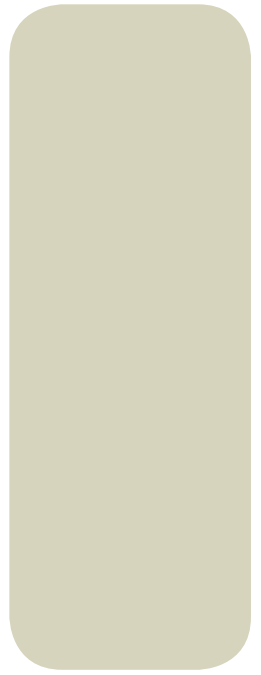
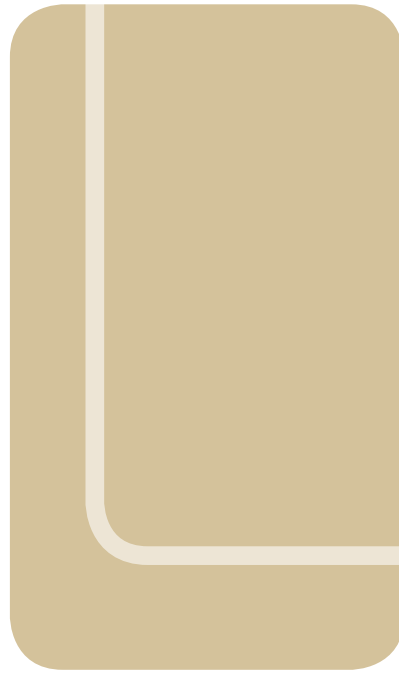
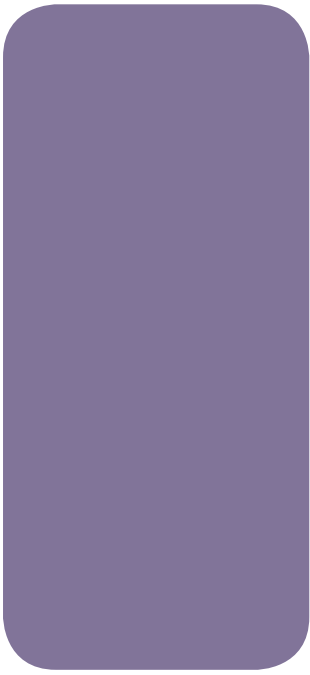
Further details of the research and consultation undertaken can be found in Appendix B.

Assessment, Analysis and Mapping: July 2005-June 2006

- Create Geographical Information Systems (GIS) datasets necessary for analysis of the Definitive Map of public rights of way.
- Analysis of Use and Demand study and other research. Categorise findings into 'themes'.
- Write draft high-level policy themes and objectives.
- Link research findings to the Local Transport Plan.

Write Up and Publication: March 2006 – November 2007

- Prioritise 'themes' through a public consultation exercise.
- Partnership building with the Kent Local Access Forum and external partners.
- Consultation on draft CAIP – analysis of feedback and revision. October 2007
- Publication of final Improvement Plan. November 2007.
- Formal adoption by Kent County Council Cabinet. 6th February 2008



2 POLICY CONTEXT

2. Policy Context

It is important to recognise the contribution that public rights of way and green space can make to public priorities such as health, quality of life, sustainable tourism, transport, social inclusion and economic development.

The Improvement Plan will provide direction for the future management of public rights of way and access to public green space. In doing so, it will achieve positive results for a wide range of key strategic objectives at national, regional, county and local levels, including those contained within the Vision for Kent and Towards 2010 strategies. These objectives are set out in the following policy documents.

2.1 Overview

General

- South East Plan, SEEDA. www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan
- Towards 2010, KCC 2006. www.kent.gov.uk
- Vision for Kent – Community Strategy, Kent Partnership 2006. www.kent.gov.uk
- The Kent Agreement – Kent Local Area Agreement and KCC Local Public Service Agreement 2 www.kent.gov.uk
- Local (District/Borough) Development Frameworks

Spatial Planning

- Kent and Medway Structure Plan, KCC 2006 www.kent.gov.uk
- PPS 7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, DCLG www.communities.gov.uk
- PPS 12 – Local Development Frameworks, DCLG www.communities.gov.uk

Environment and Landscape

- Rural Strategy, DEFRA 2004 www.defra.gov.uk
- Kent Environment Strategy, KCC 2003 www.kent.gov.uk
- High Weald Management Plan 2004-2024, AONB www.highweald.org
- Kent Downs Management Plan 2004-2009, AONB www.kentdowns.org.uk
- PPS 11 – Regional Spatial Strategy, DCLG www.communities.gov.uk

Recreation and Tourism

- Kent Tourism Partnership Framework, 2005-2015. www.ktanet.co.uk
- South East Tourism, 2004 www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com
- Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales, 2005 www.bhic.co.uk
- PPG 17 – Planning for open space, sport and recreation, DCLG www.communities.gov.uk
- PPG 21 – Tourism, DCLG www.communities.gov.uk

Transport

- National Cycling Strategy, DfT www.dft.gov.uk
- PPG 13 – Transport, DCLG www.communities.gov.uk
- Walking and Cycling, an action plan, DfT 2004 www.dft.gov.uk
- Local Transport Plan for Kent 2006-11, KCC www.kent.gov.uk/transport-and-streets

Health

- Choosing Health DH, 2004 www.dh.gov.uk
- A Strategy for Public Health in Kent, KCC, 2007 (Draft)

Below are some of the most relevant strategies and plans whose objectives are closely aligned with the Improvement Plan. The Statement of Action within this Plan is designed to contribute towards these strategies and plans. In turn, some of the policies and pre-determined targets within these documents will help deliver the objectives of the CAIP.

2.2 Vision for Kent KCC 2006

The community strategy for the county sets the direction for all key players to improve the quality of life for everyone in Kent.

Goals for Kent are to:

- Promote healthy lifestyles, positive behaviour and relationships, respect for equality and diversity, moral, emotional and spiritual development and environmental awareness
- Provide people with the infrastructure to use public rights of way and access the countryside in order to encourage people to walk or cycle more on a daily basis
- Reverse the growth in road traffic and its impacts, reducing the need to travel by car and lorry and making better use of existing transport infrastructure before building more of it
- Create an attractive place in which tourism and leisure is developed in a structured and sustainable way
- Make the coast, countryside and historic environment accessible to all and recognise its contribution to quality of life
- Develop visitor management strategies for Kent's country parks, open access countryside and public rights of way
- Reduce the environmental impacts of transport by promoting alternative fuels, public transport, walking and cycling
- Develop local rights of way so that they are more useful for trips to public transport stops, local shops, schools and services
- Improve public rights of way and provide people with information about them so they have the confidence to use them

2.3 Towards 2010 KCC 2006

The KCC's policy document setting out the County Council's plans to deliver the following goals up to 2010:

- Increased prosperity for Kent through business growth and job creation
- Transformation in education
- Reduced traffic congestion
- Improved health and quality of life
- Quality homes in a well-managed environment
- A safer Kent
- Continued improvements in services while keeping council tax down

Related Targets:

Target 48 Increase opportunities for everyone to take regular physical exercise

Target 45 Protect and enhance Kent's ancient woodlands and improve access to countryside, coast and heritage

2.4 The Local Transport Plan

When the Department for Transport was preparing its guidance for second Local Transport Plans it recognised that, as public highways, rights of ways are a key ingredient in the development of an integrated transport network, and play an important role in helping LTPs deliver the shared priorities for transport and wider quality of life objectives. The *Full Guidance on Local Transport Plans* (Dec 2004) states that "Rights of way improvement planning will be progressively incorporated into local transport planning".

One of the aims of integrating the two plans is to establish shared objectives and establish a definite link between Improvement Plans and LTPs.

The headline vision for LTP2 is:

“To provide good, safe accessibility to jobs and services for all sections of the community in Kent, and to improve the environment and health of the community by reducing congestion and pollution, widening the choice of transport available, and by developing public transport, walking and cycling.”

The LTP has ten objectives which support the Vision, these are:

- Accessibility
- Demand Management
- Environment, Heritage and Communities
- Health
- Integration
- Keep Kent Moving
- Road Safety
- Sustainable Regeneration
- UK Connections
- UK Gateway

Whilst rights of way will support all of these objectives, the main contribution will be to the objectives of:

Accessibility

“Kent County Council will support independence and reduce social exclusion by improving transport links to key destinations and bringing services closer to communities”

Environment, Heritage and Communities

“Kent County Council will stabilise and, where possible, reverse the adverse effect of transport and its infrastructure on the natural and built environment and on local communities”

Health

“Kent County Council will improve the health of Kent residents by reducing the impact of transport, encouraging increased physical activity and enhancing access to key health facilities”

Within the LTP Policies, Policy ACC3 - Public Rights of Way, was developed jointly by the Countryside Access Service and LTP team. It states that:

“KCC will improve access to goods and services through improvements to the public rights of way network”

Other policies with strong links are:

Policy DM2 - Walking

“KCC will encourage walking as an alternative to the private car for local journeys”

Policy DM3 - Cycling

“KCC will encourage cycling as an alternative to the private car for local journeys”

The rest of the chapter on public rights of way outlines the work to date on the Improvement Plan, the stages remaining to be carried out before publication, and the type of schemes that would be considered for implementation during the LTP period 2006-11.

In order to ensure that the schemes being implemented during LTP2 offer value for money, as well as delivering against the LTP objectives, KCC has developed a prioritisation methodology called PIPKIN. This process assesses each scheme against a wide range of objectives, targets and other priorities, and assigns scores between 1 and 100, with higher-scoring schemes being those offering better value for money. Measures arising from Improvement Plan for consideration in the LTP Programme will be put through PIPKIN and assessed accordingly. The Countryside Access Service will work closely with Kent Highways Services to put forward joint projects.

The Guidance on LTPs envisages full integration between the Improvement Plan and Local Transport Plan from 2010 onwards under LTP3.

2.5 Walking Strategy KCC 2001

The general aims of the walking strategy are to improve the safety, personal security and attractiveness of walking in Kent.

The plan has seven main objectives with defined targets. These are to:

- Reduce the vulnerability of pedestrians and promote their safety and security.
- Promote walking as a safer mode of transport to school
- Reduce peak period car journeys, including those to work, and to reduce short distance car journeys in general, in order to reduce congestion and pollution and to promote healthy living
- Ensure developments are pedestrian-friendly
- Encourage walking as part of an integrated transport policy
- Promote the benefits of walking
- Develop recreational walking

2.6 Cycling Strategy Appendix 9 KCC Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2006–2011

The cycling strategy outlines national, regional and local objectives, proposes a policy for cycling in Kent and outlines all the strategy themes which contribute towards the LTP objectives and targets. Further consultation is being completed and the document thus forms only a draft action plan at this stage.

The objectives of the LTP for cycling are set within three core themes:

Facilities: Improvements in integrated planning and the provision of suitable facilities such as parking, signage and design.

Safety: Encouraging and promoting safe routes to schools, providing cycle training and ensuring high standards of cycle route maintenance.

Promotion and Education: Promotional events, travel plans, consultation and partnership working.

2.7 Kent & Medway Structure Plan (Adopted Policy, July 2006)

The Kent & Medway Structure Plan (2006) sets the strategic planning framework for the protection of the environment, major transport priorities, and the scale, pattern and broad location of new development (including new housing and major economic development). The following policies are worth noting:

- **SP1 - Conserving and enhancing Kent's environment:** and ensuring a sustainable pattern of development includes reducing the need to travel, encouraging the availability of a choice of transport, reducing growth in dependence on the road network and fostering good accessibility to jobs and services for all sections of the community.
- **QL3 - Movement and accessibility in the public realm:** includes a commitment to establish programmes for a network of high quality, direct and convenient pedestrian and cycle routes linking urban areas, residential areas with community facilities / services and the principal urban areas with the surrounding countryside.
- **QL17 - Green-space networks and rights of way:** existing open space and public rights of way will be protected and improved as part of these networks, which, where possible, should extend through major new development sites and connect directly with community facilities, employment areas and transport hubs. In urban areas local authorities will establish and extend green space networks as corridors for movement by foot and cycle, as havens for wildlife and natural habitats and for leisure amenity and recreational use.
- **QL18 - Strategic Green Space Initiatives:** Major infrastructure programmes will be developed to maintain, enhance and extend green space, heritage, wildlife and access initiatives, especially those in Gravesham, Medway and the Lower Stour Catchments.

- **TP11 - Facilities for Pedestrians and Cyclists:** Facilities for pedestrians and cyclists will be provided and their use promoted. Local authorities should ensure that these are included in the design of all transport projects and other developments. Land should be safeguarded to provide safe and direct pedestrian and cycle routes where necessary.
- **EN12 – River Corridors:** The environment within river corridors and river catchments, including the landscape, water environment and wildlife habitats, will be conserved and enhanced. Where consistent with this, provision will be made for:
 - Increased opportunities for access and water recreation.
 - Increased public access for walking, cycling and horse riding and links to existing rights of way and cycleway networks.

2.8 Draft South East Regional Plan

The Draft South East Plan was submitted to Government on 31 March 2006, following two years of intensive work by the Regional Assembly with local authorities and stakeholders. It sets out a vision for the region for the period 2006 - 2026. The relevant policies are:

Communications and Transport

- **T1:** Manage and Invest, (ii) Achieve a rebalancing of the transport system in favour of non-car modes as a means of access to services and facilities. (vi) Include measures that reduce overall number of road casualties.
- **T2:** Rural Transport, (ii) Include a rural dimension to transport and traffic management policies, including looking for opportunities to improve provision for cyclists and pedestrians between towns and the nearest villages.

Sustainable Natural Resource Management

- **NRM4:** Conservation and improvement of Biodiversity. (vi) Maintaining and establishing accessible green networks and open green space in urban areas.

Countryside and Landscape Management.

- **C4:** Countryside Access and Rights of Way Management. (i) Maintaining, enhancing and promoting the public rights of way system, and permissive and longer distance routes, to facilitate access within, to and from the countryside for visitors and all members of the community. (ii) Identifying opportunities and planning for routes within and between settlements, seeking to reduce car use for shorter journeys. (iii) Where possible, making new routes multi-functional to allow pedestrians, horses and cyclists to use them.

Tourism and Related Sports and Recreation

- **TSR2:** Rural Tourism, (ii) In surrounding countryside areas with significant tourism potential, local authorities should identify actions to strengthen linkages between market towns and their hinterlands through the provision of integrated, sustainable transport and complementary product development, investment and marketing.

Social, Cultural and Health Dimensions

- **S3:** Supporting Healthy Communities. (i) Community access to amenities such as parks, open spaces, physical recreational activity, and cultural facilities. (iii) Healthier forms of transport, by incorporating cycle lanes and safe footpaths in planned developments.

2.9 Kent Downs AONB Management Plan

The management plan sets in place clear policies and actions for the conservation, management and enhancement of the AONB for the period 2004-2009, also taking into consideration a longer term view. The AONB covers an area of 878 sq. km stretching from Dover to the Surrey Border.

Policies relating to countryside access include:

AEU1 – Co-ordinated information about visitor use, recreation and access across the AONB will be promoted, which is accurate, well presented, and readily available and which will help to foster a greater understanding and respect for the AONB.

AEU2 – The sustainable management of open access sites through the Local Access Forums, and the partnership approach to the statutory Rights of Way Improvement plan will be supported.

AEU3 – Mechanisms will be supported to resolve and improve conflicts between permitted users of Public Rights of Way, and where there are conflicts from illegal or damaging activities.

AEU4 – Improvements to the waymarking, signposting and maintenance of public rights of way network will be encouraged.

AEU5 – Opportunities for high quality enjoyment and understanding of the AONB will be provided to all people, to ensure overall quality of the visitor-experience is high and to engage visitors in the aims and objectives of the AONB.

AEU6 – Provision and management of safe and quiet links between the Public Rights of Way, particularly for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, will be supported.

AEU7 – Attain high standards of landscape and recreational management, visitor facilities and access opportunities, and increase opportunities for learning through a programme of training, events, farm walks and gateway routes and sites.

AEU8 – Encourage sustainable tourism and quiet enjoyment of the AONB in targeted areas where this will increase understanding of AONB objectives and where it will bring new opportunities to the rural economy.

2.10 Kent High Weald AONB Management Plan

The High Weald covers an area of 1,457 sq. km and covers the Wealden areas of four counties, Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey. Produced in 2004 the plan sets out a 20-year strategy for protecting the AONB.

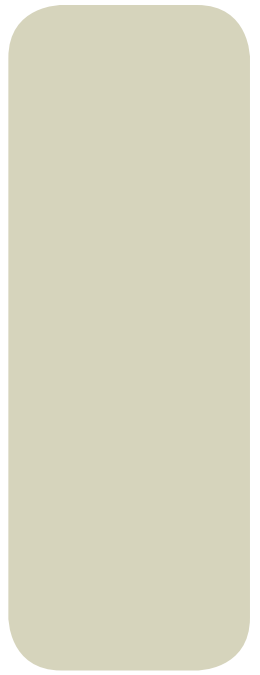
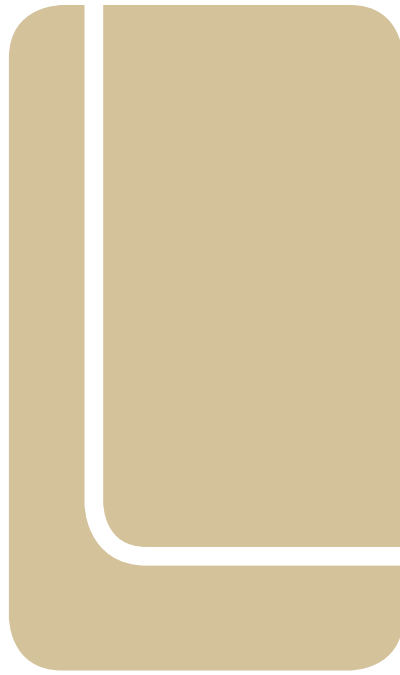
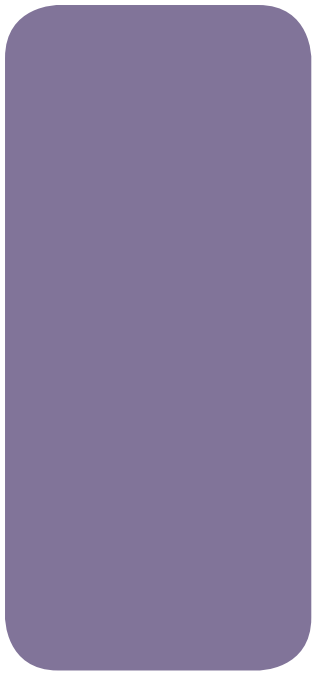
Relevant indicators of success are as follows:

Objective UE4

- i.) Improved maintenance standards of the rights of way network in areas close to towns, villages, visitor attractions and within the AONB rural tourism hubs.
- ii.) Increased range of high quality promoted access opportunities that meet the needs of all users.
- iii.) Development of key strategic links in the rights of way network for all walkers, cyclists and riders.
- iv.) Improved links between promoted informal access opportunities and public transport provision.
- v.) Action to reduce traffic impact on AONB lanes with a high level of leisure use.
- vi.) Integrated approach to the development and promotion of “green” tourism.

Objective R1

- i.) Increased protection for, and awareness of, the best preserved examples of networks of ancient routeways.

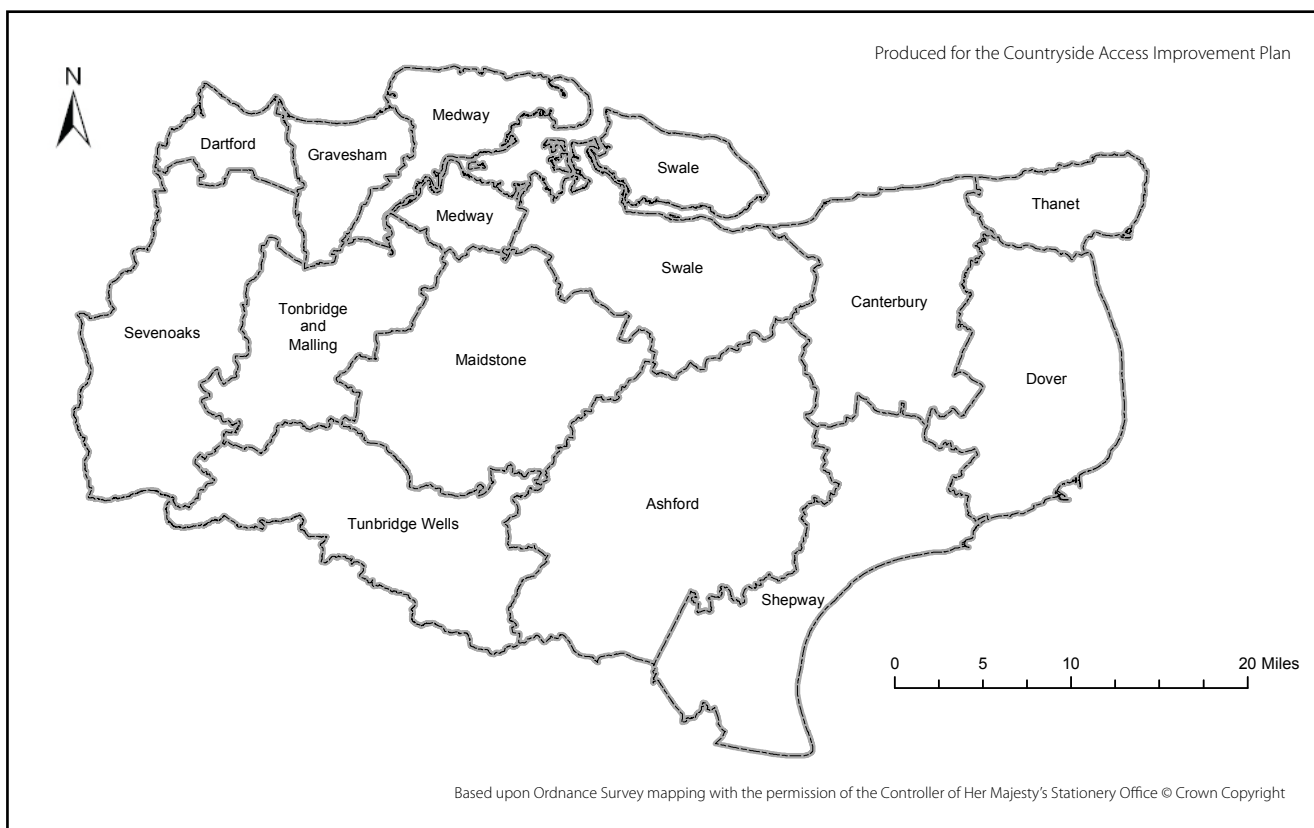


3 KENT "THE GARDEN OF ENGLAND"

3.1 A Picture of Kent

Kent has a rich natural and cultural heritage, which makes a significant contribution to the high quality of life in the county.

The county is made up of 12 District/Borough Councils and 304 Parish Councils, covering an area of 352,296 hectares. Within the county is the administratively-independent unitary authority of Medway. Kent's main administrative centre is the county town of Maidstone. Historic Canterbury, the only city within the county, is dominated by its Norman cathedral and is home to the county's university.



Map 1. District Boundaries

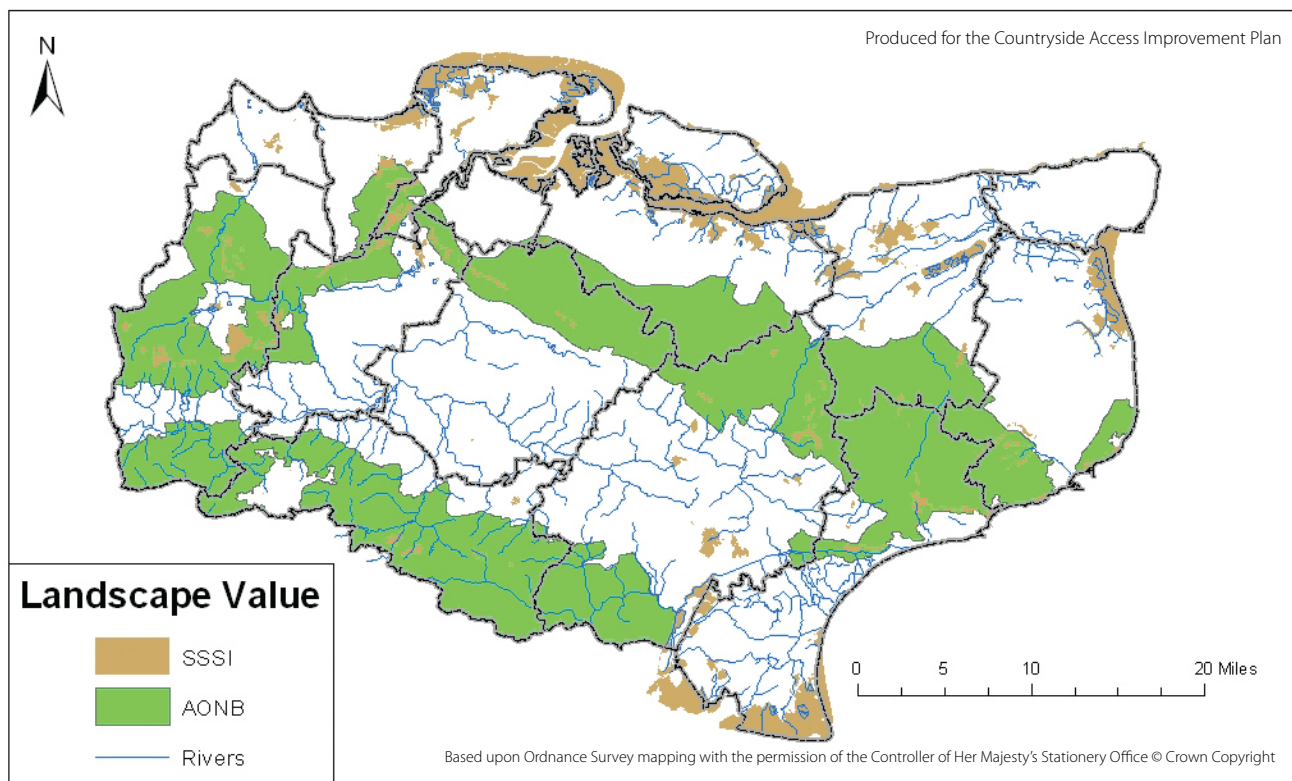
3.2 The Natural Environment and Heritage

Countryside / Landscape/ Biodiversity

Kent has always been known as the 'Garden of England', thanks to a traditional pattern of agriculture, including orchards and hop gardens. With a landscape made up of rolling chalk downs, secluded dry valleys, ancient woodland and orchards, chalk cliffs, salt marsh, sand dunes and historic villages and sites, Kent has one of the most interesting in the country. Around 70% of land in Kent is agricultural, with nearly one quarter of residents living in these rural areas.

Kent supports a great diversity of habitats and species, largely stemming from its varied geology and land use history. Kent is also a stronghold for many species of rare or protected animals and plants, such as the dormouse, Adonis Blue butterfly, lady-orchid and man-orchid, as well as being home to many insects which are not known to occur anywhere else in Britain. The county is home to 28 of the UK priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, and has internationally important numbers of wintering, breeding and migrating birds.

The quality of Kent's landscapes is nationally recognised and protected through designations such as the Kent Downs and High Weald Area's of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the South Foreland & Dover-Folkestone Heritage coasts. Kent has over 500 conservation areas, more than any other county.



Map 2. Landscape Values

While Kent is home to a rich mosaic of wildlife and habitats, there is no room for complacency. We need to protect and enhance the number of plant and animal species in Kent, and the quality of their habitats. New development, particularly in the identified growth areas, will place further pressure on existing habitats and access opportunities. Partnership with developers can offer opportunities to link existing habitats and create new green space.

Biodiversity, as well as being important in its own right, makes a significant contribution to the quality of life and well being of the people of Kent, and to the attractive environment in which they live and work. Carefully managed access and educational material can increase awareness and appreciation of our fragile environment. The richness of our countryside is due largely to the careful management of reserves by organisations such as Natural England, The National Trust, Kent Wildlife Trust, The RSPB, The Forestry Commission, together with the work of private landowners and our own country parks and countryside management projects.



Picture: Bluebells

History and Heritage

People have been living and working in Kent for almost half a million years and the traces of their activities surround us. Their houses and homes, farms, settlements, towns and villages and places of worship and burial have helped shape modern Kent and remain important and visible links with our past.

The variety of sites in Kent is very wide, dating from some of England's oldest human remains from Swanscombe (c. 400,000 years old) to the present day.

Kent was the site of the first Roman invasions and the county contains some stunning Roman remains. Richborough Fort, near Sandwich, is described by English Heritage as one of the most symbolically important of all Roman sites in Britain. Both Richborough and the dramatically situated Reculver Fort can be visited from the popular walking trail, "The Saxon Shore Way". Kent has many castles, including Dover, with its secret wartime tunnels from where the Dunkirk evacuation was organised in World War II.

Home to four of the original "Cinque Ports" first mentioned in the Royal Charter of 1155, Kent's coast is steeped in fascinating maritime heritage, from the oldest sea-going boat in the world, the Dover Bronze Age Boat (now in Dover Museum) to the great Georgian seaside resorts of Margate and Ramsgate.

Over 18,000 listed buildings demonstrate the character and variety of the built environment, which includes the locally characteristic oast houses and windmills. Sandwich has a greater density of listed buildings than any town in England and the most spectacular architectural achievements can be seen at the UNESCO world heritage site of Canterbury, which includes its famous cathedral.



Picture : Canterbury Cathedral

These remains are our inheritance and they help us to connect with the past, to understand where we have come from and to see how modern Kent has come to assume the shape and character that it has. Our heritage also has an important role to play in the future. New communities are being created in Kent at a rapid rate. These historic remains contribute to these new communities feeling part of the continuing story of the county helping them gain a sense of place and belonging. Similarly, survivals from the past can help to regenerate older communities as older buildings and monuments often form the most distinctive and prized elements of a modern town.

Kent's heritage is also very important to the economy of the county as its historic towns, buildings and monuments attract huge numbers of tourists every year. It also provides opportunities for exploration and enjoyment to residents, offering great days out for people of all ages.

In 2006 the South East had the highest level of visitors to historic sites of any region, with about 76% of adults visiting sites compared to about 69% nationally.

As well as being a heritage resource itself, Kent's vast public rights of way network offers endless potential for accessing the county's heritage on foot, bicycle and horse back. The Improvement Plan will seek to develop the network to increase sustainable access to our heritage.



Picture: Leeds Castle

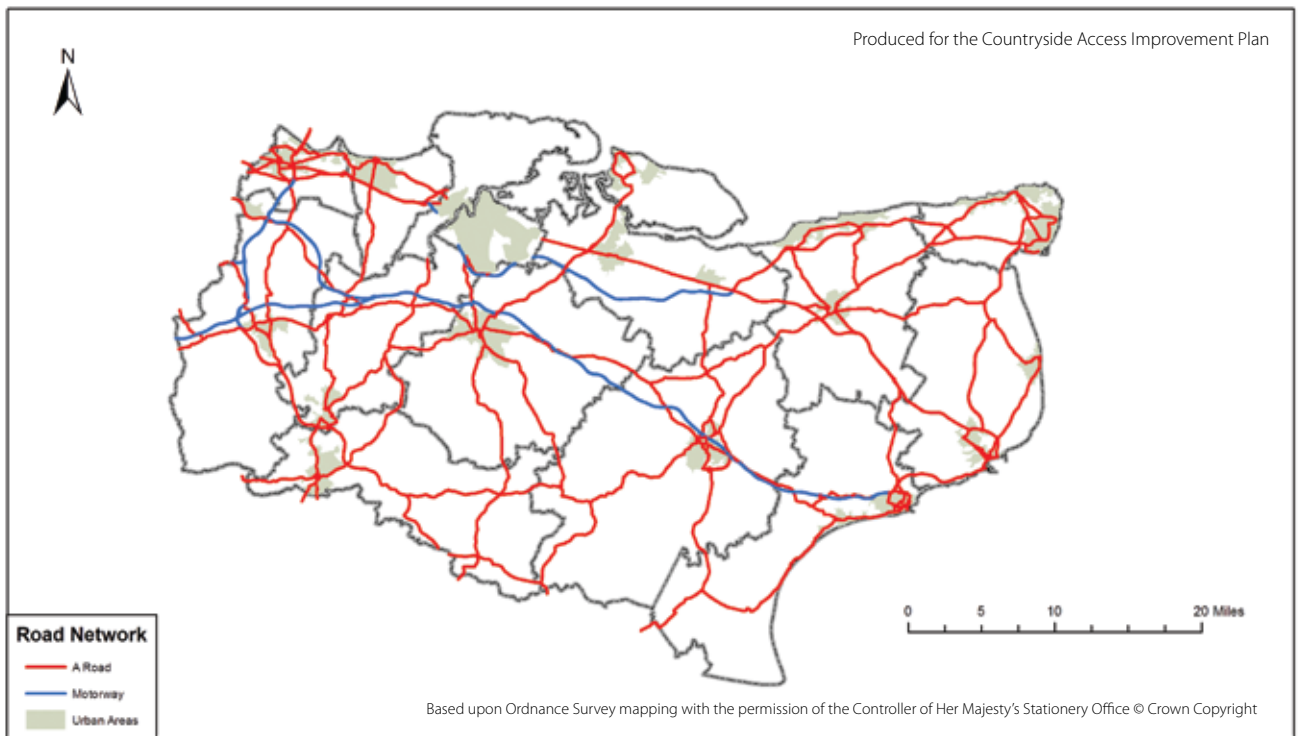
3.3 Transport and Population

Transport

Sandwiched between London and Europe Kent has huge population centres on its doorstep. There is no single dominant urban area in the county itself, which has eighteen towns and one city, all with strong relationships to rural areas. The network of public rights of way, linking urban fringes to the wider countryside, offers great potential for recreation and essential links to village communities.

Many people commute into and out of the county by rail and road, both for work and for leisure. On a typical weekday over 16 million miles are driven by cars on Kent's roads (excluding lorries and other vehicles). The heavy volume of freight traffic adds to the environmental impact of this travel. Kent is the principal gateway between Britain and mainland Europe, with a high volume of road and rail traffic travelling through Kent to reach the ports and the Channel Tunnel. Over 14 million passengers passed through the Port of Dover in 2004.¹

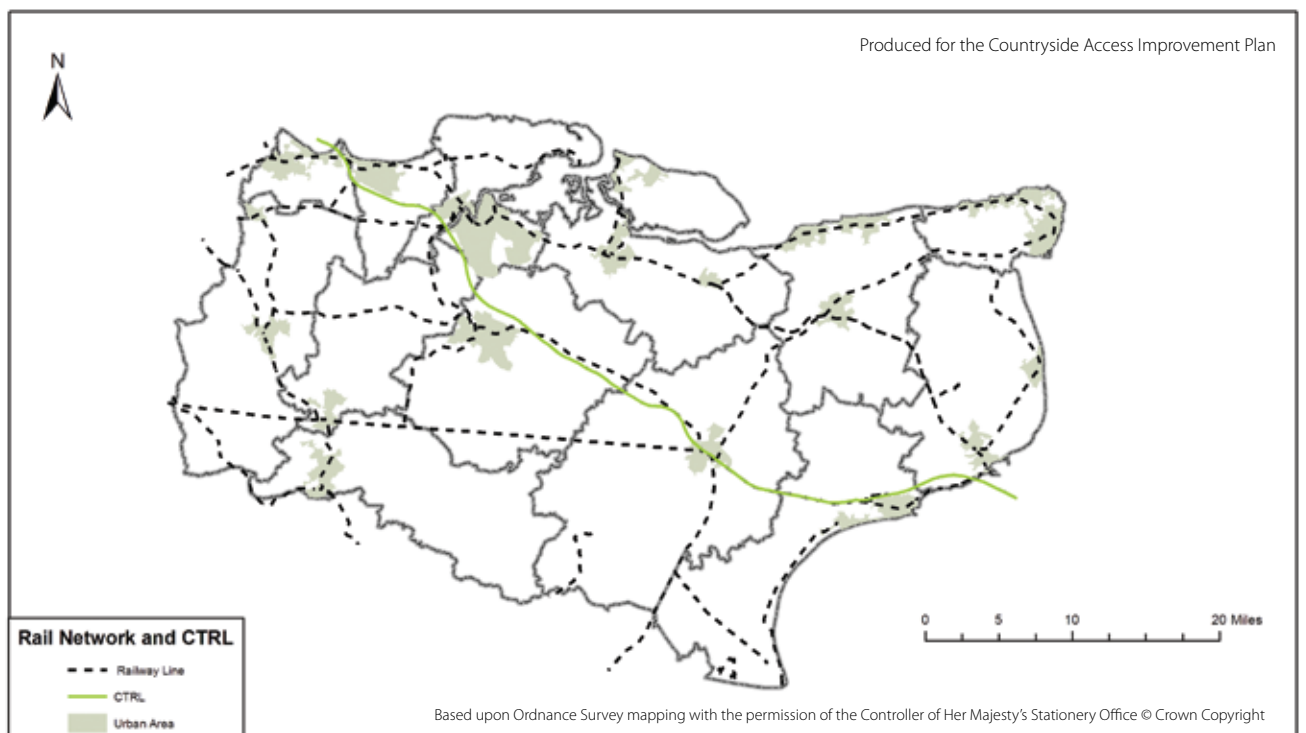
¹ Port of Dover Annual statistics



Map 3. Road Network

Because of the topography of the Downs escarpment, many of these transport patterns are east-west, along the M2 or M20 corridor. Travelling north-south using roads or public transport becomes much harder.

Traffic in Kent is increasing at a rate nearly one third higher than the national average and poses a real problem for the future. Integrated public transport services need to be developed to provide a viable alternative for commuters and people socially isolated in rural communities. Both central Government and the Local Transport Plan identify an increased use of public rights of way as an essential sustainable option. One of the most interesting statistics to come from the National Travel Survey (DfT, 2001) is that nearly a quarter of all car trips were shorter than two miles. New and improved public rights of way will be vital in minimising the social and environmental impact of these shorter journeys.



Map 4. Rail Network

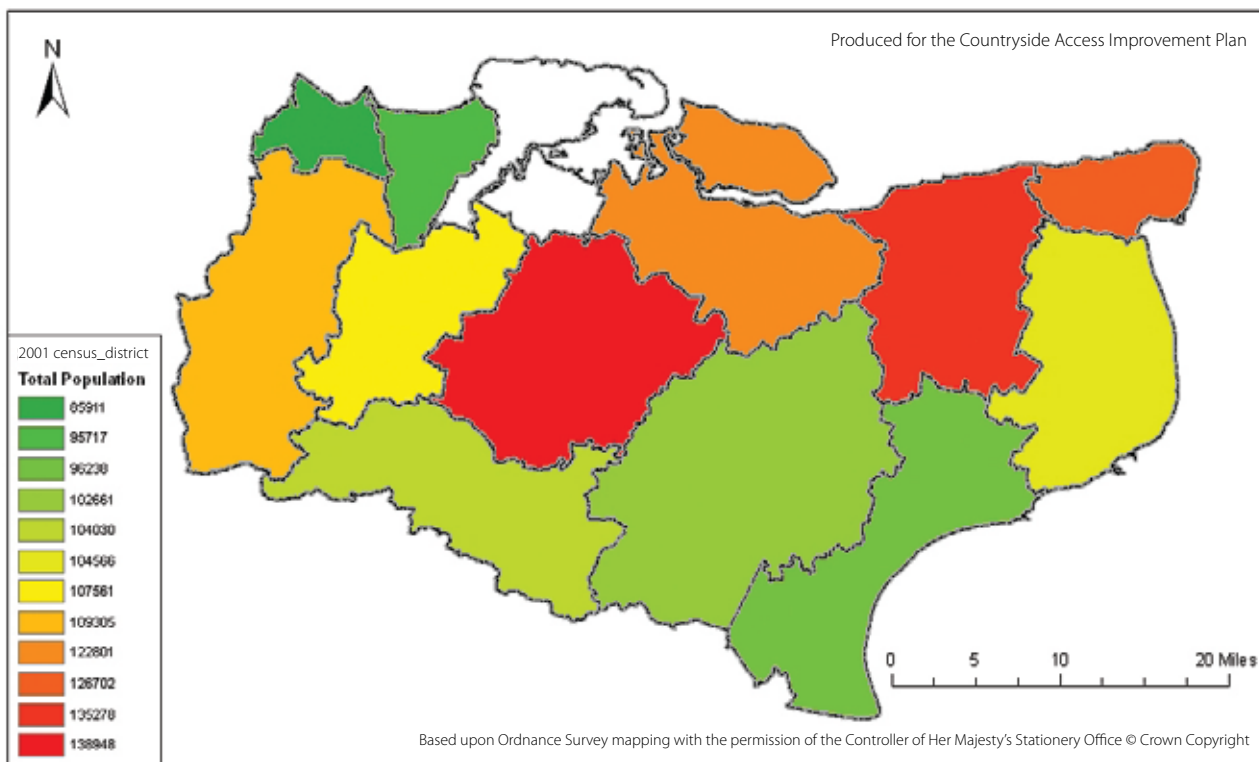
Population

The population of Kent, excluding Medway is just over 1.3 million, and between 1991-2001 grew by nearly 3%. It was expected that the population would rise by a further 4.5% in the following 10 years. The natural increase in population (excess of births over deaths) is very low, and in 2000 was around 200 for the whole of Kent. However, regional variations within the county are quite significant as over the same period, the population of East Kent, which has a generally older profile, had a net loss of over 1300 people. Unsurprisingly, the largest increases in population are expected in the identified development growth areas. These larger communities will produce increasing pressures on existing green space and provide new challenges for delivering new requirements for open space and public rights of way. Predicted forecast figures are available in the "Population forecast strategy Sept 06" (Appendix D). Overall population in the South East is expected to rise by 13% by 2029.²

The UK as a whole has an ageing population and in mid-2003 the percentage of people aged 65 and over was 16%. The most significant growth in age structure since the 1991 census is in the 45-59 age band – tomorrow’s elderly. A well-maintained footway and public rights of way network is essential for elderly people, for exercise and recreation as well as to provide access to local services.

In terms of ethnicity, Kent has an overwhelming white majority of nearly 97%. In some areas, particular groups may have a higher representation than in the Kent population as a whole – for example, just over 7% of Gravesham population is of Asian origin.

In Kent, some 13% of people are registered disabled – approximately 178,000. Having said that, up to two-thirds of Kent’s population could be affected by limited mobility at some point in their lives. This could include parents with pushchairs, elderly people, etc.



Map 5. Total Population

² ONS Population Trend Report. Winter 2006



4 CURRENT ACCESS PROVISION

Introduction

This next section looks initially into the provision of public rights of way, and then on to the wider countryside access estate, such as country parks and open access land.

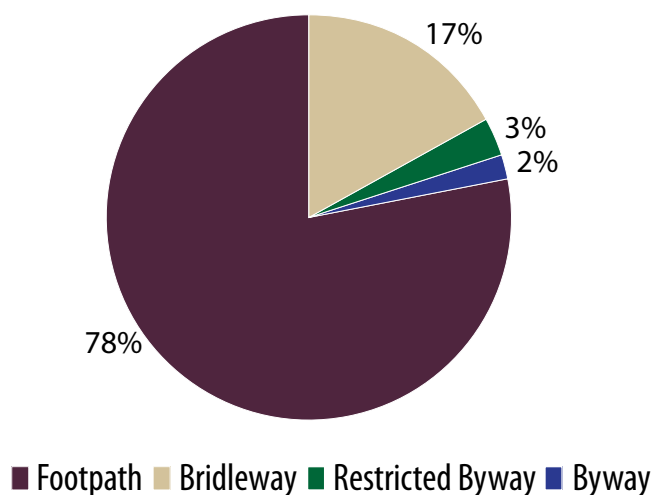
4.1 Public Rights of Way

England and Wales have a unique network of publicly-accessible paths and tracks, which are legally, protected public highways. They are mostly used as a means to access and enjoy the countryside. However, some also serve as sustainable commuter routes or provide vital links between rural communities.

In England there are approximately 118,000 miles (190,000 kilometres)³ of recorded public rights of way, compared to 185,031 miles (297,779 kilometres) of public roads⁴. Kent has 5,276 miles (8,491 kilometres) of public roads and 4,164 miles (6,705 kilometres) of public rights of way. The rights of way network within Kent constitutes a significant amount (42%) of available public highway, above the national average of 39%.

The County Council manages a larger rights of way network than any other local authority. When compared to national averages, Kent's rights of way network has a higher percentage of paths with footpath status. Consequently, a lower than average percentage of the network is available to cyclists and horse riders. Kent's bridleway network is 7% less than the national average.

National PROW Provision



Regional PROW Provision

In comparison with its neighbouring authorities Kent has a larger public rights of way network. However, Kent has a much shorter distance of paths available to cyclists and horse riders than both East Sussex and Surrey.

County	Footpaths	%	Bridleways	%	Restricted Byways	%	Byways	%	Totals
Kent	3499	85%	435	10%	92	2%	138	3%	4164
East Sussex	1523	73%	445	21%	92	4%	35	2%	2095
Surrey	1367	65%	677	32%	0		74	3%	2118
Medway	143	85%	10	6%	7	4%	7	4%	167

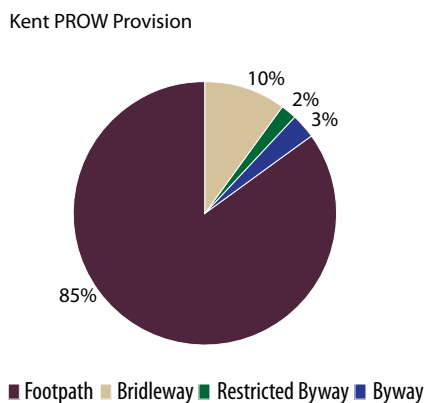
Table of neighbouring county networks in miles.

³ www.countryside.gov.uk

⁴ DfT 2004, National Statistics

4.2 Summary of Kent's Rights of Way Network

Footpath	3499 Miles	5633km
Bridleway	435 Miles	701km
Restricted Byway	92 Miles	149km
Byway	138 Miles	222km



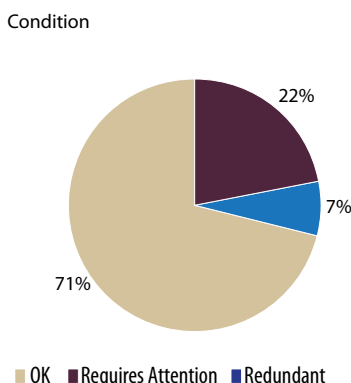
In summer 2007 the County Council completed a comprehensive condition survey of Kent's public rights of way network. The valuable information gathered from this four-year project will enable the council to make informed management decisions and provide members of the public with accurate guidance on the condition of the network. The survey provides a starting point to help area officers keep the Countryside Access Management System (CAMS) up to date. The availability of detailed and accurate information was something frequently requested during the research phase of the Improvement Plan.

4.3 Asset Statistics

Stiles

Type	Number	%
1 step	9661	76
2 step	2411	19
Ladder	184	2
Other	469	3
Total	12725	

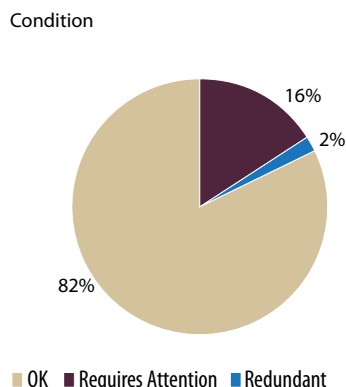
Nominal asset value⁵ (2007) £276,000.



Gates & Structured Gaps

Type	Number	%
Field Gate	2282	40
Kissing Gate	1079	19
Pedestrian Gate	1004	17
Bridle Gate	392	7
Gap/Chicane	442	8
Other	552	9
Total	5751	

Nominal asset value (2007) £696,000



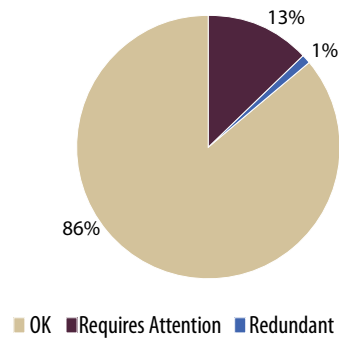
⁵ Nominal Asset Value is based on current market prices and is subject to price fluctuation and the effect of management decisions.

Bridges

Type	Number	%
Footbridge	1423	46
Sleeper	1227	40
Vehicular	309	10
Other	128	4
Total	3087	

Nominal asset value (2007) £3,539,320

Condition

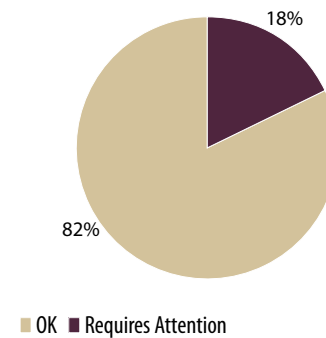


Fingerposts

Type	Number	%
Fingerpost	10318	83%
Milestone	2176	17%
Fingerpost Required	1405	
Total	12494	

Nominal asset value (2007) £278,000

Condition

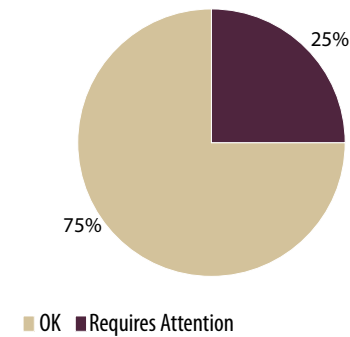


Waymarkers

Type	Number
Waymarks Required	4576
Waymarkers	13521
Total	18097

Nominal asset value (2007) £181,000

Condition



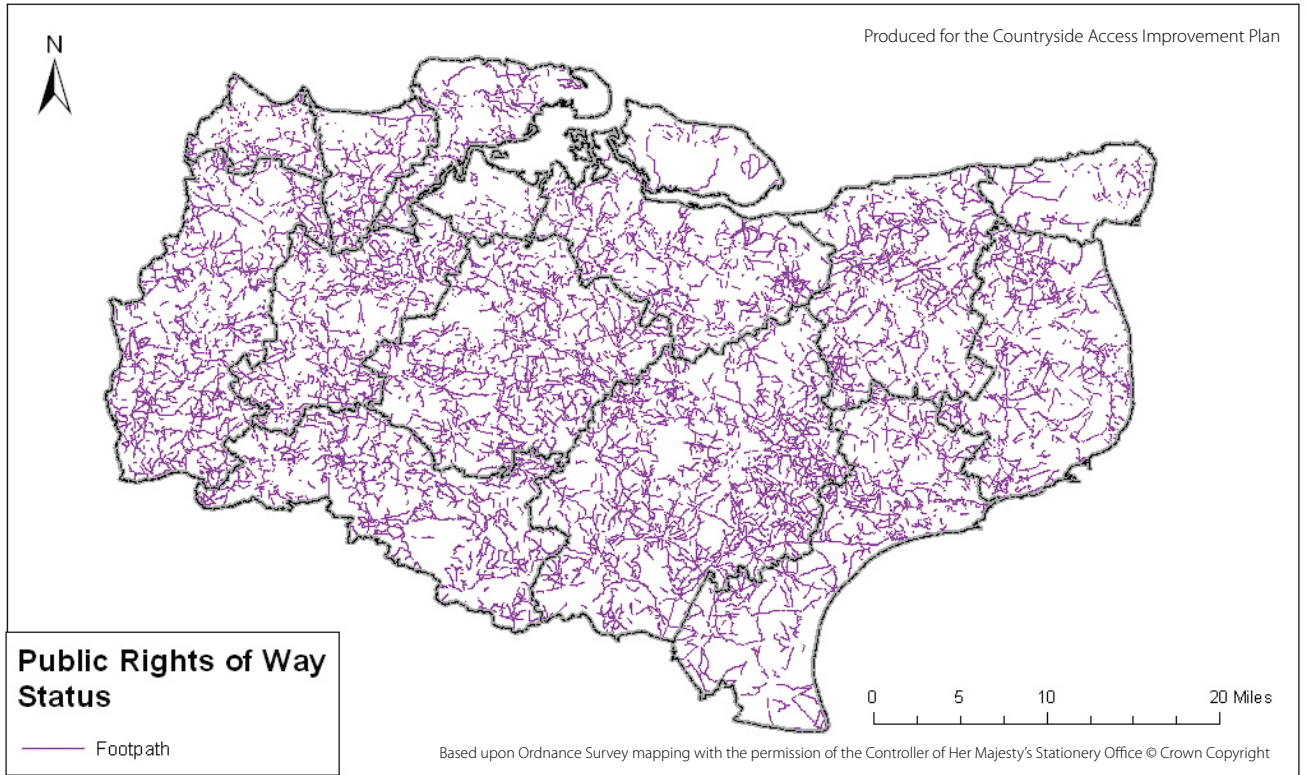
Surface Condition

Surfaced	887m	1427km	21%
Un-surfaced	3313m	5333km	79%

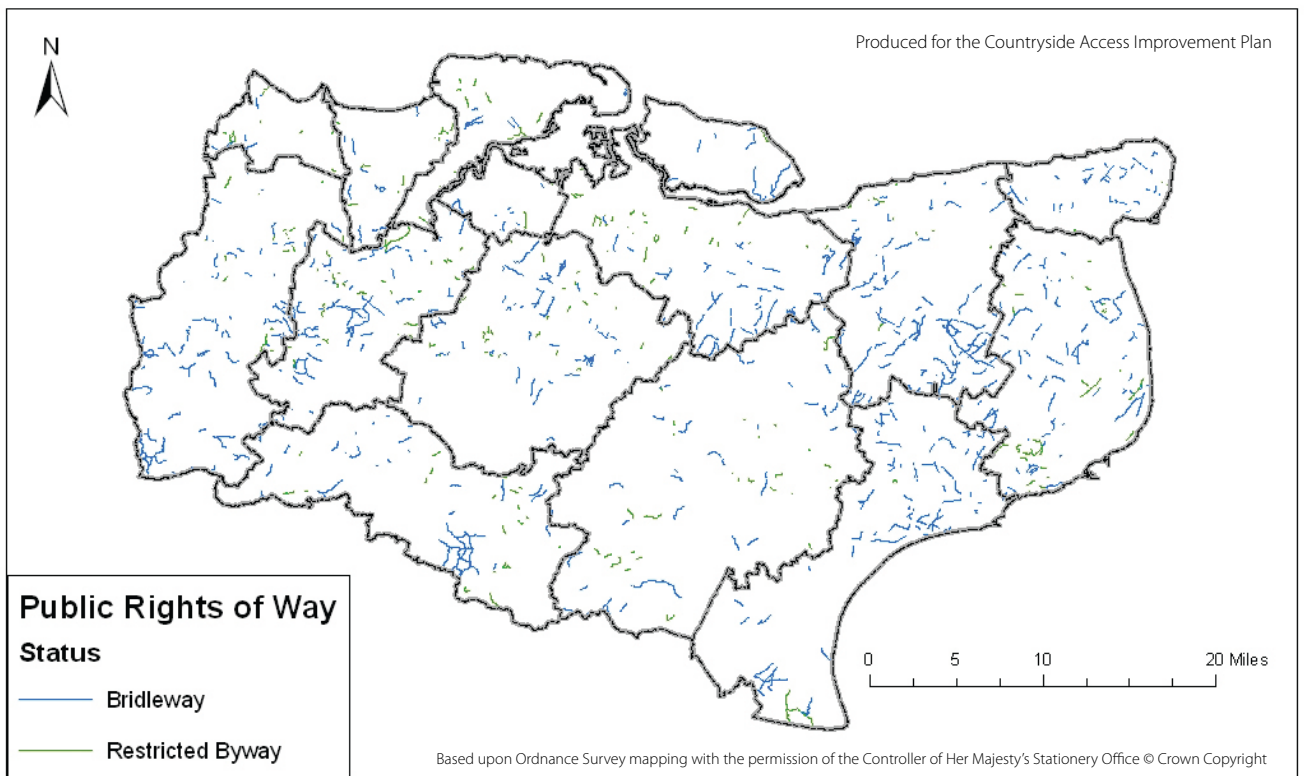
Nominal asset value (2007) £21,405,000

Total Asset Value = £26,375,320

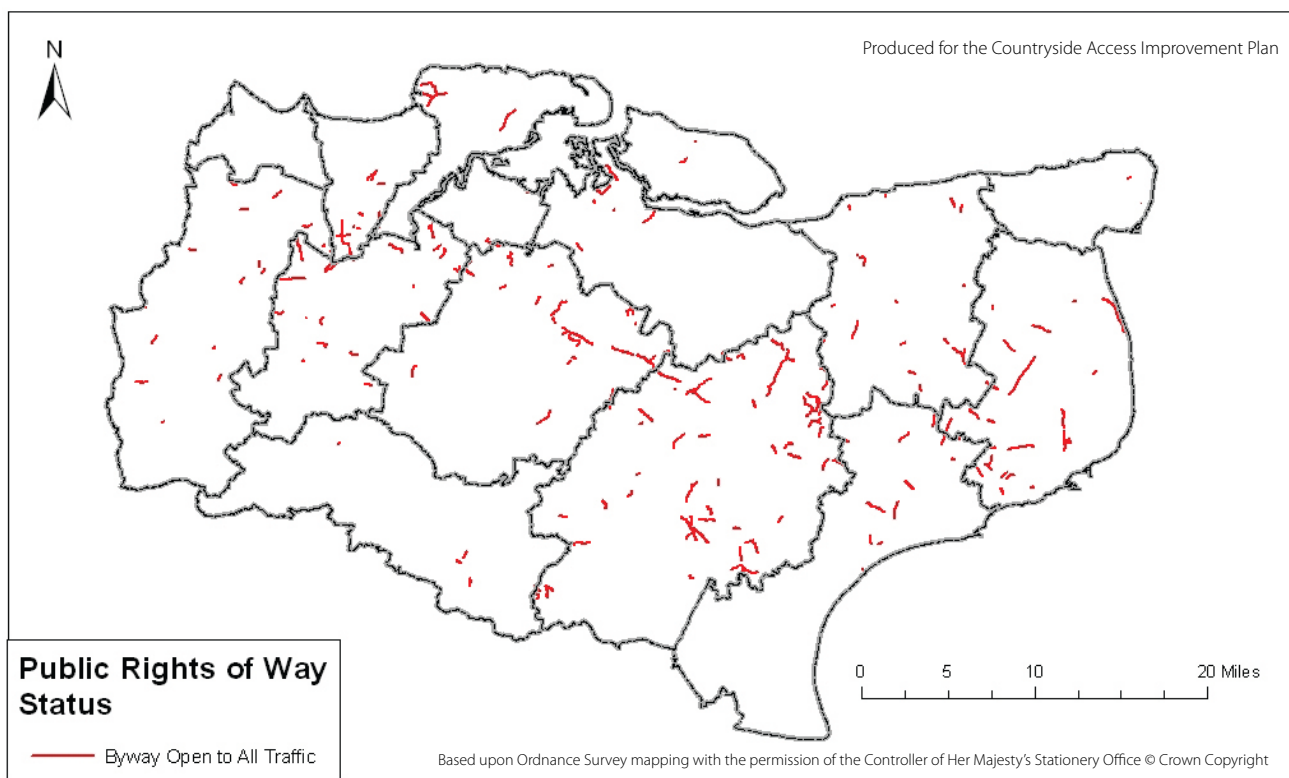
The following maps give an overview of Kent's public rights of way network, to indicate areas of relative density.



Map 6. Public footpath network



Map 7. Public bridleway and restricted byway network



Map 8. Public byway network.

Breakdown of network length by District/Borough

District	Miles	KM	% of network
Ashford	758	1221	18.2
Maidstone	472	760	11.3
Sevenoaks	462	744	11.1
Dover	391	630	9.4
Shepway	390	628	9.3
Canterbury	386	621	9.3
Swale	357	576	8.6
Tunbridge Wells	356	573	8.6
Tonbridge & Malling	332	534	8.0
Gravesham	118	190	2.8
Dartford	76	122	1.8
Thanet	66	106	1.6

4.4 Promoted Routes

The County Council maintains and actively publicises a number of 'promoted routes'. These predominantly comprise long distance walking routes and short circular walks. However, there are also promoted cycling and horse riding routes. These routes all offer beautiful scenery and diverse landscapes and consequently attract both residents and visitors to the county.

The promoted routes are maintained to a high standard to keep them as easy to follow and as problem-free for users as possible. They are regularly checked by public rights of way officers.

There are currently twelve long-distance promoted walking routes in Kent, including the North Downs Way National Trail, all signed with route-specific waymarking. Information and interactive mapping of all of these routes is available on the County Council's Explore Kent website.

Guidebooks are available to purchase for most of the routes, with the latest guides now also including shorter circular walks from these promoted routes – a feature which our research identified as important.

The County Council has created a number of short promoted routes around Kent, of which there are now over 40. These include a number of easy-access walks suitable for all abilities. The growing popularity of these promoted routes has been demonstrated by the strong demand for leaflets describing the walks, and also by the impressive website statistics. The ‘Walks in Kent’ series of leaflets consistently receives over 2500 downloads a month. Other similar routes are promoted by district and parish councils, and by local walking groups.

The promoted cycling and riding routes are detailed on the Explore Kent website and in the ‘Cycle Kent’ and ‘Ride Kent’ guides. The cycle routes use both National and Regional route network, and the riding routes use public rights of way and permissive Toll Rides.

County Council	Percentage of PROW network promoted	Length (miles)	Length (kilometres)
Kent County Council	19.5	815	1311
Surrey County Council	30	895	1441
East Sussex County Council	20	418	673

Table showing the percentage and length of the public rights of way network promoted by Kent’s neighbouring authorities.

4.5 The North Downs Way

The North Downs Way is Kent’s premier walking route, and one of fifteen long-distance National Trails across England and Wales part-funded by Natural England. The trail also forms part of the wider European walking network and historic international long-distance pilgrimage route from Canterbury to Rome called the ‘Via Francigena’.

Key Facts -

Location: Kent and Surrey

Length: 153 Miles (246 Kilometres)

Promotional Literature: Dedicated website, guidebook, series of walk leaflets

Average number of days to complete: 14

Estimated number of visitors per year: Over 300,000

User availability: 100% available to walkers, and 20% to cyclists and horse riders

Start and Finish points: Farnham – Dover

Much of the route follows the Pilgrims’ Way from Winchester to Canterbury. The route goes over the Surrey hills, the Kent downs, through ancient woodland, farmland and orchards, ending at the historic White Cliffs of Dover. Because of its mainly elevated nature, spectacular views can be obtained along many parts of the route.



Picture: The North Downs Way

4.6 Permissive Paths

In many parts of the county, the public rights of way network is supplemented by the addition of permissive paths. Permissive paths are not public rights of way but are offered by landowners to enable the public to cross their land. Permissive access plays a valuable role in joining up the wider public rights of way network. Dedicated permissive access, made available through DEFRA's Countryside Stewardship Scheme, is available at 64 sites throughout the county. Details of these sites can be found on DEFRA's website www.countrywalks.defra.gov.uk or at www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent.

Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust (TROT) is an independent, membership-based organisation which negotiates with landowners to provide permissive horse riding routes to supplement the bridleway, byway and restricted byway network. There are currently 36 such routes available in Kent. These routes provide an excellent additional resource for horse riders, and information about these routes can be found at www.tollrides.org.uk.

4.7 Roads

Kent has a large number of quiet country lanes and minor roads, some of which can act as valuable recreational routes, especially for cycling and riding. They also provide essential links connecting with the public rights of way network. Existing road side verges and footways offer a valuable resource for joining up the network. Where appropriate, the clearance of road side verge vegetation and signage could offer safe connections to public rights of way.

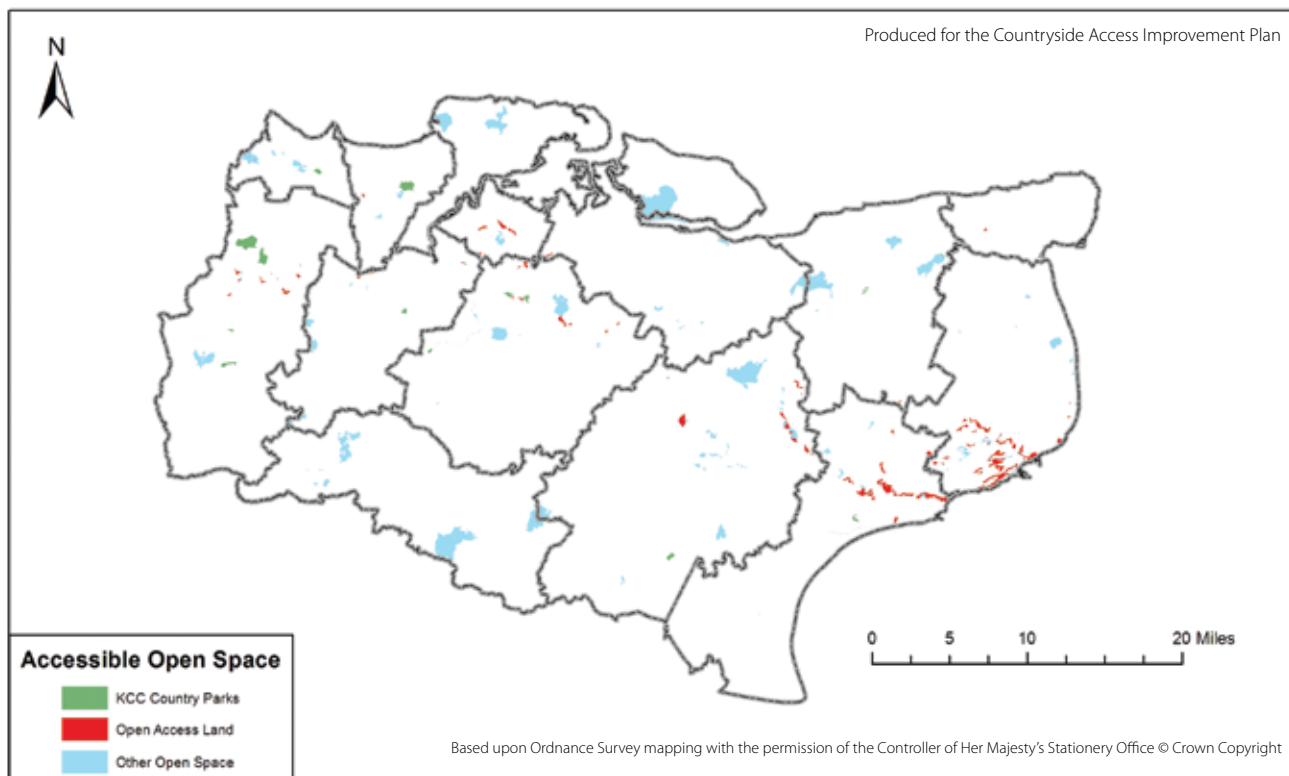
Construction of new roads, together with increasing traffic levels, has contributed towards fragmenting the rights of way network. Closer liaison between the Countryside Access Service and Kent Highways Services is essential to ensuring that the roads and public rights of way networks complement each other in the future.

4.8 Accessible Green Space

In addition to the County Council's areas of responsibility, a significant contribution to publicly-accessible green space is also made by other organisations and landowners, including the RSPB, English Heritage, the National Trust, the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, Southern Water, District Council's, and the Kent Wildlife Trust. Working in partnership is therefore particularly important for the future development of open green space provision in Kent.

In total, there are estimated to be over 18,357 hectares of accessible natural greenspace in Kent.⁶

⁶ An Analysis of accessible natural greenspace provision in the South East. South East AONBs woodlands programme/Forestry Commission/Natural England (Feb 2007).



Map 9. showing accessible green space in Kent

4.9 Country Parks, Picnic Sites and Nature Reserves



Picture: Shorne County Park Visitor Centre

The County Council owns and manages nineteen country parks and picnic sites, offering opportunities for recreation, relaxation and education. Five country parks have visitor centres, which include shops, tea rooms, education facilities, parking and toilets. Visitor numbers for 2005-2006 reached 1,272,485.

Shorne Wood is the County Council's flagship country park. Situated close to the new growth areas of Thames Gateway and within the Kent Downs AONB, the site is a mix of ancient woodland and heath. The state-of-the-art visitor centre has already won a prestigious award for environmental good practice, and features a range of cutting-edge innovations, such as a wind turbine and solar panels for energy, a woodchip burner for heating, and a waste digester. The park offers a number of features and facilities which help to improve accessibility within the site. These include an easy-access trail, a sensory garden and two all-terrain electric off-road wheelchairs called Trampers.

There are routes for cycling and horse riding through four of the County Council's country parks at Shorne, Lullingstone, Oldbury Hill and Stubbs Wood. Potential exists at many of the country parks to offer increased provision of facilities for these activities.

In addition to the County Council and District managed sites, Kent is also home to 445 Local Wildlife Sites and eleven National Nature Reserves and 42 Local Nature Reserves.

Table showing the major open space managed by the County Council and twelve District Authorities.

District	KCC Managed	District Managed
Ashford	Parkwood	Victoria Park Memorial Gardens Queen Mother's Park
Canterbury	Grove Ferry Canterbury Environmental Education Centre	Dane John Gardens Westgate Gardens Whitstable Castle Memorial Park Herne Bay Riverside Walk
Dover	Eastry Park	Kearsney Abbey Connaught Park Pencester Gardens Marke Wood Victoria Park
Dartford	Beacon Wood	Central Park Hesketh Park Dartford Heath Darenth Country Park Darenth Woods
Gravesham	Shorne Wood	Northfleet Urban Country Park Camer Park Woodlands Park Wombwell Park Windmill Hill & Gardens Riverside Leisure Area
Maidstone	Teston The Larches White Horse Wood	Penenden Heath Mote Park Brenchley Gardens Millennium River Park Clare Park South Park
Sevenoaks	Lullingstone & Preston Hill Dry Hill Stubbs Wood	Farningham Woods Shoreham Woods Oxenhill Shaw & Meadow Kemsing Downs Seal Chart, Fawke & Bitchet Commons Westerham Commons Hanging Bank
Shepway	Brockhill Peene Quarry	Coastal Park Royal Military Canal Kingsnorth Gardens Folkestone Warren
Swale		Grove Park Queenborough Lines Beachfields Park Trinity Gardens Johnson House Gardens

Thanet	Pegwell Bay	Northdown Park King George V1 Park Balmoral Gardens Dane Park Hartsdown Park Ellington Park Pierremont Park
Tonbridge and Malling	Oldbury Hill Manor Park Bluebell Hill Trosley	Haysden Country Park Leybourne Lakes Country Park Taddington Valley Holly Hill Platt Wood Woods Meadow
Tunbridge Wells		Calverley Grounds Dunorlan Park The Grove Rusthall Common Tunbridge Wells Common Woodlands Park Marshley Harbour Wood

4.10 Open Access

Following its enactment in October 2005, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 dedicated vast areas of “Open Access” land across England and Wales. The Act gave new public access rights to land defined as mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land. “Open Access” land equates to around 7.1% of the country, some 940,000 hectares. Information about access land in England is available from Natural England at www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk and is clearly marked on new Ordnance Survey maps.

By comparison with counties such as North Yorkshire, with its large areas of moors and dales, the Act has had a very low impact in Kent, where only 0.6% (2,075 hectares) of land has been designated. Map 9 shows where these areas are. The right to access this land is limited to walkers, but also allows a number of ‘advised activities’, such as orienteering, climbing and running. Rights do not extend to horse riding, cycling or 4 x 4 uses, except where they already exist under other legislation or where the landowner lifts restrictions on one or more of these activities under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. Where appropriate, access to the sites in Kent has been signed by the County Council.

4.11 Village Greens and Commons

Part of the historic fabric of rural life is the availability of village greens and recreation fields. Currently there are 175 registered village greens in Kent, totalling an area of approximately 202 hectares. There are also 111 parcels of registered common land, totalling approximately 740 hectares. These essential components of village life provide for a variety of outdoor activities and are protected by individual and sometimes quirky local bye-laws. For example “*No person shall in the commons, except under such restrictions, and at such places as the conservators shall from time to time prescribe, hang, beat, shake, sweep, brush or cleanse any carpet, drugget, rug, or mat or any other fabric retaining dust or dirt*” (Taken from the Tunbridge Wells Common Bye-laws). On average, the County Council receives three or four applications each year to register a common or village green. Recent changes in legislation,⁷ adding to the increasing pressures of development, mean this area of work is likely to increase.

4.12 Woodland

Woodland accounts for 11% of the Kent land area and is a popular resource for outdoor recreation. Woodland sites in Kent often provide areas for car parking and, because of their very nature, can accommodate large numbers of people whilst still being able to provide solitude for visitors.

⁷ Commons Act, 2006

Although woodlands have massive potential to provide good quality public access, they are often managed primarily for commercial interests and can, at times, be subject to access restrictions due to timber extraction or conservation work.

The Woodland Trust manages over 30 woods in the county, specifically managed for the protection of wildlife and public enjoyment.

The Forestry Commission also own five sites covering a vast expanse of woodland, and is running a national campaign, "Active Woods", which aims to provide health and fitness opportunities throughout Britain's woodlands. The Commission has also realised the growing popularity of mountain biking, and purpose-built trails have been built within Bedgebury Forest, near Tunbridge Wells, which link with the existing wider bridleway network. With the assistance of central Government funding, the Commission has purchased an area of land close to the growth area in Dartford and Gravesham known as Jeskyns Farm. This exciting new site is being developed for nature conservation, education and public access.

White Horse Wood, near Maidstone, is the County Council's newest country park, where over 20,000 native trees have been planted. This site is crossed by The North Downs Way and is the hub for a series of circular walks.

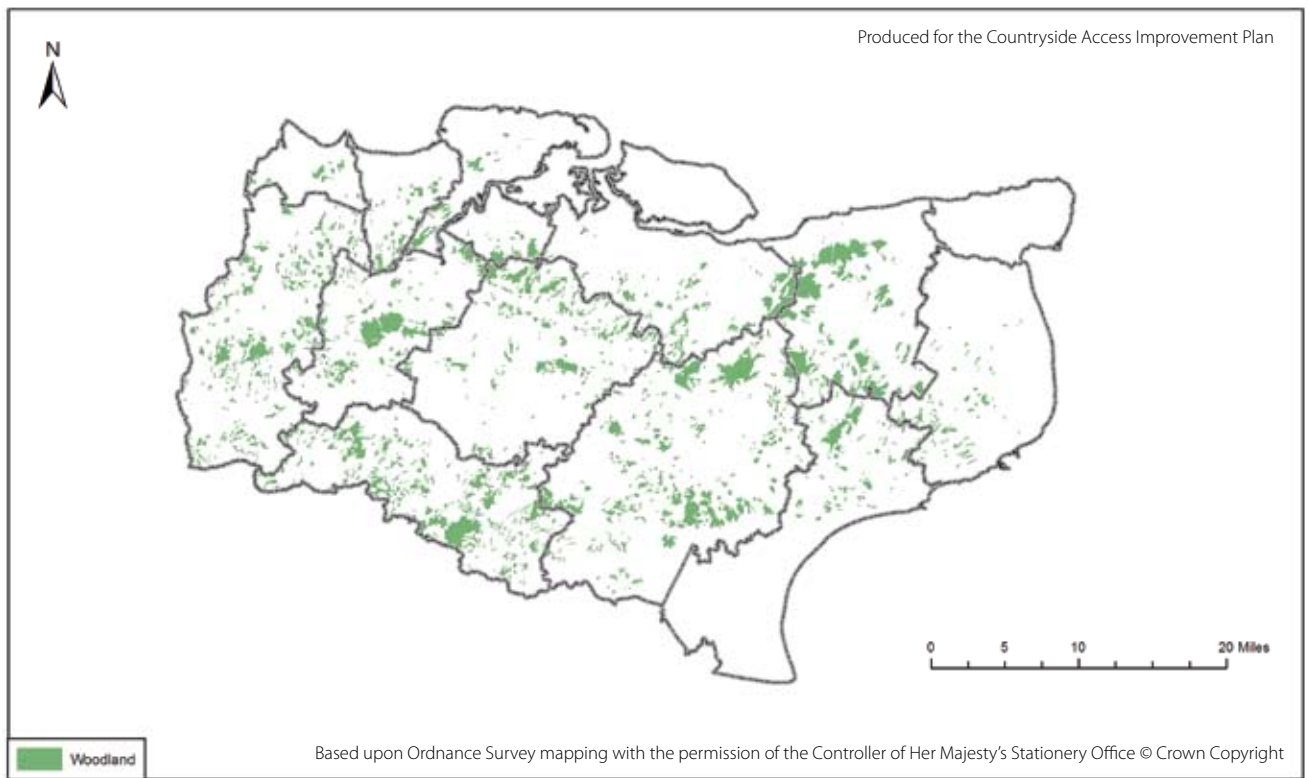
The single largest expanse of woodland is Blean Woods, near Canterbury. Since 2002 the woodland has been run by a joint management partnership, to develop an integrated approach to land management and promote biodiversity, heritage and recreation.



Picture: Blean Woods

According to Natural England's research, the main two reasons for leisure trips taken in woodland are walking, at 62%, and cycling, at 9%⁸, demonstrating how valuable woodland resource is for outdoor recreation. Equestrian access is fairly limited, although some Forestry Commission sites do include permissive paths administered by TROT.

⁸ England Leisure Visits Survey 2005, Natural England 2006.



Map 10. Woodland areas

4.13 Coastal



Picture: St Margaret's Bay

At just short of 360 miles, Kent's coastline is one of the longest of any English county. Within this great length can be found a fascinating heritage and a variety of habitats, some of which are more accessible than others. Much of Kent's coastline provides internationally important habitats for birds, invertebrates and vegetation, and areas of particular note include the North Kent marshes, the Thanet Coast's chalk reefs and caves, the shingle spit at Dungeness and the Romney Marsh. Kent also has some beautiful and iconic landscapes, such as the White Cliffs of Dover and the sand dunes of Sandwich. Along the Kent coast you can also see relics of our coastal heritage. From Roman forts at Reculver to medieval castles at Dover, from the historic dockyard at Chatham to Victorian seaside towns in North East Kent, our past uses of Kent's coastline are very evident and there to explore.

Approximately 75% of the coastline has linear public access provided by public rights of way, cycle routes and promenades. The Saxon Shore Way which stretches for some 160 miles gives access to the majority of our coastal area. The County Council has produced a companion guide to the route, giving insight to the historical and landscape highlights to be found along the way.

Circular coastal routes are popular inclusions in the County Council’s portfolio of guides. Promoted cycling routes include National cycling network routes 1 and 2 and the Viking Coastal Trail around the Thanet peninsula.

Most of the suggestions received for improvements around coastal areas are for the provision of increased cycle and equestrian access, calling for the upgrade of some sections of footpath to bridleway. There is also a demand for similar upgrades to be made to paths along the Medway valley, both for commuter and recreational use.

Many recreational activities take place along the coast, including dog walking, fishing, windsurfing and carting. Horse riding is permitted on certain beaches. However, local bye-laws often place restrictions on times and dates of access, both for reasons of public safety and to avoid the disturbance to wildlife.

Coastal Horse riding access by Borough/District

District	Beach
Thanet	Minnis Bay
	Westbrook Bay
	Joss Bay
Swale	Minster Lees
	Leysdown (Limited access)
Shepway	Littlestone
	Greatstone

Nine beaches in Kent have Blue Flag status, 19 beaches are a MCS Recommended Beach and six beaches have the Environmental Campaigns Quality Coast Award.

Coastal access for England and Wales is currently under review and DEFRA has recently consulted on a number of options to increase access to the English coastline. Such changes would be intended to deliver three complementary outcomes;

- secure access along the length of the English coastline, accepting that this may be subject to some exceptions, whilst considering erosion, growth and realignment
- a more accessible coastline, by creating physical routes to access the coast and by encouraging more people to enjoy the coast
- improvements for coastal wildlife and the landscape, as well as encouraging people to enjoy and understand this environment

4.14 Riverside and Inland Water

A survey showed that around 151 million leisure trips were taken in England to inland water⁹. As with most outdoor recreation, this figure represents a decline in activity. However, riverside routes are considered by many to be popular and interesting places to visit.

Mostly offering relatively flat terrain, rivers and inland waterways could be made more widely accessible for all. The rivers, Medway, Dour, Stour, Darent, Eden and Thames-Medway Canal through North Kent Marshes, all have popular routes along parts of them. Some of these routes could benefit from improvements, as paths often suffer from erosion, damage to bridges and vegetation overgrowth.

The Royal Military Canal managed by Shepway District Council, runs through Hythe and is a good example of improved access gained through Heritage Lottery Funding. A stretch of newly surfaced bridleway and footpath runs from Seabrook to West Hythe dam, these easily-accessible paths have led to a substantial increase in visitor usage.

With support from the Millennium Commission, a new riverside park was created along the river Medway through Maidstone. The park, which opened in 2001, offers ten kilometres of easily-accessible footpaths, following the river’s course from Teston to Allington.

⁹ England Leisure Visits Survey 2005, Natural England 2006

Another popular waterside route is a circular path around Bewl Water, near Tunbridge Wells. This 12.5 mile circular route is open to walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and is mostly off-road, straddling the border of Kent and East Sussex.

The growth areas of Thameside and Ashford could both provide considerable lengths of additional waterside access. Routes will need to be identified at an early stage, in order for them to be included within developments. One recognised opportunity is for a 'city to coast path', linking London and the Thames path to the North Kent coast via the Saxon Shore Way.

According to information given by the British Canoe Union, only 2% of rivers in England and Wales have access rights to the public. The restriction affects not only canoeing, but also other water recreation activities, such as sailing, gorge walking or swimming. Figures for Kent are not widely available but it is accepted that more opportunities for water based activity should be provided, principally on the Medway, Stour and Gravesend to Higham Canal.



5 COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Introduction

Kent County Council has two principle services responsible for the provision and management of countryside access in the county. Alongside these are many other organisations and private landowners, who make a significant contribution to management of the countryside access estate.

5.1 Kent County Council

Kent County Council is the Highway Authority, Surveying Authority, Access Authority and Commons Registration Authority for Kent.

The responsibilities placed on the County Council in fulfilling each of these roles relating to countryside access, are managed by the Countryside Access Service. This Service is also responsible for the promotion of countryside access within the county. Management of County Council-owned country parks and picnic sites is the responsibility of the Countryside Group. Both Groups are part of the Environment and Waste Division.

The Countryside Access Service is responsible for:

- Protection and enhancement of Kent's public rights of way network
- Management of the Definitive Map
- Village Greens and Commons registration
- Promotion of outdoor recreation
- Open Access land management
- Production and implementation of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan

Details of the Service's policy and priorities can be found in the "Countryside Access Objectives and Policy" document, available upon request or on-line at www.kent.gov.uk/countrysideaccess.

The Countryside Group is responsible for:

- Management of nineteen country parks and picnic sites, including five visitor centres
- 4 of 10 Countryside Management Projects based in Kent

Maintenance and Enforcement

The general management of asserting and protecting Kent's rights of way is completed by three area offices. Each of the twelve Districts areas has an assigned officer, who is the first point of contact for any issues arising.

Their work covers:

- Maintenance of path furniture and surfaces
- Enforcement action, evidence collection and negotiations
- Comments on planning applications affecting public rights of way
- Advising landowners and answering general enquiries
- Route signage

Routine maintenance and vegetation clearance is often undertaken by volunteers and the area officers, but private contractors are used for larger works and the seasonal vegetation clearance schedules. The authority currently provides landowners with materials for the repair of any damaged rights of way furniture. This is done primarily to fulfil the council's statutory duty of providing a minimum 25% towards costs but also with a view to raising levels of quality and uniformity.

To assist with enforcement work, the Area Officers are supported by the county's Rights of Way Enforcement Officer, based at County Hall. Formal enforcement action is sometimes required to protect the rights of way network from illegal obstructions, diversions or nuisance.

Promotion

The promotion of opportunities for countryside walking, cycling and horse riding is the responsibility of the Access Development and Promotions team. The team’s remit extends to the promotion of the entire county access estate, not just public rights of way.

Promotional activity is now an essential element of the business, meeting growing public demand for information and, through some aspects of it, generating income to re-invest into the service. Further details of the information produced by the team are available in the specific user group sections of this plan. Below is a brief overview of the area of work they are responsible for:

- Originator and owner of the Explore Kent brand
- Content managers for www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent
- Responsible for a large ‘Explore Kent’ promotional portfolio, including ;

For Walking	For Cycling	For Riding	For All
Walks for all packs	Cycle Kent brochure	Ride Kent brochure	Explore Kent magazine
Guidebooks for promoted long distance trails	Cycling itineraries		Explore Kent calendar
Walk Kent brochure			Education packs
East and West Kent circular walks packs			Explore Kent website
Guided walks leaflet			Kids activity sheet

The majority of the promotional portfolio has been funded by European ‘Interreg’ grants.

The Definitive Map

The Definitive Map team manages Kent’s Definitive Map and Statement. The Definitive Map of public rights of way is accompanied by the Definitive Statement, which lists and describes all of the routes shown on the Map. The Map and Statement jointly form the legal record of public rights of way in Kent. They prove conclusively, in law, the existence and status of a public right of way at a specified date, known as the Relevant Date. The public rights have the protection of law, and may only be changed or extinguished through a legal process.

The Map and Statement record the minimum rights that are known to exist. There are often cases where paths, not recorded on the Definitive Map, nevertheless exist on the ground, and have been freely used and enjoyed by the public for a considerable time. In such cases, there may be a basis for that route to be added to the legal record, to protect those public rights that have been acquired by unrestricted use.

Sometimes the legal record is found to be inaccurate – a way recorded only as a public footpath may, in reality, have been used for twenty years or more as a public bridleway. Alternatively, evidence may exist to show that a path recorded on the Definitive Map is not, in fact, a public path, or a route is perhaps recorded on the wrong line, or needs to be more precisely defined.

Where evidence comes to light which brings in to question the legal recorded line or status of a path, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 gives the County Council the power to make a Map Modification Order. A Diversion Order can be made under the Highways Act 1980, if it can be shown to be in the interests of the landowner or of the public. An Extinguishment Order can be made, where it can be shown that a public path is no longer needed for public use.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 gave the Council new statutory powers to process path change Orders, meeting new criteria relating to school security and the protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI’s).

Public Path Diversion or Extinguishment Orders to enable development to take place are usually dealt with under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. However, it is important to note that an Order cannot be made under this Act if the development in question has already been completed, or is substantially complete.

Any changes to the network require public consultation. While the County Council may make Orders to change the public rights of way network, it cannot confirm any Order where objections are received and maintained after consultation. In such cases it falls to the Secretary of State, through the Planning Inspectorate to determine the matter. This is often done by holding a Public Inquiry or a Local Hearing.

On average, the team receives fifty applications each year to amend the Definitive Map and Statement of public rights of way. Applications will generally be dealt with in order of receipt; however, there is a constant backlog of applications, and it may consequently take several years for an application to be determined.

A succession of legal changes brought about from the Countryside Rights of Way Act and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, together with increasing levels of development, have put added pressure on this area of work.

There are currently ten Excluded Areas in towns in Kent, which were exempt from the original public rights of way recording process in 1949. Subsequently, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 placed a duty on the authority to deal with these outstanding areas. Two of these excluded areas, Whitstable and Sandwich, have now been surveyed and mapped, and three others, Maidstone, Thanet and Dover, will be completed in 2008.

Although electronic mapping of the network is available to staff, and to the general public via the Explore Kent website, the actual legal records are still required to be paper-based. Consequently, all amendments must be written and drawn by hand. With the technology available to make this process far quicker, it is frustrating that this outdated system remains. Furthermore, the current Definitive Map is at a scale of 1:10,000, which is often far from ideal. The Countryside Access Service is currently in the process of creating a 1:2500 scale version, which will provide a far more precise indication of the exact position of paths.

The Definitive Map is under constant review and amendment. As a result the public rights of way network is growing each year through claims and creations. The Improvement Plan aims to create a more sensible network, designed to encourage participation in walking, cycling and horse riding, but it must also examine the cases of paths that are no longer needed for public use.

Within the network are a number of cul-de-sac routes, and routes which change status partway, for instance from a bridleway down to a footpath. There are also routes which duplicate other nearby routes. These routes are often confusing, and are in many instances of little value to the network and seldom used. Where the network can be improved by extinguishment, diversion or the creation of multi-user routes, the County Council will work closely with partners to achieve this.

Strategic Asset Management

The strategic 'asset management' approach has been adopted by many large businesses to manage their physical assets, particularly in the face of growing accountability in cases where assets fail.

The recent completion of a detailed survey of the public rights of way network and the introduction of the CAMS will now enable the County Council to adopt asset management principles for the management of network maintenance. The CAMS database is a map based management tool used by the Countryside Access Service. It handles detailed path inventories, condition survey data, maintenance and enquiry management, contract management and legal events. Through the database the Service will for the first time be able to demonstrate the financial value of its physical assets.

In adopting an asset management approach to maintenance responsibilities, it is intended to achieve the following long term benefits:

- Reduce the risk of accidents occurring as a result of furniture, surface or structure failure
- Increase the value of the network assets, with informed decisions being taken that strike a balance between the performance, lifespan and cost of an asset being reached
- Relate investment in the network to key objectives
- Use the information gathered in CAMS to establish long term maintenance programmes
- Carry out a greater proportion of maintenance in a pre-programmed and more cost effective manner
- Provide accurate budget forecasting

5.2 District Councils

The twelve District and Borough Councils of Kent also own significant parcels of publicly-accessible open space. These include parks, countryside sites and recreation fields. They are the main providers of outdoor sports facilities in the county.

District and Borough Councils of Kent have the power to process diversions and extinguishments of public rights of way, where necessary for development. Any Orders made must then be forwarded to the County Council for changes to the Definitive Map to be processed.

A strategy for the provision of sports and open green space is a key requirement of their Local Development Frameworks. These legally-required documents must analyse the future needs for leisure facilities and open green space within their areas. Each of the districts LDF's are being monitored by the Countryside Access Service to ensure that they include reference to this plan. They should not only provide the framework for protecting and enhancing rights of way and green space within future development but also include public rights of way within their travel strategies. Policy contained within these documents will be hugely influential on the ability to create new links within development.

5.3 Parish Councils

Parish Councils look after the many historic village greens, recreation fields, sports facilities and allotments. These valuable community facilities are a key component of rural life.

Parish Councils are important consultees for any amendments to rights of way in their areas, and will be key partners in the delivery of the area improvements made through this plan.

5.4 Countryside Management Projects

Countryside Management Projects play a key role in enhancing and retaining the character of the Kent countryside. In total, there are ten projects covering the majority of the county.

Their role in countryside access management includes:

- Working with local communities and Kent's Countryside Access Service to improve access and recreation across the county
- Giving site visits, talks and presentations to groups to promote the value of the Kent countryside
- Provide opportunities for people of all ages to get involved on a voluntary basis in the conservation and enhancement of the Kent countryside and coast, including volunteer task days, events, health walking and community projects
- Helping communities, schools and young people understand and interpret their local landscape and wider environment

5.5 Voluntary and Charity Sector

Kent Countryside Access Forum

This statutory independent forum advises Kent County Council and other organisations on ways to improve public access to the countryside for enjoyment and open air recreation. The forum consists of voluntary members who represent various areas of interest, including users of local rights of way and landowners, together with other interests, such as health and tourism.

The forum will have an important role to play in the implementation of this Improvement Plan.

Main areas of work include:

- Responding to Government consultations
- Contributing to the Countryside Access Improvement Plan
- Steering and monitoring access and recreation policy in Kent

Volunteers

Volunteers have been supporting the Countryside Access Service and their own communities for many years. In 1992 the Countryside Commission initiated the P3 Project, which was superseded by the County Council's own Community Paths Project. This project supports local communities, by training volunteers to support their KCC Area Rights of Way Officer in with maintenance issues and rights of way improvements. Historically volunteers contributed over 25,000 hours and over £18,000 worth of work to improve and maintain the rights of way network. Successful partnership working generated an additional 79% funding for grant-assisted projects, demonstrating considerable added value. The continuation of this project is vital for the delivery of many of the actions contained within this plan.

Charity Sector

As mentioned before, many charitable organisations have secured the protection of vast areas of the Kent Countryside, through the purchase and management of many sites and reserves. Most include some form of public access, either free or by means of entry fees or membership.

The following table shows the number of sites managed by charitable organisations in Kent.

Organisation	Managed Sites	Larger Sites
RSPB	7	Blean Woods Tudeley Woods Dungeness
Kent Wildlife Trust	23	Burham Down Queendown Warren Lydden Temple Ewell
Woodland Trust	30	Ashenbank Wood – Cobham Hucking Estate – Hollingbbourne Victory Wood - Yorkletts
The National Trust	15	Knowle – Sevenoaks The White Cliffs of Dover Ightham Mote - Tonbridge

5.6 Neighbouring Authorities

The County Council has good working relationships with its neighbouring authorities, which have proved effective when dealing with cross-border issues.

The county shares the responsibility for a number of regionally important promoted routes with its neighbouring authorities. Shared responsibilities with Surrey County Council include the popular North Downs Way National Trail and the Greensand Way. The National Trail Officer for the North Downs Way is managed by a steering group consisting of managers from Kent and Surrey County Councils and Natural England.

Kent's south western border is with East Sussex. Successful partnership working has been demonstrated on projects at Bewl Water reservoir and the Royal Military Canal.

Public rights of way linking Kent with the London Boroughs are particularly important in providing a sustainable transport infrastructure for the new growth area, as well as linking the urban populations to the countryside beyond. The Kent countryside is a popular destination for residents of South East London, however, stronger relationships with the officers of the Boroughs Bexley, and Bromley, need strengthening further. One exciting future project with Bexley is the proposed 'city to shore' path along the river Thames.

The unitary authority of Medway lies within Kent's geographical boundaries. Medway is a highly populated area with an urban profile, although it also includes far less-populated rural areas on the Hoo peninsula. The main area for joint working is around the management of the Saxon Shore Way and the Thames Gateway development.

All neighbouring authorities will be consulted on the Improvement Plan as required by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000.

Kent in the South East

Officers from the Countryside Access Service actively participate in two regional groups; The Countryside Working Group of the CSS - South East Region, and the Rural Ways Partnership.

The aims of the CSS are:

- To share knowledge on technical countryside access management issues
- To discuss legislation and industry pressures
- To evaluate local authority performance through bench-marking

The aims of the Rural Ways Partnership are:

- To bring together tourism and countryside access managers to share experience, co-ordinate efforts and maximise scarce resources
- To raise the profile with Government agencies of the importance that walking and cycling plays in the tourism product of the South East
- To market the walking, cycling and horse riding product in the South East and develop economies of scale through partnership working

Kent in Europe

The European Union has encouraged Kent and the Nord-Pas de Calais region of France to share issues of common concern and opportunity, through successive rounds of the Interreg programme.

In 2001, the Countryside Access Service established an international relationship with the Conseil General Departement du Nord and Comite Departemental du Tourisme du Nord. The Group has successfully worked with its partners on two Interreg projects, to develop countryside access and promote recreational tourism in Kent and the Northern region of France.

Maintaining this important partnership is essential to enable the County Council and its partners to secure further external funding.

5.7 Landowner Issues

Landowners are well represented on the Kent Countryside Access Forum and have contributed into the publication of the Access Forum Position Paper. One of the 23 actions set out in this document is to work with landowner organisations to promote appropriate access management.

The Kent Countryside Access Forum has mentioned a need for greater flexibility in the legislation to negotiate access agreements with landowners.

The County Council's ongoing dialogue with landowners in Kent continues to provide a good insight into their opinions and concerns. Some of the main areas of concern come from a lack of understanding and respect of their land. These include:

- People not keeping to paths
- Dogs running loose & fouling land
- Litter
- Liability and litigious public
- Irresponsible & illegal activity

Landowners will be significant partners in delivering many of the actions in the Improvement Plan. These include, reducing the fragmentation of the rights of way network, improvements to the quality of furniture, addressing issues of public safety, and educating members of the public about their rights and responsibilities.



6 THE WIDER CONTEXT

The following section covers some of the broader social, economic and environmental issues that will need to be taken in to account in developing the countryside access estate for the future.

6.1 The Health Benefits of Countryside Recreation

Introduction

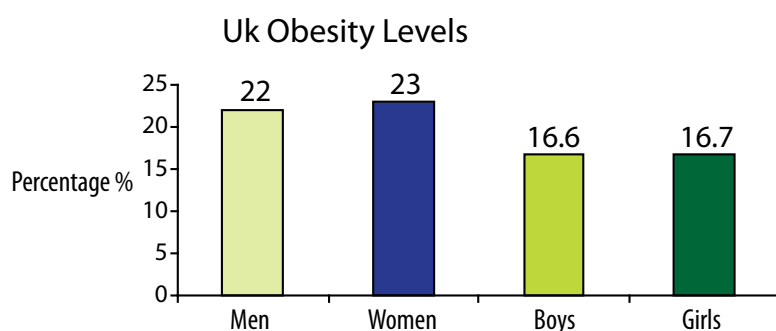
The need to encourage more people to exercise regularly is currently a high priority in public sector policy. A range of strategies focus on the benefits of walking and cycling, which are easy, relatively cheap and can counteract problems such as obesity, coronary heart disease and type II diabetes, as well as improving psychological well-being.¹⁰

The National Picture

Nationally, the Government's White Paper on health, entitled 'Choosing Health'¹¹, includes proposals to support cycling and to develop holistic approaches to cycling and walking.

Headlines from the "Choosing Activity" report¹² are:

- Only 37% of men and 24% of women meet chief medical officer's recommendations for physical activity.
- The Chief Medical Officer's report highlighted cost of inactivity to be £8.2 billion annually.
- Regular physical activity has positive effects on mental health and reduces the risk of depression.
- A combination of unhealthy eating and lack of exercise has resulted in 22% men and 23% women becoming clinically obese.



In order to encourage the population to be more active this paper identified a clear action plan for delivery. It is widely accepted that the public rights of way network can play a significant role in supporting many of the actions identified. A sample of relevant actions taken from the "Choosing Activity" paper is included in the table below.

Actions taken from "Choosing Activity".

What	Who	When
Continued support of National Bike Week	DfT	Ongoing
Marketing cycling – DfT will continue to support marketing of cycling. Search for opportunities to promote "Bike For" endorsements	DfT	Ongoing
National Walking website – the establishment and maintenance of a website/portal that provides information on walking for practitioners and the public	DfT	
Cycling portal – support development and maintenance of this key resource, www.bikeforall.net , to provide information about why, how and where to cycle.	DfT	Ongoing
All schools in England should have school travel plans by 2010.	DfT/DfES	2010
DEFRA/DfT will lead on progressive integration of Rights of Way Improvement Plans into DfT's Local Transport Plans	DfT/Defra/ Local Authorities	2010

¹⁰ World Health Organisation, 2002

¹¹ Department of Health, 2004

¹² Department for Health, 2005

Guidance to be produced for walking and cycling in sustainable communities – ensure that new developments identified in the Communities Plan and major town centre schemes include good provision for pedestrians and cyclists.	DfT/ODPM	March 05
Encourage health professionals across PCTs to use pedometers in clinical practice.	DH/Defra	2006

Tackling Obesity

In 2001 a report was commissioned by the Government to highlight problems with obesity and make recommendations for tackling them.¹³ Listed below are some of the findings of this report:

- Obesity has trebled over twenty years.
- It costs the NHS £½ billion a year in treatment costs and £2 billion to wider economy.
- Human costs amount to 18 million sick days and 30,000 deaths each year.
- The four most common problems linked to obesity are heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis – there are twenty conditions in total.

Recommendations from this report advise local authorities to produce targets for:

- Cycling and walking which provide clear incentives to support healthy modes of travel.
- Increasing the number of school journeys undertaken by bicycle, on foot or by public transport.

The Kent picture

In 2005 a survey was completed by the University of Kent to research the health and lifestyles of the people of Kent. The report gives an indication of where problems are more prevalent, and will be useful in identifying where to concentrate resources in order to address the continuing decline in public health.

The report highlighted:

- Overall, 55.2% of respondents said they were currently active, 60.3% of men and 50.6% of women.
- The lowest levels of physical exercise were being taken in Ashford and Swale.
- Overall, 31.9% of the population were overweight, with 15.3% classified as obese.
- In Dover, 19.5% of men were overweight or obese, compared to 11.2% in Tunbridge Wells.

Walking the Way to Health Initiative

This is a national initiative of the British Heart Foundation and Natural England, which encourages people to start walking for the benefit of their health. Overall it has helped to create over 350 local health walk schemes and trained over 20,000 volunteer walk leaders. There are currently four projects in Kent (Bedgebury, East Kent, Edenbridge and Tonbridge and Malling) which run a regular series of volunteer-led walks for all abilities. The largest group, in East Kent, currently runs 29 walks per week, with an average of fifteen participants joining each walk. These groups are particularly important for the ageing population, as the recognised benefits from walking include improved balance and muscle strength, and mental well-being. Public rights of way should therefore be made as accessible as possible, to cater for the demands of an ageing population. Following initial success, the expansion of these projects has resulted in three new Health Walk Co-ordinators for the Eastern and Coastal Primary Care Trust. These posts have been created as a result of a unique partnership between the Kent Countryside Access Service and the NHS.

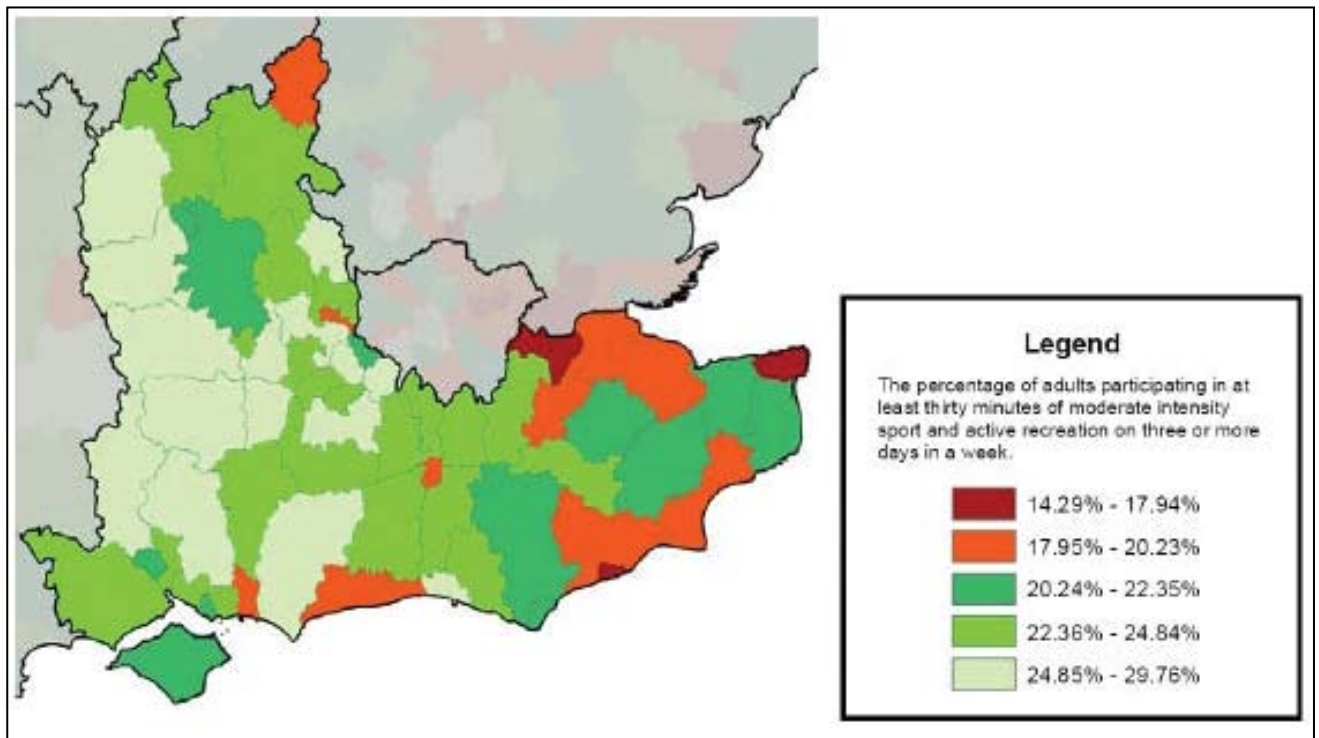
¹³ Tackling Obesity in England, Report by the Controller & Auditor General, 2001

Active Sport Survey

In 2006 Sport England completed the largest survey of sport and active recreation ever completed in Europe. The questionnaire examined the participation of various sports by different demographic groups. The survey discovered that only 21% of the adult population regularly take part in sport and active recreation. Regular participation is defined as taking part in moderate intensity of sport or active recreation for at least 30 minutes, three days a week.

The map below demonstrates the levels of active recreation for each area. If confirmation were needed the map clearly shows that the areas of least activity correlates with the University of Kent's health report previously mentioned.

Both reports clearly identify a need to support initiatives that facilitate and increase active recreation within the areas of Dartford, Gravesham and Thanet.



Map 11. Source: Sport England's South East Fact sheet.

6.2 The Economic Benefits of Countryside Recreation

Introduction

Outdoor recreation and rural tourism bring a wide range of social and economic benefits to local communities, including:

- Sustaining the viability of local shops and services
- Job creation (both seasonal and non-seasonal)
- The sustainability of services such as buses, post offices and banks within larger rural communities
- The re-use of redundant buildings and upkeep of properties

The economic benefits from rural tourism are dependant on the area and type of attraction on offer. For example, a large honey-pot attraction, which people have to drive to, may well retain the benefits within its site.

The positive impacts of National Trails, such as the North Downs Way, and other circular walks and rides can be spread over a wider geographical area. It is important to remember that some types of visitor are more 'independent' than others, visiting an area, but not necessarily contributing to the economy.

The National Picture

The value of tourism and countryside access to the rural economy, and the contribution made to this by public rights of way, was brought home during the Foot and Mouth epidemic in 2001. Estimates of the total economic impact of the disease ranged from £1.6 billion to £6.3 billion. The studies suggested that the impact on tourism was greater than the impact on agriculture. Farms which had diversified into tourism suffered twice as much as those which had not.¹⁴

Many studies seek to put a value on the income generated from recreational tourism and the number of jobs created. Nationally, it is estimated that between £1.4 - £2.7 billion is generated from walking in the English countryside, supporting between 180,000 and 245,000 jobs¹⁵. 1999 figures valued cycle tourism at £635 million a year.¹⁶ The 2005 England Day Visits Survey revealed that 699 million leisure visits were taken in the English countryside, amounting to expenditure of £9.4 billion.¹⁷ A survey on Britain's longest national trail suggested that the South West Coastal path put an estimated value of £307 million annually in to the regional economy.¹⁸

Studies in Scotland have researched the economic value of local path networks to rural economies. Some 36 miles of routes around Dunkeld and Birnam contribute between £1.4 million and £3.7 million to the local economy per year, supporting between eight and fifteen full-time jobs.¹⁹

A key factor for increasing economic impact (and reducing environmental impact) is to encourage a higher proportion of staying visitors.

The Kent Picture

The proximity of Kent to London and Europe means that the county is increasingly popular for day trips, short breaks and holidays, and tourism is of growing importance to the local economy. Kent attracted just over 44 million visitors in 2003 which, in turn, generated £1.8 billion,²⁰ supporting the equivalent of nearly 49,555 jobs.

Two major studies have investigated the value of cycle tourism in East Kent. Cycle tourism in the Dover area has been estimated to be worth £285,000 per annum²¹, which suggests £1 million in Kent as a whole. The economic impact of the Viking Coastal Trail is estimated at nearly £294,000 per year.²²

At Easter 2006, the Forestry Commission opened a new visitor attraction at Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest, near Tunbridge Wells. The site contains an internationally important collection of trees, and offers miles of off-road cycling, riding and walking through new purpose-built trails. In its first five months since opening, the site has attracted more than 80,000 visitors, already surpassing its previous annual visitor figures of 50,000. The site's success demonstrates a clear demand for this kind of recreational attraction, and shows how the creation of cycling facilities can give a considerable boost to local economies

Figures taken from questionnaires handed out at Kent's walking festival in 2004 valued its economic contribution of £67,000 - £112,000 over a period of nine days.

The research mentioned above clearly demonstrates the significance of recreational tourism to the rural economy. Investment in the countryside access estate must therefore be seen as contributing to the quality of life for Kent's residents from both an economic and recreational perspective.

6.3 Development Opportunities for Countryside Recreation

The Governments Sustainable Communities Plan has identified specific growth areas in order to meet the future demand for housing, particularly in the South East. There has been a steady population growth around London, and the aim is to achieve sustainable development through retaining green belts and preventing urban sprawl. The South East Development Plan clearly sets out the growth areas and strategy for planning within

14 'Rural Change and the Impact of Foot and Mouth Disease' by Dr D Roberts, in CRN Vol 9, Number ¾, Autumn / Winter 2001

15 'The economic and social value of walking in England', by M Christie and J Matthews, published by the Ramblers' Association, 2003

16 Sustrans factsheet TT21 – Cycle Tourism

17 England Leisure Visits Survey 2005 – Natural England, 2006

18 The Economic Value of the South West Coast Path (2003), Tourism Associates and South West Tourism.

19 EKOS (1998), Establishing the overall value of a local path network, Scottish Natural Heritage

20 Source: <http://www.ktinet.co.uk/ktresearch/ktresearchkenttourismfacts.aspx>

21 The Economic Impact of Cycle Tourism in SE Kent (Dover District Council, 1998)

22 The Economic Impact of the Viking Coastal Trail in Thanet, Department of Sports Science Tourism and Leisure, 2004

the region. The four key growth areas are; Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes/South Midlands, London-Stansted-Peterborough-Cambridge and Ashford. Over the whole region it is planned that an average of 28,900 homes will be built each year. The South East Development Plan stresses the importance of using public rights of way in achieving the delivery of healthy, sustainable and attractive communities for people to live in.

The Kent picture

Two of the primary growth areas for future development are in Kent. Part of the Thames Gateway, from Dartford to Faversham, and Ashford. The delivery of such vast development will impact greatly on the existing public rights of way network and open green space. The County Council's Countryside Access Service has already created a full-time post, to work with developers and planners to safeguard and enhance public rights of way and public green space. Development of Kent's two growth areas must be seen as an opportunity to improve sustainable transport and recreational facilities.

Ashford

- The population and size of Ashford is set to double by the year 2031
- 31,000 new homes will be built
- 28,000 new jobs will be created
- A new high-speed rail link will reduce the journey time from Ashford-London to just 37 minutes

Building on the county's identity, Ashford is to be known as "The Town in the Garden". The new development is planned as urban villages, close to a revitalised town centre with traffic calming, civic square and learning campus. Greenery and water are a central theme, creating a future vision of city-style living within a calm setting of lakes, canals and parkland. In line with national planning policy, development in Ashford demonstrates a clear opportunity for the creation of walking, cycling and riding routes along the watercourses, and through links from residential areas to the town centre and employment areas.

Key theme taken from the "Greater Ashford Development Framework"

- Walking Ashford. Exploiting the flatness of the place and the regional walks to focus on the potential for creating excellent walks throughout the town and countryside, focussing on routes along the water systems, the great streets and walking streets – promoting permeability, reducing severance, ease of access to public transport, cycling, etc. – ease of movement.

Thames Gateway

- Stretches 40 miles along the Thames estuary
- 30,000 new homes will be built over the next 30 years
- 50,000 new jobs will be created
- Adoption of the 'Green Grid' concept
- New international train station at Ebbsfleet. London journey time, 15 minutes
- Approximately £50 million Government funding



Map 12. The Kent Thames Gateway

Kent Thames Gateway is a major redevelopment of largely brownfield sites on previously industrialised landscape alongside the Thames. Located on the doorstep of London and new Olympic developments, the area is planned for a complete transformation. The development is located on the banks of the Thames, and stretches from the London boundary through to Faversham. The waterside frontage is to be the focus and will include areas of green space for recreation. The "Green Grid" is an overriding concept to be included in all development. Its vision is to provide a framework of attractive open spaces, linked by a web of green corridors. These green corridors will be designed to link urban areas with the wider countryside, providing opportunities for recreation and wildlife.

Integrated and sustainable transport systems will be included to reduce the need to jump in the car. A new international train station at Ebbsfleet will link the wider population to Europe, with journey times to London of 15 minutes. There are projects to develop two major public transport systems, Fastrack and Medway Transit. New walking and cycling routes will be required to link with these transport hubs.

6.4 Climate Change

Introduction

It is clear that Kent will face some of the greatest extremes of climate change impacts compared to the rest of the UK. These can be summarized as hotter, drier summers, warmer, wetter winters and an increase in the number and severity of extreme weather events.

Future impacts for Kent

A major priority for the council is to establish a new focus on climate change in Kent. Its effects on Kent's environment, communities and economy will cut across all areas of our work and services.

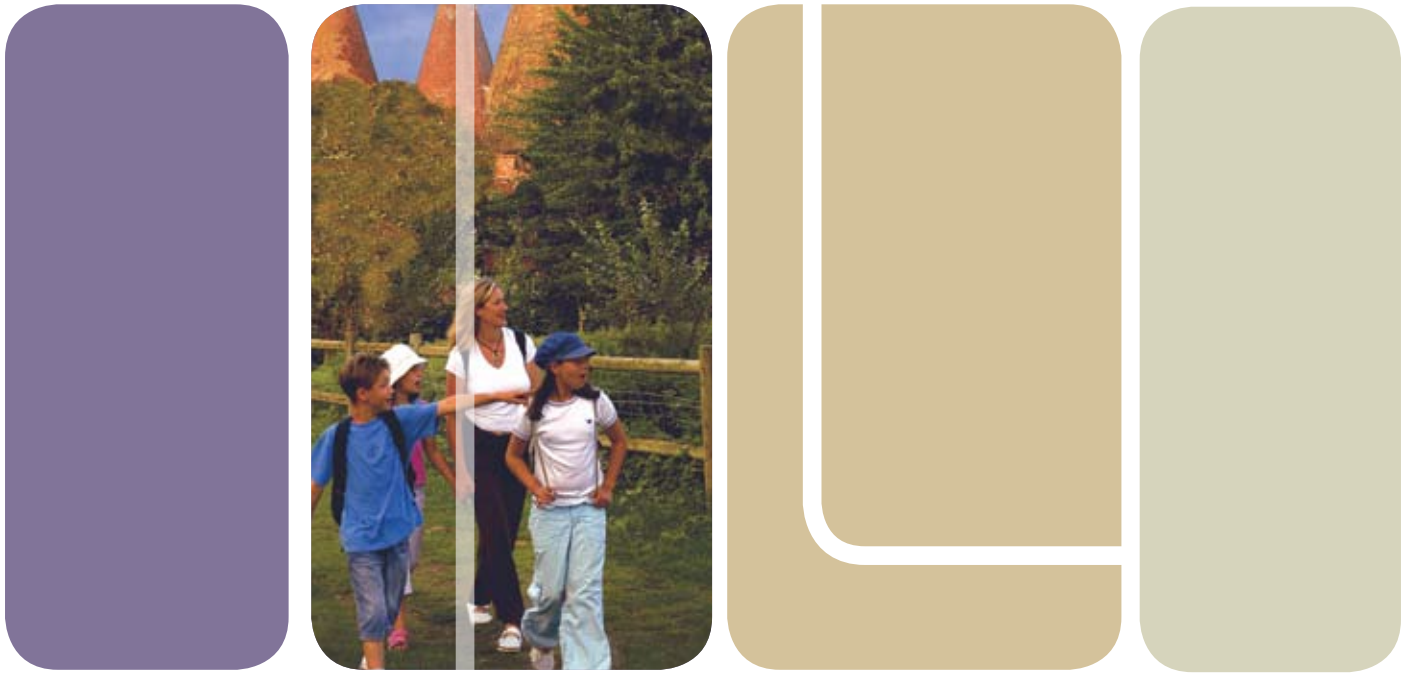
Recent storms, flooding and drought have given us a glimpse of the problems that might lie in the future if the growth in greenhouse gas emissions is left unchecked. And as a result of past emissions, we will inevitably face some changes to which we must adapt, even if efforts to reduce future emissions are successful.

KCC has already signed up to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change that commits us to tackling the causes and effects of a changing climate on our county.

Potential impacts of climate change on access to the countryside, and management of Kent's public rights of way network during the Improvement Plan period;

1. Increase in storm damage - fallen trees etc.
2. Increase in rainfall leading to flooding problems beyond existing capacity - affecting path surfaces and the integrity of structures and furniture.
3. Access to public rights of way restricted by flooding and storm damage resulting in increased legal and maintenance costs.
4. Summer increase in incidents of tarmac melt.
5. Less summer rainfall and an increase in tourist numbers leading to increasing risk of summer fires on the network and public green space.
6. Greater extremes of drying and wetting, increasing the risk of subsidence with impacts on bridge foundations and stability of path furniture.
7. Instability of coastal and riverside paths and increased vulnerability of coastal landscapes and rights of way to tidal inundation, and strategic implications for rights of way arising from changing approaches to coastline management (e.g. managed realignment).
8. Longer growing periods resulting in greater vegetation obstruction and potential for new and invasive species and pests with implications for management regimes.
9. Less summer rainfall resulting in increased leisure opportunities and more tourists; more people walking, riding and cycling. Potential impact on environmentally sensitive locations.
10. Greater demand for information on opportunities for walking, riding and cycling.
11. Increase in staff workload due to unpredictable and changing environmental conditions.
12. Increased demand for urban greenspace and shading to cope with warmer weather, and good access to these and the countryside beyond.

Some of these impacts may not be strongly felt within the period addressed by the Improvement Plan, but planning to adapt to them will certainly need to start during this period.



7 USE AND DEMAND



USE AND DEMAND

7.1 Walking

Introduction

Walking is the most popular outdoor recreation activity in the country. In England, walking has grown as the main activity for people on leisure trips from 12% in 2002/03 to 19% in 2005. There is no evidence to suggest that this is not replicated in Kent. The popularity of the Kent countryside for walking makes it a hugely valuable asset to the rural economy. The County Council already has an adopted strategy for increasing walking, which has seven objectives. These are:

1. To reduce the vulnerability of pedestrians and promote their safety and security.
2. To promote walking as a safer mode of transport to school.
3. To reduce peak-period and short-distance car journeys, so as to reduce congestion and pollution, and promote healthy living.
4. To ensure developments are “pedestrian-friendly”.
5. To encourage walking as part of an integrated transport policy.
6. To promote the benefits of walking.
7. To develop recreational walking.

The Improvement Plan has been written with these objectives in mind. It is designed to bring together the mutual ambitions of the County Council and other organisations and stakeholders.

The benefits of walking

- Assists in reducing traffic congestion for short journeys
- Is the only true ‘carbon neutral’ form of transport
- Improves health, as recognised by the Government’s Chief Medical Officer
- Promotes independent lifestyle
- Gives experience and understanding of the natural environment

Key facts

- Walking and dog walking are the main outdoor activity for 72% of people visiting the Kent countryside
- 77% of UK adults, around 38 million people, say they walk for pleasure at least once a month²³
- Leisure walking is the county’s most popular outdoor recreational activity
- 75,698 Kent residents currently walk to work. This represents 11.6% of the working population, excluding those who work from home²⁴
- Membership of organised walking groups and clubs is increasing. The membership of the Ramblers’ Association has grown, from around 38,000 in 1980 to over 140,000 today²⁵

23 Ramblers’ Association

24 2001 Kent Census

25 Ramblers’ Association

- There are currently four NHS funded Walking to Health Initiative projects in Kent
- Walkers have access to more public paths than any other user type, with access to the entire 4,200 mile network of public rights of way in Kent
- Walkers have exclusive rights on 3,499 miles of this network. In addition to this, walkers can use highway pavements, and also explore areas of common land, village greens, parks, open access land and the coast

There are four generally-recognised types of walker; Commuters, Dog Walkers, Casual Leisure Walkers, and Regular Leisure Walkers/Ramblers. Each of these different groups has slightly different needs and demands.

For commuters regularly using paths to get to work, school or for shops and services, signage and information is particularly important. Our research identified that not knowing where routes go was the main reason why people were not using public rights of way for their daily journeys. As the Highway Authority, the County Council is responsible for signing all public rights of way. For some routes our research has suggested that destination information would be useful and result in greater usage. Paths used by commuters also need to be well lit, have smooth hard surfacing and appear safe and welcoming. To demonstrate what can be achieved a new route was created in the village of Eynsford linking to the local school. Counters located on the paths are recording around 2,500 walkers per month.

According to our research, dog walking accounts for around 29% of all walkers. They prefer routes without stiles, woodland paths, and areas of open access, for dogs to run free without the concern of livestock. Regularly-emptied dog litter bins are also important.

Casual walkers also need routes which are as easily accessible, but tend to prefer a more natural appearance. Walking in woodlands or exploring country parks is popular for this group of people. Information or word-of-mouth are essential for engaging with this group. The County Council's new 'Walks in Kent' series and other guide books are specifically targeted at this market. The casual walking market contains significant latent demand across all age ranges.

Regular leisure walkers/ramblers expect a good variety of well-maintained public rights of way and are more likely to explore the less well-used paths. They are often well equipped and knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities, and tend to be less concerned by distance or terrain. The interactive map on the Explore Kent web site is a popular resource for this market. Evidence suggests that the web site is used to identify and design personalised walks. This group takes an active interest in the maintenance and management of the countryside access estate.

The provision of reliable information is vital in encouraging further participation in walking for recreation, health and commuting, for all recognised types of walker. It is also essential for supporting Kent's tourism industry.

Evidence suggests that promoted circular walks are a successful way of encouraging participation in countryside walking. Two promoted circular leisure walks at Shoreham and Cranbrook have automatic counters installed on them showing average monthly user figures of 1,765 & 829 respectively. Recent statistics taken from the Explore Kent website showed that circular walks were the most popular document with 5,283 viewings in March 2007 alone.

How can walking in Kent be improved?

The rights of way network in Kent represents an exceptional asset to support walking, both for leisure and for daily journeys. Whilst this network does have the potential to cater for all the different types of walkers we have identified, in reality, with such a large network to maintain and develop, resources often have to be spread too thinly across the whole network to have a real impact.

Within Kent's extensive public rights of way network, there remain public footpaths which are rarely, if ever, used. There are also many paths, particularly in urban fringe areas, which would be used far more if they were improved, whether this be through surfacing improvements, lighting, the installation of more accessible furniture, safer road crossings, or simply better signage.

The long-term pressure on resources and funding can only be managed by prioritising expenditure on routes that people really want and need.

Through diversion and the creation of new public rights of way, and holding open discussions about the removal of paths from the Definitive Map which are no longer needed for public use, a network fit for the demands of future generations can be created. Numerous suggestions for changes to the public rights of way network have been received through the research phase of the Improvement Plan. This information will allow the County Council and its partners to carefully select and negotiate projects to create a far better network, for both existing users and to encourage others to start walking. Unfortunately, although the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 has provided a catalyst for improving the countryside access network, it hasn't provided new powers for implementing projects. Working closely and positively with landowners and user groups in order to get the best out of the network will therefore be essential.

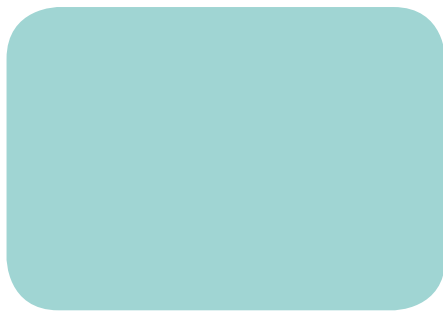
The attention being given to Kent's two major development areas (Ashford and Kent Thameside) offers a great opportunity to turn areas that currently have very low walking participation levels into environments which people want to explore on foot. Careful negotiation with property developers, and provision of information gathered during the CAIP research, is already being incorporated in the Local Development Frameworks. Where possible, the County Council will seek the provision of multi-functional routes, in line with Policy C4 of the South East Plan.

Our research has shown that one of the biggest barriers to walking is the lack of reliable and targeted information. If we are to improve walking in Kent, the 'information gap' will need to be addressed in a targeted way. The different types of walkers (or 'segments') will be targeted with new and updated information that meets their specific needs and demands. The internet and mobile communication technology will be important in providing this information for future generations.

Encouraging people to walk more, whether for health, recreation, or as an alternative to driving short distances, often requires encouragement and support. Walking for Health Initiatives (WHI) continue to be a very good way of encouraging people to start walking to improve their health. Support will be given to organisations offering health walks and other guided walks.

Key Partnerships

Kent Countryside Management Projects
Ramblers' Association
NHS Primary Care Trusts
Walking for Health Initiative
Landowners
Kent Highway Services
Open Spaces Society
Natural England/DEFRA
Parish Councils
District Councils
Environment Agency
Countryside Access Forum



USE AND DEMAND

7.2 Cycling

Introduction

There are many widely-acknowledged benefits of cycling. The Government is committed to increasing the level of cycling, whether for trips to work, to school or for recreation. Through the LTP process the Government is looking for local authorities to set targets to increase the level of cycling as an alternative to using the car, especially for short journeys. In response, Kent County Council has set a target within its LTP, and has a cycling strategy to identify priorities for achieving this target. Some District Councils have adopted local cycling strategies, which give more detail on proposed cycling improvements and how these link into future development. These strategies are supported by the emerging Local Development Frameworks (LDFs), which seek to ensure sustainable development and growth in the districts of Kent. Safe and direct usable cycle routes are a key element in achieving this.

The benefits of cycling

- Saves energy
- Causes no air or noise pollution
- Is good exercise and contributes to personal health and well-being
- Reduces transport costs
- Requires far less space for routes and parking compared to motor vehicles
- Can be a cheap and fun family day out
- Contributes to tourism and local economies

Key facts

- According to our research, cycling is the main activity for 9% of people when visiting the Kent countryside. This level is mirrored nationally²⁶
- Nationally, the number of cycling trips has fallen, from 18 per person per year in 1995 to 14 in 2005²⁷
- 13,830 Kent residents currently cycle to work²⁸, just over 1% of the population
- Bicycle ownership is thought to be very high, particularly amongst children. A questionnaire completed by children at Goudhurst School, although only a snap-shot, identified 86% of girls and 77% boys as owning cycles
- There are 28 cycling clubs and teams listed on www.gocyclekent.co.uk
- Cyclists actually absorb lower levels of pollutants from traffic fumes than car drivers²⁹

There are four main identified reasons for cycling; general transport and commuting, family leisure, leisure and mountain biking, and long-distance cycling.

For commuters there is a 303 mile (490 kilometres) cycle network within the county. As with much of the rights of way network this can be very fragmented. Commuters need direct, well-signed, smooth tracks linking essential services such as schools, towns and public transport. The county's travel plans have made bold commitments to increase opportunities for commuter cycling. Policy DM3, from the LTP, states that "KCC will

26 General Household Survey (2002)

27 National Travel Survey DfT (2005)

28 2001 Kent Census

29 DfT A New Deal For Transport : Better For Everyone (1998)

encourage cycling as an alternative to the private car for local journeys.” The LTP’s target is to achieve a 38% increase on the cycling levels of 2003/04 by 2011. There are many areas where this type of cycling could be encouraged.

For families, leisure and mountain bikers there are the 665miles (1072km) of bridleways, restricted byways and byways, although this network can again be very fragmented. The variable quality of surfacing significantly reduces the amount of routes suitable for some of these users.

Our research has shown that good quality off-road routes such as the Crab and Winkle Way and the Tonbridge to Penshurst Cycle trail, are very popular for leisure cyclists and family groups, and actually create new demand after construction.

The new development at Bedgebury Forest arguably offers some of the best family and mountain biking facilities in the South East. Available are over 7.4 miles (12 Kilometres) of single-track mountain biking, a professionally-designed ‘Freeride’ area with challenging jumps and stunts, and cycle hire, purchase and repair facilities. The increasing popularity and demand for off-road cycling is clearly apparent by the vast number of visitors to the site, particularly at weekends.

Mountain bikers need a variety of rough and challenging routes. Unfortunately, this demand is not being adequately catered for across the whole of the county.

The promotion of recommended routes and days out is seen as being particularly important for encouraging family groups and leisure cyclists into the countryside. Family groups search for safe and pleasant environments to explore, particularly when linked with other attractions and facilities, as demonstrated at Bedgebury.

The term ‘long-distance cyclist’ includes cycle tourists and those training for cycling and multi-sport events. Long-distance cyclists are more confident cycling with traffic and using country lanes and the wider road network. In Kent, there are three National Cycle Routes and five Regional Routes available for long-distance cyclists.

Our research has shown a strong demand from the cycling community for better linkages with public transport carriers, especially trains and coaches. This is also important for developing cycle tourism.

In 2002, Kent County Council and Connex Trains obtained funding for a project to provide new cycle parking facilities at 65 stations. The following table demonstrates that the extra parking provided was soon consumed by demand.

Station	Spaces 2002	Percentage Occupation 2002	Additional Spaces Autumn 2003	Percentage Occupation additional spaces Autumn 2003
West Malling	0	0	22	90
Ashford	80	100	30	80
Canterbury West	5	100	30	60
Chatham	5	100	15	100
Gravesend	40	100	50	70
Faversham	10	100	22	90
Maidstone East	9	100	16	80
Sandling	0	0	10	40
Rochester	0	0	8	100
Strood	7	90 + informal parking	8	100

How can cycling in Kent be improved?

It is clear that much has already been achieved to improve cycling in Kent. However, it is also clear that the demand for off-road cycling is not being adequately catered for across the whole county. The current public rights of way network is nowhere near meeting its potential, considering the current political will and increasing public demand. The use of hard surfacing on more of our existing bridleways, byways and restricted byways would improve the accessibility for all users including cyclists.

Creating and promoting new routes to schools will help to address the “school run” issues, and also stimulate a cultural shift in choosing cycling for short journeys. A number of routes serving individual schools have been identified through our consultation and these will be developed where possible.

The identification, improvement and promotion of sections of the wider rights of way network for mountain biking could also help meet the demand for this popular recreational activity. Opportunities for the development of off-road facilities exist around the new Kent Thameside development area. Shorne Woods Country Park, Ashenbank Wood and Jeskyns Farm all offer significant areas of access for walkers, but cycling facilities are still lacking. The development of more cycling facilities in this area is needed in order to cater for the inevitable increase in demand from both the new communities in the development area, and the existing communities of Gravesend in Kent and Rochester in Medway.

The relatively flat landscape corridors of the River Thames, Medway and Stour offer great potential for developing commuter routes and links from the urban fringe to the wider countryside. Equally, the low-lying areas around Swale and the Romney Marsh offer excellent opportunities for more cycle tourism initiatives, particularly for the family market.

Creating cycle friendly communities and transport systems will reduce the practical obstacles to people cycling. Input into the planning and development of the growth areas is particularly important for securing new routes. Enhancements to National Cycle Route 1 will be pursued through the development of the “Green Grid” in Kent Thameside. Development in Ashford must include the creation of new multi-user routes to provide sustainable transport options.

The need for three specific new routes was identified during our research; a long-distance cycle route between Rochester and Canterbury, a cycle route through the Darent Valley, and a route linking London and the Thames Path to the Kent Coast along the Saxon Shore Way.

The development of more off-road multi-user routes could make significant contributions to reducing localised traffic congestion and increasing the well-being of Kent’s residents. Evidence suggests that where routes are developed they become well-used. Consultation has already been undertaken to identify existing public footpaths that could be upgraded, along with opportunities for the creation of new routes. These will all be reviewed and considered. Closer working with key partners will be essential to deliver new routes and link existing rights of way, in order to prevent any further fragmentation of the network.

The promotion of cycling will continue to be a priority for the County Council.

Key partners

Sustrans
Landowners
Kent Highway Services
District Councils
Parish Councils
Environment Agency
Countryside Access Forum
The Forestry Commission
Public Transport Operators



USE AND DEMAND

7.3 Horse Riding and Carriage Driving

Introduction

Horse riding and carriage driving makes a valuable contribution to the fabric of rural society, and offer a wide range of people, including young children, an excellent way of exploring the countryside. Riding gives a real sense of exhilaration and freedom, sitting up high to give the best views of the countryside.

The benefits of riding

- A fun and invigorating way to explore the countryside
- A great form of physical exercise
- Good for improving personal confidence
- Improves balance and co-ordination

Key facts

- 2.4 million people ride in the U.K
- The U.K equine industry directly employs 50,000 people
- An estimated £3.4 billion is spent annually on horses and riding in the U.K³⁰
- Nationally, £500 million is spent on riding lessons, with 45 million paid-for lessons taking place every year³¹
- British Horse Society (BHS) membership increased by 2,400 in 2005³²
- The BHS has 2,300 members in Kent
- Equestrian activity contributes a total £100 million to the Kent economy - 13% of the land-based value in Kent³³
- There are 26 BHS-affiliated riding clubs and five carriage driving clubs in Kent
- An hour's riding can burn similar calories to a 30-minute jog at 6mph or cycle ride at 9mph

Research conducted for the Improvement Plan shows that around 5% of people who have been into the Kent countryside chose horse riding as their main activity.

Recreational riding covers a number of activities including Hacking, Trekking, Touring, and Driving. Hacking and general riding are the two most popular types of recreational riding. Our research has shown that most riding trips taken on local bridleways and roads last for between 1 ½ - 3 hours.

Horse riders have access to 665 miles (1,072 kilometres) of bridleway, byway and restricted byway. For carriage drivers, the available network is limited to byways and restricted byways, which form only 5% of Kent's rights of way network. Carriage drivers therefore have to rely heavily on rural lanes.

Compared with neighbouring counties, the percentage of the public rights of way network available for horse riders is low. In Kent the figure is 15%, East Sussex is 27% and Surrey is 35%. Even taking into account permissive rides, the level of access is still comparatively low.

30 Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales. BHIC/DEFRA 2005

31 Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales. BHIC/DEFRA 2005

32 BHS Minutes of the 2006 AGM.

33 Land based economy of Kent. LUC study for KCC & SEEDA 2002.

In addition to the public rights of way network, Kent has an impressive network of toll rides for riding and carriage driving. Toll rides are provided through landowner agreements, and are administered by the Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust (TROT). Although users are required to pay a membership fee in order to access these routes, the scheme has opened up significant new riding areas whilst providing additional income for landowners. There are forty-one toll rides in Kent (2007), compared with six in Surrey and seventeen in East Sussex. Of the forty-one toll rides in Kent, eight are open to carriage drivers.

In addition to the relative lack of provision in the county, horse riding is further complicated by sunken or inaccessible gates and narrow and overgrown tracks. Along with cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers are particularly affected by the safety concerns, and reduction in attractive routes, associated with the increased traffic on Kent's roads.

Research commissioned by SEEDA and the County Council supports research undertaken for the Improvement Plan in detailing the concerns of horse riders and carriage drivers in Kent.

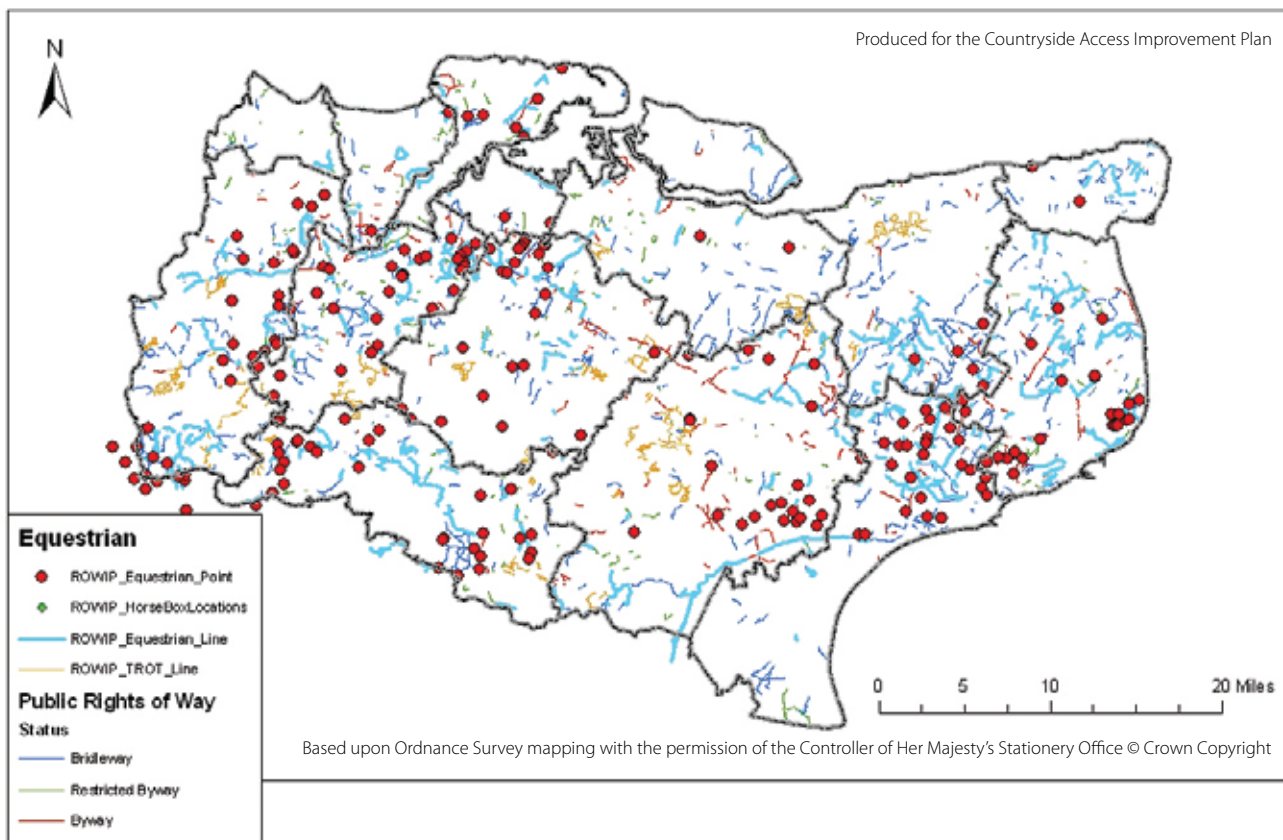
The report highlights the following four main issues:

1. The need for more public information on riding areas
2. The need for a more complete and joined-up network
3. The need to remove unnecessary obstructions
4. The need for better maintained path surfaces

In response to the first issue, in 2007 a new riding brochure 'Ride Kent' was produced by the County Council to promote horse riding and support the equine industry. The Explore Kent website has also been developed to show the best areas of the county to visit on horse back.

How can riding & driving in Kent be improved?

Much has been said already about the relatively low proportion of the public rights of way network available to the riding community. Targets will be included within the Statement of Action to address this.



Map 13. Suggested Equestrian Routes

Map 13 shows the information gathered during the research phase of the Improvement Plan. When completed it will provide valuable information into the areas of high population of horses, the location of livery yards and stables, riding schools, together with availability of Kent's bridleways, byways and restricted byways. This evolving map will be used in planning priorities for improvements to the rights of way network in order to address the concerns of Kent's horse riders and the business needs of the equine industry.

An example of a successful project identified from this research is the construction of a new bridleway beside the Leybourne bypass near Maidstone. This new bridleway will benefit two riding centres within the immediate area.

Working with equestrian user groups the County Council will work towards reducing the fragmentation of the bridleway, byway and restricted byway network, paying particular attention to road crossings and rider safety. Where possible the County Council will create new, multi-functional routes. We will also work proactively to identify and open up roadside verges which can be maintained in a safe condition. We will proactively support the Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust to expand and develop permissive rides to support the rights of way network, while at the same time working with landowners to extend the bridleway network.

Carriage drivers would benefit from the upgrade of existing public rights of way to restricted byways. Where an opportunity arises to upgrade to, or create a new bridleway, consideration will be given as to whether a restricted byway could offer wider public benefit. Areas which have been identified as needing more access for carriage drivers are:

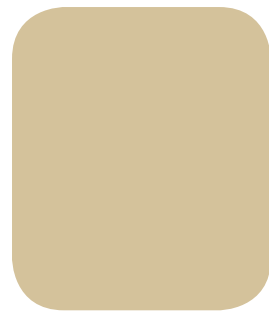
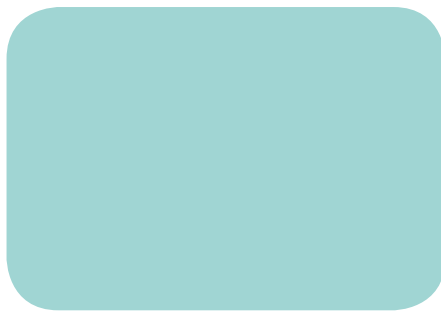
The Pilgrim's Way
Wye Downs
Bedgebury Forest
Meopham

The County Council will work in partnership to encourage the dedication of new areas of public access for horse riders, for example by the lifting of restrictions on open access land under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, or by the creation of new access on areas of public open space.

In 2006, the British Horse Society ran a training day for public rights of way officers, to demonstrate how problematic horse riding and driving in Kent can sometimes be. This event improved understanding and was a great success. The County Council will continue to work closely with the all equestrian groups in order to provide a quality service.

Key partners

British Horse Society
Ramblers' Association
Kent Highway Services
Landowners
Countryside Access Forum
Parish Councils
District Councils
British Driving Society
Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust
DEFRA/Natural England



USE AND DEMAND

7.4 Motorised Vehicles

Introduction

Public vehicular use of the public rights of way network is considered by many to be disruptive, noisy and damaging to the environment.

In some areas there have been unwelcome levels of illegal use of quad-bikes and motor cycles on public rights of way, causing upset to local residents and lawful users, as well as damaging path surfaces.

The responsible use of motorised vehicles on public byways is a legitimate activity and should be accepted and managed. However, there is no doubt that the cost of maintaining Kent's byway network presents a major problem for the County Council.

Working closely with organised groups interested in this type of activity can encourage responsible use and help with the cost of maintaining the network.

Key facts

- Nationally byways account for only 2% of the public rights of way network
- Nationally, 42% of byway use is by mechanically-propelled vehicles³⁴
- Byways account for 3% of Kent's public rights of way

In Kent, motorised vehicle users have a fragmented 138 mile (222 kilometre) network of byways for off-road use. Out of the 102 byways in Kent, only 21 are considered to be physically inaccessible by 4x4 vehicles, and a small number are subject to Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's).

As a result of recent changes in legislation, the length of public right of way network available for use by motorised vehicles has been reduced. Routes formally designated as Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPS) were reclassified as Restricted Byways. Public rights over Restricted Byways extend to non-motorised vehicular use only, although private motorised vehicular rights may still exist. A number of claims on such routes have been raised, seeking to change their status to byway.

Further availability is provided by private "pay and play" tracks, which are often far better-suited to the kind of adventure sought by users. There are a few privately-owned off-road tracks throughout Kent, catering for a variety of activities, including 4x4 and motorcycle scrambling. One such motor cross track has been operating for many years at Canada Heights near Swanley. However the lack of social acceptance of these sites makes it very difficult to find locations for new facilities. The Motor Cross Challenge Project, operating in the Dover area, aims to encourage and motivate young people through education and recreational activities so they may become more responsible members of the community.

Kent has its own independent off-road vehicle association, KORVA www.korva.org.uk KORVA acts as an umbrella body for groups representing off-road vehicular users. Their objectives are to help groups or individuals interested in off-roading in Kent, and to assist local authorities with their management of the public rights of way network.

In 2005, the Kent Trail Riders Fellowship www.trailridinginkent.co.uk had approximately 57 members. Local trips (within 50 miles) are reportedly limited to a few times a year; however, wider trips (beyond 50 miles) are more frequent, with groups going out most weekends.

Visitors from outside the area did not identify Kent as a destination for off-road motorised recreation.³⁵

How can the provision for motorised vehicles in Kent be managed?

A database exists of all Kent's byways, detailing their use, condition, past maintenance and historical issues. In light of the emotive issues arising from vehicle use in the countryside, a Byway Working Group has been established involving representatives from user groups, interested parties such as Parish Councils, the police and Kent County Councillors. This group advises on appropriate management of byways causing most concern and is charged with managing the balance between lawful vehicular use and environmental sustainability.

DEFRA's "Making the Best of Byways" guidance was redrafted in December 2005, following the changes introduced by the CROW Act. The guidance was produced to assist highway authorities to address the nationwide problems of conflict between users, poor surface conditions and increases in byway use.

The guidance advises that the following factors should be considered when determining byway problems and deciding the appropriate solution:

- Conflicts between users
- The local rights of way Improvement Plan
- The durability of the byway
- The condition of the byway
- The use of the byway
- Hedgerow and tree protection
- The heritage of the byway
- Any ecological sensitivity associated with the byway
- The management approach

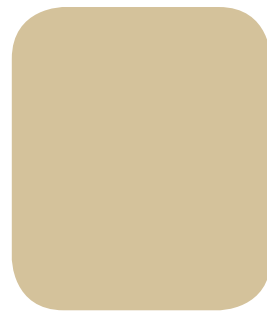
In cases where there is illegal motorised use on public footpaths and bridleways, policing initiatives can be used. Lessons can be taken from Operation Freedown, a Kent Police operation started in 2003 to crack down on illegal motorcycle and quad biking. Driving on private land without permission is an offence under section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. The police can also use powers set out in section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002. However, there must be a consistent record of offences before the police can be expected to act.

The use of TRO's is an option for protecting byways; however, their use constrains legitimate legal rights and causes a burden for policing. DEFRA's guidance encourages the use of temporary orders for those byways which suffer from seasonal damage, although there are currently none in place in Kent.

It is hoped that the Byway Working Group will provide sustainable solutions to the issues arising from motorised vehicle use.

Key Partners

Kent Police
KORVA
TRF
Ramblers' Association
British Horse Society
British Driving Society
Landowners
Kent Highway Services
DEFRA/Natural England
Parish Councils
District Councils



USE AND DEMAND

7.5 Blind, partially-sighted and those with mobility or learning difficulties

Introduction

The term 'disabled' is very difficult to qualify, and there can be no single solution to resolving the many complex issues. Improving accessibility does not just mean making improvements for wheelchair users, but must also consider the needs of the elderly, partially-sighted and blind, as well as those with learning disabilities or mental illness, mothers with pushchairs and many other individuals and groups.

The Countryside Rights of Way Act, (CROW Act) requires Improvement Plans to assess the accessibility of public rights of way to blind or partially-sighted people, and others with mobility problems. In conjunction with this, the authority is legally bound by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), and amendments made to the Highways Act 1980 in section 69 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, to improve access to the countryside.

Key facts

- In 2006, 246 stiles were removed completely or replaced with kissing gates
- There are 212,187 Kent residents with limiting long-term illness³⁶
- In 2005 the Kent Outdoor Pursuits Disability Project aided 3500 people in a variety of outdoor pursuits
- There are eight Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) groups in Kent

Research

Four local 'Diversity Review' action-based research projects were commissioned by Natural England in response to the Rural White Paper (2000), which promised a national diversity review. One of these projects was awarded to KCC, placing Kent at the forefront of research for inclusive access in the countryside. The Kent-based 'By All Means' project focused on testing methods for increasing the numbers of disabled people visiting the countryside and taking part in countryside activities. A full report on this project and other national research documents can be found in Appendix C.

Understanding the needs and demands of people with restricted mobility

The "By All Means" project reports that there are 212,187 residents in Kent with 'limiting long-term illness'. This equates to 16.63% of the population.

According to the latest available research, 8% of disabled people in Kent do thirty minutes of active recreation or sport, three days a week³⁷ in Kent. The Kent Disability Sports Strategy (2004-2008) identifies a number of knowledge gaps in the field of disability sports, hindered by the many different definitions of disability and the complexity of official bodies in this field. What research there is tends to show that most disabled people prefer to do their sport alongside other disabled people, to build confidence. However, this is not necessarily the case for disabled riders and carriage drivers, where the horse can in many cases enable the person to overcome their disability and take part on equal terms with and in the company of riders and drivers without disabilities. Transport and cost are two barriers to increased participation.

36 By All Means Research, Natural England 2005.
37 Sport England Active People Survey 2006.

The Kent Outdoor Pursuits Disability Project has been working to increase access to the outdoor and rural environment. The development of facilities and activities opens up opportunities for disabled people to enjoy the countryside and take part in informal sports. The project offers courses in cycling, walking, climbing, archery, sailing and rowing.

The Walking to Health Initiative has already been mentioned, and offers guided walks at various locations across the county. Although the majority are not specifically designed for those with limited ability, the Forestry Commission at Bedgebury has started to provide health walks for people of all abilities.

Barriers to activity can be social, physical or psychological, man-made or natural. Because of previous negative experiences, disabled people, like other under-represented groups, may have a lack of confidence in knowing where to go, what to expect when they get there, and what to do at the site. Access to information and making their own informed decisions is therefore a major issue for disabled people. There is a need for accurate and up-to-date information on opportunities, facilities and physical accessibility. This should be integrated with general information provision, through consultation with a range of disabled people when planning facilities.

Often public rights of way provision for disabled people is along flat, riverside or coastal walks. This limited choice can lead to boredom and heavy use by wheelchair-users on busy days. While this can suit some people, others want a greater variety of routes, or greater challenge.

Many disabled people choose to rely on managed sites, such as Country Parks and National Trust sites. Information and knowledge of facilities already exists and on-site staff are trained and welcoming, making these places a far more attractive option. Most participants feel they are victims of tokenism, as very few facilities take into account the needs of people with sensory impairments or learning difficulties. There is a demand to 'branch out' from managed sites into the wider countryside, using public rights of way and other routes. The challenge remains how best to target access improvements and information provision.

In 2003 a postal survey was carried out, to assess the needs and demands of disabled people in accessing the countryside. The questionnaire was completed by 75 people and produced the following results;

- 39% of disabled people had to rely on others to visit the countryside
- Of those visiting the countryside, the main reasons were for views and landscapes and areas to sit and relax
- The three most important factors for encouraging more frequent visits were more accessible routes/paths, more accessible facilities, toilets and car parking and more detailed information
- The best ways of informing people who did not currently visit the countryside were by word of mouth or through local newspapers

How can access for disabled people be improved in Kent?

The completed network survey provides vital information for assessing where there are areas and specific paths that could be improved. Added to this is the information received from the Parish Council questionnaires, advising where enhancements would be of most benefit to their communities.

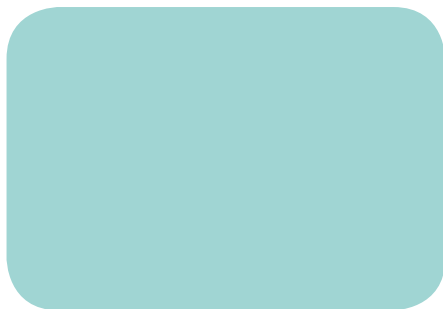
The County Council recognises that for many people the existence of stiles can restrict or block access to the public rights of way network. For many years the Countryside Access Service has been following the 'least restriction' option through delivery of a 'gaps, gates and stiles' policy. This policy is an ongoing commitment to provide a more accessible public rights of way network. Specific targets to reduce stile numbers can be found in the Statement of Action. Recent changes to legislation have made this policy far easier to implement. Section 147ZA of the Highways Act gives authorities the power to make agreements with owners, lessees and occupiers of land for works to replace or improve structures that make them safer or more convenient for people with mobility problems.

Following consultation with the Kent Association for the Blind, elements of the Explore Kent website have been restructured, to allow compatibility with software used by people with visual impairments. The content of the site will continue to be improved, including ensuring that an acceptable percentage of advertised country park events are inclusive for disabled people.

Officers will proactively seek opportunities to remove access restrictions, following consultation with local landowners and parishes. To help with this, the links already established with disabled group representatives should be continued beyond the completion of the BAM's project in June 2007.

Horse riding and carriage driving can provide a great countryside experience for the disabled. A greater number of multi-user routes will be a priority as they offer the greatest opportunity for all users. We will actively support the eight disabled riding centres in Kent.

There is still much work which can be done to improve accessibility throughout the public rights of way network and the wider countryside access estate. Greater provision of facilities and events is necessary to build the confidence required for increased participation.



USE AND DEMAND

7.6 Ethnic Minorities

In the 2001 Kent census, 3.1% (41,534 people) classified themselves as belonging to a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) group. The majority of the population is of Christian religion, with the second largest group being Sikh at 0.6%. The greatest numbers of BME groups are located in North Kent in the boroughs of Dartford and Gravesham.

Sport England results for the Kent area show that 22.9% non-whites had walked for thirty minutes at least three times a week. This is slightly less than the white-only figure of 28.4%. Cycling results showed even less of a difference in participation, with 2.3% of whites cycling for the same period and days as opposed to 1.6% non-whites.³⁸

The research has not identified any specific Kent based figures for horse riding by BME groups.

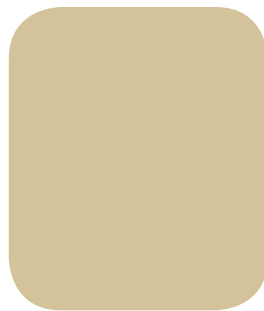
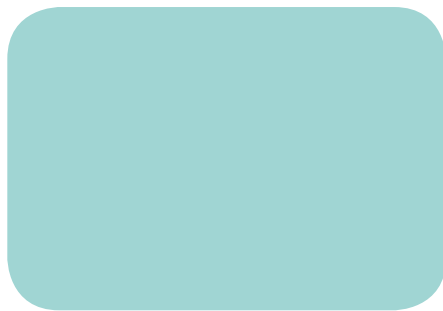
What can be done to improve countryside access for Ethnic Minorities?

Reaching out to BME groups to take advantage of outdoor access opportunities will involve looking at a wide range of issues, such as the language and images used to promote access, cultural differences, and the way in which we target, distribute and communicate information.

New access provision, linked to riding schools and cycling facilities within easy reach of public transport in Kent's urban and suburban areas, could encourage greater BME participation. This is happening in other areas such as Docklands.

KCC's country parks provide a good introduction to outdoor activities and have a specific objective (10.5) within their strategy, aimed at encouraging use by BME groups.

For our actions to be effective, it will involve working directly with representatives from black and ethnic minorities and encouraging partnerships with organisations that have expertise in engaging these groups and getting them involved.



USE AND DEMAND

7.7 Younger Residents

Key facts

- There are 342,900 under 19's in Kent
- In 2005 there were 18,747 births

To assess the needs and use of the network by our younger members of society, members of the Kent Youth County Council, Duke of Edinburgh Scheme participants, and a class of pupils from Goudhurst School were consulted. The Canterbury focus group, organised by BMG Research specifically for the Countryside Access Improvement Plan also gave further insight into the views and opinions of the younger market.

As with other consultation groups, the youth surveys highlighted a lack of awareness of rights and responsibilities relating to the use of public rights of way. Most of the people questioned had a good idea of where to look for information on ways to access the countryside, but were not regularly doing so. When advised of the sort of activities that can be undertaken on rights of way, a significant number said that they would want further information on where they could go.

Our research into this group has indicated that clearly signposted and waymarked paths (with destination signage or named routes), free leaflets and good on-line information are all essential. There was a perception that maps and guidebooks are for older people and therefore do not appeal to the younger market. Non-users advised that they would visit a tourist information centre or search on the internet to find information.

Stiles, gates, barriers and even muddy paths were not seen as a deterrent to exploring the countryside. More of an issue was the length and connectivity of routes and the feeling of being safe. Many of the young people questioned described the feeling of safety that managed sites provide. A number of people who attended the Canterbury focus group described the desire to find more areas of 'secure wilderness' where they could walk away from other groups of people whilst at the same time feeling safe.

Family walks and regular dog walking accounted for the largest use of the public rights of way network by this group. Other popular activities also included cycling and camping. Compared to the average population, a larger proportion of young people had also been horse riding, with 7% advising they had ridden.

Nationally 33% of children claimed to want to cycle to school, yet only 2% currently do³⁹, clearly demonstrating potential demand. As a reflection of the popularity of cycling, results from Goudhurst School showed that 86% of girls and 77% of boys owned bikes. The lack of good off-road cycling facilities was regularly mentioned as the main barrier to participation.

What can be done to improve countryside access for Younger People?

Research identified a requirement for more information to be made available. To meet current demand and encourage other younger people into the countryside, specifically targeted promotional material, and educational resources to support the national curriculum, will be developed. Information tailored towards parents which includes stimulating ideas for rewarding days out, will also assist in increasing interest in outdoor recreational activities.

As a way to reduce traffic congestion and facilitate demand, the County Council will work with local schools and Kent Highway Services to develop off-road cycling facilities. These will be specifically aimed at supporting school travel plans and the “Healthy Schools” initiative.

The County Council and its partners will continue to run family events at country parks that are designed to educate, inspire and motivate children. Managed sites provide the safety and security sought by younger people and their parents. These sites need to be developed as “gateways” for younger people and families to explore the wider countryside.

7.8 Latent Demand

The question of what prevents people from taking advantage of 'the great outdoors' is very hard to answer. It is widely recognised that the reasons for non-participation are often complex and change over time as people age. However, with current Government initiatives to encourage more active living there has probably never been a better time to capture this potential market.

How many are there?

Our own research indicates that around 26% of Kent residents had not been walking, cycling or horse riding for over two miles in one trip, over a sample four-week period. National figures are showing an increase in non-participation. There is a continuing decline in numbers of adults who, when questioned, had taken a leisure visit in the previous week, falling from 74% in 2002/03 to 63% in 2005.⁴⁰

Why do people not use rights of way or wider countryside access?

Lack of time, interest and information seem to be the main reasons why people are not accessing the countryside, particularly for leisure trips.

The Countryside Agency's UK day visitor surveys have shown there to be a steady reduction of interest in countryside recreation over a number of years. The most likely explanation for this is increasing competition from other leisure pursuits, such as home DIY, computer games and interactive television. Eating out and shopping feature as the most popular activities identified in this survey. Some people are simply less comfortable and less confident about using the countryside, perhaps due to their upbringing or current peer group.

As part of the Improvement Plan, six focus group sessions were run by BMG Research, to identify the awareness and needs of specific groups of Kent residents with regard to access to the countryside. Five of the groups did not necessarily have prior interest in the subject

The groups were held in:

Bromley – Residents with an urban background

Canterbury – Younger people

Dartford – Less active residents, and 'hard to reach' groups

Elham – Residents with a rural background

Faversham – More active residents

Folkestone – Residents aged 35+

When questioned about their use of public rights of way, many of the respondents' initial response was that they did not use the network for their day-to-day journeys. However, when pressed, a number became aware that in fact they did, but didn't initially think of town alleyways or surfaced paths as public rights of way.

The Dartford and Canterbury groups found outdoor activity the least interesting, but did think that they would be more interested in having a day out at a more organised venue, such as a tourist attraction or country park, rather than going on a countryside walk.

In the more rural group, at Elham, people advised that one of the main attractions for living there was the fact that you could easily access the countryside. Non-participation appears far less of an issue for rural communities. More important concerns were about the condition and location of public rights of way, as they play an important role in daily life.

40 England day visitors survey Natural England (2005).

What can be done to encourage greater participation?

The Health Walk Initiatives and guided walks are good ways of introducing people, particularly from groups defined by the Government as 'hard to reach', into active recreation. Through direct referral from medical practitioners and then the support of walk leaders, people can be encouraged into the countryside. As previously mentioned, there are already successful programmes being run around the county, although there is plenty of scope for further development in this area.

As identified in the focus groups, introduction through tourist attractions and country parks offer a valuable link into the wider exploration of the Kent countryside. Many attractions already provide walking leaflets to add value to visits. Such sites often include car parks, toilet facilities and refreshments, which were all mentioned as being important when introducing people to the countryside for the first time.

Results from the Improvement Plan research show that having more leisure time available and access to better information are the two main things that would encourage and enable people to explore the countryside. Although we cannot give people any more time, we are able to develop the public rights of way network to make it more useful and convenient to use.

All of the focus groups reported that information on circular walks was an important way of encouraging greater participation. Providing good-quality information is something that the Countryside Access Service already does, but clearly more needs to be achieved. Our circular walks pack has proved to be a very successful way of giving people the confidence to venture into the countryside. The research also identified maps and guidebooks as the best ways to get information to the majority of people. The County Council's Explore Kent website and printed products have a key role to play in providing this.

Some of the focus groups singled out improved signage on the ground, including destination information on signposts, as important ways of encouraging use. This was also identified as a priority objective through later formal consultation.

Promotional exposure at key outdoor events such as the county show are excellent ways of engaging with the general public, and stimulating interest. Clearly, Countryside Access presence at these events should be continued.



8 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF KENT'S DISTRICTS AND BOROUGHES

8. Key Characteristics of Kent's Districts and Boroughs

The following table shows the key characteristics and potential access improvement opportunities available for each of the Districts and Boroughs.

District/Borough	Population	Key issues	Opportunities
Ashford	111,100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thousands of new houses planned Providing for new and existing communities Providing infrastructure and jobs to match housing increase Travel time to London due to be slashed by high speed rail link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Routes along the Stour to the wider countryside & coast Facilities for Off-road cycling Access potential through Kings Wood Blue, Green Grid Willesborough Dykes
Canterbury	138,900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong tourism and cultural economy Improving public transport and reducing congestion Matching local skills to local jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cycling links to Herne Bay Cycling potential around the North Downs Way Access potential through Blean woods
Dartford	90,900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering sustainable regeneration that benefits local communities Improving housing and cultural facilities and preserving the green belt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Darent Valley Path enhancements Green Grid Partnerships Development opportunities to increase the provision of PROW
Dover	106,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic and pollution (especially from freight) Encouraging investment and new jobs Tackling social problems in deprived areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Betteshanger Colliery Works Coastal access River Dour cycle route
Gravesham	95,800	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering sustainable regeneration that benefits local communities Improving housing and cultural facilities and preserving the green belt Improving local skills base to match employment opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable transport initiatives City to shore cycle path Green Grid Partnerships Development opportunities to increase the provision of PROW
Maidstone	144,600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence of the growth areas of Ashford and the Thames Gateway How to attract more residential and high quality development to prosper Reducing congestion, improving infrastructure and public transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commuter and leisure cycling growth Medway river path refurbishment to link towns to the wider countryside
Sevenoaks	108,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing congestion and parking problems Requirement for more activities for young people Affordable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walking tourism Development of routes from and around the Greensand Way
Shepway	98,300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community safety Regeneration Attracting new investment and employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coastal access Romney Marsh & White Cliffs Countryside projects Coastal footpath through Folkestone
Swale	125,400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large proposed housing growth Improving skills, learning and education Protecting the natural environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commuter links Tourism potential
Thanet	129,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism, retail and cultural economy Supporting vulnerable people Improving transport links to London 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism potential Viking Coastal Trail links Richborough Power station decommission
Tonbridge & Malling	112,600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing affordable housing Keeping crime and disorder low Caring for the local environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> River Medway routes Cycling links in towns
Tunbridge Wells	105,300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable housing and retention of skilled workers Community safety and fear of crime Traffic congestion, parking and public transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commuter links New routes included within the A21 widening Links from Tunbridge Wells to tourist attractions



9 THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

9. Themes and Objectives

Introduction

Our research and evaluation of use and demand has given us a clear indication of what the people of Kent would like from its network of public rights of way. From this research we have identified seven key themes to guide the process of improving opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding. This provides a framework for the Statement of Action. By pursuing the following targets, we will be making Kent a better place to, live, work and visit.

Within the following seven key themes there are 42 objectives.

1. Well Maintained Countryside Access
2. Growth and Development
3. A More Sensible Network
4. Knowing What's Out There
5. Improving Safety
6. Education and Respect for the Countryside
7. Working Smarter and Improving our Customer Service

1) Well Maintained Countryside Access

You Said

"Having a well-signposted and accessible network is the top priority for improving local public rights of way."

The Issue

A large percentage of people questioned thought that a higher standard of path furniture (gates, bridges etc) should be a priority. This would encourage people to explore the countryside and encourage wider use of public rights of way for their everyday journeys. Currently 74.1% of the network is considered easy to use⁴¹. However, we will strive to improve this by working ever more efficiently and securing additional resources.

We Will

- Increase the number of stiles that meet British Standard 5709:2006, and improve the standard of structures through the provision of quality materials and guidance to landowners, volunteers and KCC staff.
- Improve signposting and waymarking, and in certain places add destination information.
- Make appropriate path surface and drainage improvements.
- Continue the responsible management of byways with reference to Government guidance; "Making the Best of Byways".
- Install bridges where they are currently missing.
- Seek the removal of existing stiles and barriers, and only authorise new structures where absolutely necessary.
- Take appropriate enforcement action to resolve illegal obstructions or changes to rights of way.
- Effectively manage resources through prioritising routes.
- Remove and reduce the dumping of illegal waste on rights of way and open spaces.
- Effectively manage access land and open green space.

2) Growth & Development

You Said

“Public rights of way and access to green space should never be lost as a result of housing or economic development.”

The Issue

Planned development in Kent both poses threats and provides opportunities to the existing public rights of way network and public access to green space. Within the two Kent growth areas there are proposals for 80,000 new homes and the creation of over 100,000 jobs over the next 30 years. The location for these new homes will primarily be in The Thames Gateway, East Kent and Ashford. It is essential that rights of way in these areas are protected and opportunities to enhance the network for all users are taken. By demonstrating the opportunities that public rights of way and open space offer in these areas, we will be contributing to the quality of life of Kent residents.

We Will

- Promote good design principles for new rights of way created as part of development schemes.
- Comment on and influence emerging policy documents that may impact on access to green space and the public rights of way network.
- Proactively work with developers and local and regional planning authorities to protect and enhance existing public rights of way and green space, and advise on proposals for new green infrastructure.
- Develop multi-user routes that allow walking, cycling and horse riding from towns to the wider countryside.
- Seize the opportunity to implement improvements to the network through major transport infrastructure schemes.

3) A More Sensible Network

You Said

“Rights of way don’t always go where you need them to, and sometimes the network appears fragmented. Compared with walkers, horse riders and cyclists have a limited network to explore and enjoy.”

The Issue

Research from the Kent Residents’ Panel identified a number of reasons why people are not using the public rights of way network for their daily journeys. The reasons included the fact that paths are not always in the right place, or do not always take the most direct route.

Kent’s public rights of way network is fragmented and poorly connected in certain parts of the county. This results in a heavy reliance on a relatively small percentage of the network. Carefully considered local and strategic changes would give greater opportunity for using the public rights of way network for recreation and leisure, and for linking residential areas to local schools and services and the surrounding countryside.

Compared with other counties, the network also has a lower than average accessibility for horse riders and cyclists. By creating new or ‘upgraded’ paths this problem could be addressed.

We must develop the public rights of way network for future generations to enjoy and ensure that walking and cycling routes provide real and sustainable alternatives to the private motor vehicle.

We Will

- Establish a more complete rights of way network. This includes creating new links through consultation with members of the public and our partners.
- Increase provision for off-road horse riding and carriage driving.
- Increase provision for off-road cycling and mountain biking activity.

4) Knowing What's Out There

You Said

"We would like more information about opportunities for exploring the countryside."

The Issue

When asked, most people like "the great outdoors" and would like to spend more time exploring the Kent countryside. Surprisingly though, the majority of these people assume that the countryside is inaccessible and lack the confidence to go out walking, cycling or riding. Why is this? One reason is quite simply that people don't know where to go. People need and want clear information about where to go to make the most of the countryside. An important way of giving people confidence, raising awareness and increasing use of public rights of way is to provide them with the clear information they need to help them take that step. Better access on the ground must go hand in hand with good, easy-to-use information for everyone.

We Will

- Maintain and update the county's Definitive Map of public rights of way and Commons and Village Greens Register.
- Improve and develop the content and functionality of the "Explore Kent" website. www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent
- Increase awareness of the Explore Kent brand and of the benefits of exploring the countryside and coast through targeted marketing and promotional activity.
- Produce and distribute information on cycling and horse riding.
- Produce and distribute information on circular walks and health walks.
- Ensure that all information is accessible to disabled people.
- Work in partnership to improve regional/national/international awareness of walking, cycling and horse riding opportunities in Kent, to directly support tourism objectives.
- Work closely with healthcare professionals to promote the health benefits of using public rights of way.

5) Improving Safety

You Said

"Personal safety is a concern when visiting either remote or new areas, or trying new outdoor activities. Some people feel that remote rights of way are unsafe, especially for walking alone."

The Issue

Throughout our research, general concerns were raised about feelings of personal security and safety when using the rights of way network. The County Council takes its responsibility towards the health, safety and welfare of Kent residents very seriously. Although the majority of rights of way offer few safety concerns, there are areas, particularly where they meet roads or railways, which can. The Local Transport Plan already sets out a strategy for improving safety, but the following aims are in addition to those, and specifically relate to public footpaths, bridleways, byways and restricted byways.

We Will

- Manage the rights of way network with consideration for public safety and security, including identifying and improving road, rail and river crossings where there are safety concerns.
- Identify and investigate where the public rights of way network can provide safe alternative routes, to avoid people having to walk, ride or cycle on busy roads.
- Develop the public rights of way network to directly support the County Council's "Healthy Schools" initiative.
- Promote and support providers of guided walks.

6) Education and respect for the countryside

You Said

“The Kent countryside has a character and richness that is highly valued and should be protected. Many trips to the countryside are taken for the sole purpose of enjoying the landscape and wildlife.”

The Issue

The natural environment is under increasing pressures from human activity. Our research has highlighted an apparent lack of understanding of the public’s rights and responsibilities associated with exploring the countryside on public rights of way. Public bodies should make this information available to help protect the environment and the interests of landowners.

Landowners, tenants and land managers should also ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities for protecting public rights of way through responsible land management. KCC is committed to working closely with landowners, tenants and land managers to ensure that they have the information they need in order to achieve this.

We Will

- Provide support and guidance to landowners, to ensure they are aware of their legal responsibilities.
- Produce information and relevant signs to protect and improve our natural environment.
- Ensure that our promotion activities inform the public about their rights and responsibilities.
- Minimise the impact of our work on the environment, through adoption of the County Council’s Environmental Policy and externally accredited ISO 14001:1996 certificate.

7) Working Smarter and Improving Our Customer Service

You Said

“The effective management of Kent’s public rights of way network is an essential service provided by the County Council. Public rights of way are a valuable asset that contributes both to the local economy and to personal health and well being. It is important that all countryside access providers deliver efficient services and the high standards of customer care demanded by the residents of Kent.”

The Issue

In order to realise the identified Improvement Plan objectives, and continually improve service to the public, we must be prepared to explore using new technology and react to meet our customer’s changing demands.

Our customer focus can be improved by involving and listening to user groups and individuals, and having a flexible attitude to the way in which we work. New technology and best practice guidelines can all contribute to improving this service further.

We Will

- Regularly review our policies and procedures to maintain efficiency and improve customer service.
- Embrace new technology and procedures in delivering an effective service.
- Work with partners to implement and review the Improvement Plan.
- Maintain a condition survey of the entire rights of way network, in order to keep an up-to-date asset register to help with management decisions. This should include logging any observations and evidence of climate change impacts as appropriate.
- Ensure that we are complying with the Disability Discrimination Act. Seek guidance from the findings of the “By All Means” Diversity Review project in order to give the best opportunity to deliver countryside access for all.
- Support and train staff in delivering a high level of customer service.
- Seek additional funding to deliver the objectives of the Improvement Plan.
- Develop the Kent Local Access Forum and Community Paths Project to enable more residents of Kent to get involved in the management of their local rights of way network.

The actions related to these objectives can be found in the Statement of Action.



10 FUNDING, IMPLEMENTATION AND PERFORMANCE

The production of the Improvement Plan is only the start of a long-term and evolving process for delivering countryside access improvements to satisfy public demand. Partnership working, securing additional funding and good project management are the three key areas to ensuring its success.

Gaining Support

Delivery of the actions contained within the Plan will be heavily reliant upon the good will of landowners and managers, and the support of user groups and members of the public. The inclusion of these groups' views have a constant presence throughout the Plan to ensure that it delivers exactly what people want.

In November 2006, the Countryside Access Service held a very successful conference, with the aim of promoting and gaining support for the Plan. Following this event there has been increased awareness of our work and establishment of a definitive contact list for future partnership working. It is intended that the event will be repeated to continue the momentum gathered and keep interested parties informed of the Plan's progress.

All Parish Councils have been approached to contribute towards the Improvement Plan, and the projects suggested by those which responded will be prioritised ready for evaluation, and implementation as resources permit.

Funding the Plan

The Actions contained within this Plan are aspirational and not limited to what can be achieved with existing staff, financial resources and current partnerships. The Plan identifies new and ambitious activity necessary to improve access to the countryside, as well as areas of activity where the County Council and its partners may need to re-focus existing resources.

The financing of new activity will be a key challenge for the Countryside Access Service and its partners. Projects that fit Kent's Local Transport Plan objectives will be eligible for funding from this source. However, it is unlikely that the level of funding will be sufficient. Funding from the Local Transport Plan will only fund transport-orientated projects seen as a priority for the county.

The Countryside Access Service has a proven record of attracting external funding to support non-statutory services. Although securing external funding is time consuming and not guaranteed, it will be necessary to pursue such funding in the future in order to deliver key elements of the Statement of Action. The Service will maximise external funding opportunities as they arise.

To assist in securing the delivery of Improvement Plans, Natural England has drawn up a list of potential funding sources. These include;

- S106 Agreements
- Landfill Tax Credit Scheme
- Primary Care Trusts
- Lottery Funding (HLF,BIG)
- Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund
- Agri-Environment Scheme Access Payments
- European Grants

Implementation

The overall management of implementing and reviewing of the CAIP will be the responsibility of the County Council's Countryside Access Improvement Plan Officer. The Countryside Access Forum will also be involved through providing support and guidance. An executive steering group will be established to oversee the ongoing management of the Improvement Plan process.

Included within the Statement of Action is a set of measurable targets that will be monitored. A bi-annual progress report will be produced, which will include project highlights and successes. Examples of best practice and results of how the Countryside Access Service and its partners are delivering against a series of performance indicators will also be reported. Ultimately the Plan's success will be measured by the delivery of the targets within the Statement of Action.

The County Council's Countryside Access Management System (CAMS) contains full public rights of way asset information from the recently completed condition survey, together with an electronic copy of Kent's Definitive Map. This valuable asset data will be updated as and when future improvements, enhancements and changes are made to the network. The CAMS database will provide some of the activity reports necessary for monitoring progress.

All promotional projects will have in-built evaluation mechanisms. These will come in a number of forms such as evaluation of website statistics, feedback forms, questionnaires, and electronic counters installed to monitor actual physical participation.

The Countryside Access Forum will also maintain an independent overview of progress and performance.

Performance

Until 2007, public rights of way had a national 'Best Value Performance Indicator' (BVPI 178) which assessed the state of public rights of way in England and Wales and contributed to the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) of local authorities. The indicator measured the length of rights of way which are easy to use as a percentage of the total length.

The survey is carried in accordance with a strict methodology developed by the County Surveyors Society (CSS) and the Institute of Public Rights of Way Management (IPROWM). A 5% random sample is generated each year with 2.5% surveyed in early summer and 2.5% in late autumn.

From 2008, the BVPI will be phased out following a new set of national performance indicators for Local Government. However the Countryside Access profession has decided through the national bodies of the CSS and IPROWM, that as a national and local measure this annual survey should continue as good practice and an objective ongoing measure of performance.

An annual survey based on the above methodology will continue, providing a performance indicator which will help the identification and prioritisation of resources.

Year	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008
Pass rate	68%	66.5%	66.6%	67.4%	74.1%



11 MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES

How the Plan will be prioritised

A public consultation was carried out in January 2007, to gauge opinion on which areas of the plan (presented as Themes) should be given priority. The results in the table below demonstrate that the public thought that each area should be given balanced consideration. The consultation provides us with a good framework for the Statement of Action.

Position	Themes	Volume
1	Well Maintained Countryside Access	478
2	Growth and Development	451
3	A More Sensible Network	449
4	Knowing What's Out There	432
5	Improving Safety	431
6	Education and Respect for the Environment	309
7	Working Smarter and Improving Our Customer Focus	242

Projects implemented from the Statement of Action will be managed in accordance with the County Council's revised network management and operational priorities.

Network Management Priorities

The following tables set out the County Council's list of priorities for the management of the definitive public rights of way network in Kent. Paths having a 'Priority A' status will be managed and maintained before 'Priority B' paths in cases where the same operational priority has been identified.

The list of priorities has been developed following exhaustive public consultation for the County Council's Countryside Access Improvement Plan, and a robust evaluation of public use and demand.

Network Priority Status 'A'
North Downs Way National Trail.
Paths used to access local amenities/facilities (eg, station/bus stop/school/church/tourist attraction/country park).
Paths used daily for leisure walking.
Multi-user paths with a clear public benefit.
Paths identified by the Improvement Plan as having significant potential for improvement.
Paths promoted by 'Explore Kent' products and services.

Network Priority Status 'B'
Paths not classified as Priority 'A'.

For management purposes the County Council intends to record the observed or known usage of the public rights of way network. The 'predominant usage' will be recorded in the Countryside Access Management System (CAMS) database as either 'largely recreational (R)' or 'largely utility (U)'.
 Eg, Priority AR or AU
 Priority BR or BU

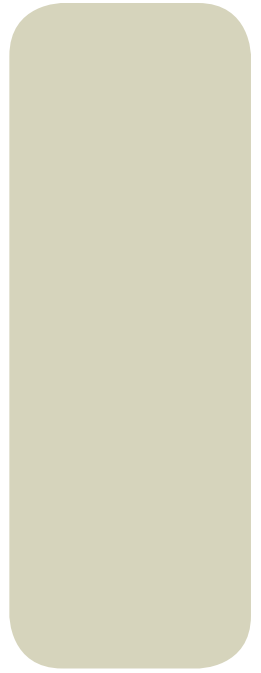
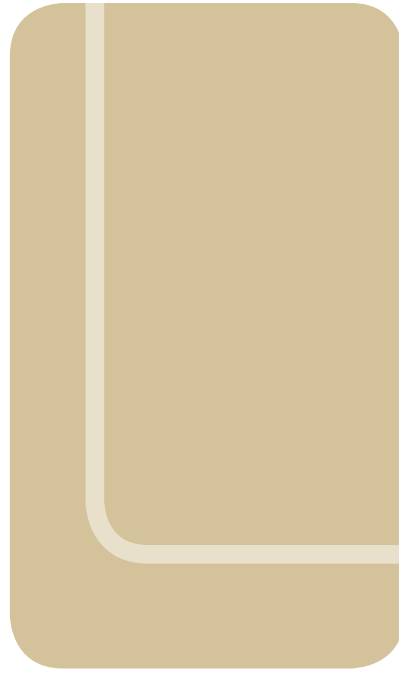
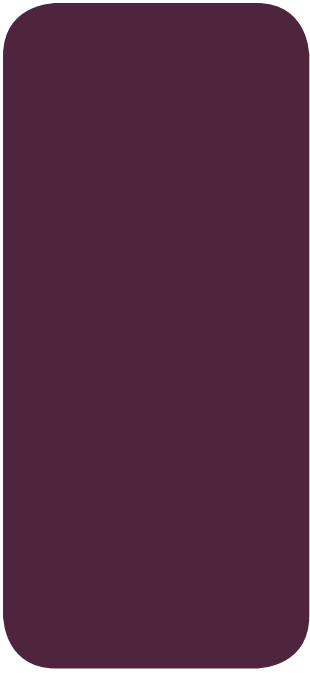
Operational priorities

Priorities for the operational management of the definitive public rights of way network and open access land are shown below.

Priority Level	Issue	Inspection Response Time (during working hours)
1	Public safety such as trip hazards, dangerous trees or adjacent objects, defective or dangerous bridges, stiles, gates or other furniture, or surface conditions. Issues that could result in litigation against KCC.	Within 24 Hrs
2	Emergency network protection, e.g. live building/construction work that would lead to irredeemable loss of a path. Legal cases with deadlines.	Within 5 Days
3	Proactive asset management.	n/a
4	Time constrained offences and new permanent obstructions e.g. crops and ploughing, fence or ditch.	Within 14 days
5	Natural obstructions, e.g. vegetation growth.	Within 14 days
6	Signposting and waymarking on promoted paths. ('Explore Kent' products and services only)	Within 14 days
7	Signposting and waymarking on non-promoted paths.	Within 28 days
8	Long standing obstructions and nuisance, e.g. deposition of filth, dirt, misleading notices etc (unless a public hazard, see Priority 1) any other matters not mentioned above.	Within 28 days

Permissive Paths

Permissive Paths will not be managed by the County Council unless they have been established under a formal signed Agreement. Where the County Council has entered into such an Agreement, the path will be given Priority Status 'B'.



12 STATEMENT OF ACTION

The implementation of the following actions, within the Countryside Access Improvement Plan, will be reviewed in 2012.

Well Maintained Countryside Access

What changes can you expect to see over the next 10 years?

A dramatic reduction in the number of stiles, by replacing them with gaps and gates, will result in a countryside access network available to a wider range of people. Better signposting and waymarking, together with the installation of more informative destination signs in appropriate locations, will increase people's confidence in using the rights of way network for everyday journeys. Promoted walks and rides will be maintained to a high standard making Kent an attractive destination for recreational tourism. The up-keep of popular paths will be noticeably improved ensuring people have an enjoyable experience in the Kent countryside.

* Key to be found on page 101.

	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
M1	Increase the number of stiles that meet British Standard 5709:2006, and improve the standard of structures through the provision of quality materials and guidance to landowners, volunteers and KCC staff.	Produce and promote a county-wide standard for path furniture.	😊	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 WS CS AONB CAPD	PCs Landowners Volunteers Other Access Providers
		Provide private landowners with quality materials and monitor installations.		*	*	*	*	*	*	£√		
M2	Improve signposting and waymarking, and in certain places add destination information.	Reach & maintain BVPI signage condition at 95%.	😊 ⊕ ⊗		*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 WS AONB CAPD	PCs Volunteers NE
		Establish and implement a mechanism for providing destination signage on PROW.			*	*	*	*	*	£√		
		Re-sign North Downs Way.						*		£+		
M3	Make appropriate path surface and drainage improvements.	Reach & maintain BVPI surface condition (including vegetation control) at 75%.	😊				*	*	*	£+	T3 AONB CAPD	Volunteers










	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
M4	Continue the responsible management of Byways with reference to Government guidance; "Making the Best of Byways".	Review management of 2 priority byways per year through the county's Byways Working Group.	😊	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	AONB CAPD	Volunteers BWG
M5	Install bridges where they are currently missing.	Survey all major structures.	😊	*		*		*	*	£√	AONB CAPD	PCs Volunteers
		Identify all missing bridges.				*				£√		
		Reduce the amount of damaged/missing bridges at a rate of 10% annually.		*	*	*	*	*	*	£+		
M6	Seek the removal of existing stiles and barriers, and only authorise new structures where absolutely necessary.	Identify a list of priority routes that can be made stile free.	😊 ⊕ ⊗ ££		*					£√	VK T3 WS AONB CAPD	PC's Landowners Volunteers Other access providers NE
		Reduce the number of stiles or other barriers by 200 per annum.		*	*	*	*	*	*	£→£ £√		
		North Downs Way to be completely stile free.			*					£+		
M7	Take appropriate enforcement action to resolve illegal obstructions or changes to rights of way.	Annually review effectiveness of enforcement policy and procedure.	😊	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	CAPD	Landowners KCAF
M8	Effectively manage resources through prioritising routes.	Apply network priority status rating 'A' or 'B' for every PROW.	😊 ⊕ ⊗ ££			*				£√	VK T3 WS CS CAPD	PCs Landowners KHS







	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
M9	Remove and reduce the dumping of illegal waste on rights of way and open spaces.	Monitor collection efficiency and act to improve service levels.	😊 +	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 AONB CAPD	District Councils Kent Police KWM KHS
		Identify known hot-spots and manage entry points to reduce accessibility for dumping.	😊 +		*	*	*	*	*	£+		
M10	Effectively manage access land and open green space.	Inspect and maintain entry points for open access land.	😊 +		*		*		*	£√	VK T3 KMSP SEP CAPD	PCs Volunteers Other Access Providers
		Develop a county-wide performance indicator for access to open green space.					*		£+			
		Work with other countryside access providers to promote managed sites as gateways to the wider countryside.		*	*	*	*	*	£√			

Growth & Development

What changes can you expect to see over the next 10 years?

Sustainable transport systems and the provision of high quality green space are key to the success of new developments. Opportunities will be taken to include facilities which reduce traffic congestion, improve safety and provide community recreational facilities. The existing rights of way network and provision of open green space will be enhanced as a consequence of new development reducing the impact of the growing population, traffic and loss of land.









	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
D1	Promote good design principles for new rights of way created as part of development schemes.	Establish and support a multi-agency working group to encourage opportunities for PROW/ countryside access improvements.	   ££		*	*	*	*	*	£→£ £+	VK T3 WS CS KMSP SEP CAPD	Developers District Councils Kent Police KHS NE
D2	Comment on and influence emerging policy documents that may impact on access to green space and the public rights of way network.	Ensure that the 12 district LDFs provide a policy for protecting and enhancing PROW/ countryside access through new development.	   ££	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	CAPD	District Councils KCC Planning
D3	Proactively work with developers and local and regional planning authorities to protect and enhance existing public rights of way and green space, and advise on proposals for new green infrastructure.	Officers to comment on all relevant planning applications received.	   ££	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	LTP VK T3 WS CS KMSP SEP CAPD	District Councils Developers KHS KCC Planning
		Create and promote exemplar schemes that demonstrate best practice in dealing with PROW/ countryside access in new development.					*					

	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
D4	Develop multi-user routes that allow walking, cycling and horse riding from towns to the wider countryside.	Demonstrate contribution to the development and progress of the Kent Thameside Green Grid and The Ashford Blue and Green Grid.	   ££	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	LTP VK T3 WS CS KMSP SEP CAPD	KHS, District Councils Developers Green Grid
D5	Seize the opportunity to implement improvements to the network through major transport infrastructure schemes.	Secure a new route through the phase 2 of the A2 widening (Cobham to Pepperhill).	  	*	*					£√	LTP VK T3 WS CS KMSP SEP CAPD	KHS HA District Councils Developers Green Grid
		Maintain a list of forthcoming highway schemes.			*	*	*	*	*	£√		
		Annually liaise with KHS staff to bid through PIPKIN for projects that contribute to the CAIP and LTP.		*	*	*	*	*	*	£√		

A More Sensible Network

What changes can you expect to see over the next 10 years?








Starting with land owned by local authorities, and in parishes which showed a particular interest during the development of the Improvement Plan, we will work closely with our partners to provide new or upgraded paths in areas of high demand. Horse riders and cyclists will have access to new paths supporting their recreational needs whilst at the same time supporting the needs of rural businesses. Kent will have a less fragmented network with routes going where people want them to. The public rights of way network will give people the opportunity for healthier transport options, helping reduce the reliance on the private motor vehicle for short journeys.







	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
N1	Establish a more complete rights of way network. This includes creating new links through consultation with members of the public and our partners.	Annually deliver a programme of improvement schemes endorsed by the Access Forum.	   ££		*	*	*	*	*	£√	LTP VK T3 WS CS KMSP SEP AONB CAPD	PCs RA BHS KHS CMPs AONBs KCAF TROT Landowners KaMBIT
N2	Increase provision for off-road horse riding and carriage driving.	Increase horse riding network provision, targeted to support recreational riding and equine business. – 2 projects per annum.	  ££		*	*	*	*	*	£+	VK T3 SEP AONB CAPD	PCs RA BHS KHS TROT
N3	Increase provision for off-road cycling and mountain biking activity.	Increase network cycling provision – 2 projects per annum.	   ££		*	*	*	*	*	£+	LTP VK T3 CS SEP AONB	PCs RA KHS Sustrans
		Provide site based facilities for mountain biking in the North and East of the county linked to population centres.					*	*	*	£+		

Knowing What's Out There

What changes can you expect to see over the next 10 years?

Explore Kent products and services will become recognised as the definitive source of information about countryside recreation in Kent. This resource will increase the participation of healthy outdoor recreation, and people's understanding of what can be discovered in Kent. This increased understanding will add value to rural economies and add to the enjoyment of living in Kent. The awareness of Kent's recreational resource will be known at local, national and international levels.

	Objective	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners	
K1	Maintain and update the county's Definitive Map of public rights of way and Commons and Village Greens Register.	Reduce waiting time for commencing requested modifications to the Definitive Map to 12 months.	   		*	*	*	*	*	£+	CAPD		
		Produce a new 1:2500 scale electronic copy of the Definitive Network Map.			*	*							£√
		Maintain an updated online map for public access via the Explore Kent website.		*	*	*	*	*	*				£√
		Produce a Definitive Map of all excluded areas.							*				£√
K2	Improve and develop the content and functionality of the "Explore Kent" website. www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent	Update website with new and interactive content, events and campaigns, including an email information service.	  	*	*	*	*	*	*	£+	VK T3 AONB CAPD	Other Access Providers KCAF KTA TSE TROT	










	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
K3	Increase awareness of the Explore Kent brand and the benefits of exploring the countryside and coast through targeted marketing and promotional activity.	Develop brand guidelines and technical standards. Work with other stakeholders to adopt.	  ££	*	*	*				£√	VK T3 WS CS SEP AONB CAPD	Other Access Providers CMPs KCAF
		Attend relevant events e.g. the Kent County Show.		*	*	*	*	*	*	£→£ £√		
		Produce Explore Kent magazine (twice yearly).			*	*	*	*	*	£√		
		Run targeted campaigns to promote Explore Kent products and services (e.g. calendar).		*	*	*	*	*	*	£→£ £+		
		Work with partners to engage with BME groups.			*	*	*	*	*	£√		
K4	Produce and distribute information on Cycling and Horse Riding.	Review, maintain and promote cycling and mountain biking information.	  ££	*		*		*	*	£+	VK T3 AONB CAPD	KHS Sustrans CTC
		Review, maintain and promote horse riding information.		*			*		*	£+		
K5	Produce and distribute information on circular walks and health walks.	Review, maintain and promote 'Walks in Kent' series.	  ££		*	*	*	*	*	£→£ £√	VK T3 WS SEP CAPD	KTA TSE Other Access Providers District Councils
		Produce companion guides for promoted long-distance walks.		*	*					£+		

	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners	
K6	Ensure that all information is accessible to disabled people.	Develop accessibility of the Explore Kent website for blind and partially sighted people.	😊 +	*	*					£√	VK T3 SEP CAPD		
		Include accessibility information on all promotional literature.				*	*	*	*	*			£√
		Ensure a minimum of 50% of all events on the Explore Kent Website are available to disabled people.				*	*	*	*	*			£+
K7	Work in partnership to improve regional/national/international awareness of walking, cycling and horse riding opportunities in Kent, to directly support tourism objectives.	Maintain relationship with Interreg partners.	😊 ££	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 AONB CAPD	KTA TSE	
		Work jointly with Kent Tourism Alliance and Rural Ways Partnership.		*	*	*	*	*	*	*			£√
K8	Work closely with health care professionals to promote the health benefits of using public rights of way.	Support and provide resource to help deliver the Strategy for Public Health in Kent.	😊 +	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 CAPD SFPH	NHS	

Improving Safety

What changes can you expect to see over the next 10 years?

Paths which had previously not been used due to safety concerns will see increased usage as people gain confidence in the safer environments. An increase in the number of safe walking and cycling routes around schools will reduce car congestion and safety concerns associated with the “school run”.

	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
ST1	Manage the rights of way network with consideration for public safety and security, including identifying and improving road, rail and river crossings where there are safety concerns.	Identify all crossings where there are safety concerns.	   ££		*					£√	LTP VK T3 CAPD	KHS. KCAF RA BHS HA NR
		Resolve 6 crossing safety projects annually.			*	*	*	*	*	£√		
		Work with community liaison groups to resolve issues of security on public rights of way.			*	*	*	*	*	£√		
ST2	Identify and investigate where the public rights of way network can provide safe alternative routes to avoid people having to walk, ride, or cycle on busy roads.	Identify & implement potential “behind hedge” routes to support actions in N1.	 		*	*	*	*	*	£+	LTP VK T3 SEP CAPD	KHS KCAF Sustrans KaMBIT
ST3	Develop the public rights of way network to support the County Council’s “Healthy Schools” initiative.	Annually develop or improve 3 new links to schools.	 + 	*	*	*	*	*	*	£+	LTP VK T3 CAPD	KHS PCs KCAF School
ST4	Promote and support providers of guided walks.	Promote guided walks and events through Explore Kent products & services to increase public confidence in the countryside.	 	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	CAPD	RA HWI T3 NHS T3 CMPs Other Access Providers.

Education and Respect for the Countryside

What changes can you expect to see over the next 10 years?

Appropriately located information and signage will lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of the Kent countryside. This will help protect landowner interests and the habitats and landscapes that make the Kent countryside so unique and popular.

	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
E1	Provide support and guidance to landowners, to ensure they are aware of their legal responsibilities.	Produce and distribute guidance factsheets regarding path re-instatement and maintenance responsibilities.	😊	*	*	*	*	*	*	£+	CAPD	Landowners
E2	Produce information and relevant signs to protect and improve our natural environment.	Where appropriate install signs to protect species or habitats.	😊		*	*	*	*	*	£+	VK T3 AONB CAPD	CMPs AONBs KCAF Other access providers
		Provide landowners with signs which encourage the responsible use of public rights of way and open access land.		*	*	*	*	*	*	£√		
E3	Ensure that our promotion activities inform the public about their rights <u>and</u> responsibilities.	Promote the Countryside Code on all relevant material.	😊	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 AONB CAPD	Landowners CMPs
		Produce & promote educational material to be used by schools.		*	*	*	*	*	*	£+		
E4	Minimise the impact of our work on the environment, through adoption of the County Council's Environmental Policy and externally accredited ISO 14001:1996 certificate.	All staff to be aware of the County Council's Environmental Policy.	😊	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 CAPD	

Working Smarter and Improving Customer Service

What changes can you expect to see over the next 10 years?

The service provided by the County Council will continue to improve resulting in greater customer satisfaction whilst improving efficiency. This will be achieved through continued investment in staff training and new technology. The Service will continue to develop its understanding of the impacts of climate change on the public rights of way network, and the environment to which it provides access, and apply this to decision-making.

	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
S1	Regularly review our policies and procedures to maintain efficiency and improve customer service.	Review the Countryside Access policy document & implement necessary changes.	😊		*		*		*	£√	CAPD	KCAF RA BHS Landowners CSS IPROW
S2	Embrace new technology and procedures in delivering an effective service.	CAMS asset management database being used by all staff.	😊	*	*	*	*	*	*	£√	CAPD	KHS KCAF Sustrans KaMBIT BHS
		Video conferencing technology installed at all area Countryside Access Service offices.		*	*					£+		
		Continue to develop new systems that enhance service quality to public and professional customers.		*	*	*	*	*	*	£√		
S3	Work with partners to implement and review the Improvement Plan.	Bi-annual report monitoring the progress of the Improvement Plan.	😊 +			*		*	*	£√	CAPD	KCAF KHS Landowners
		Establish an Executive Steering Group for the Improvement Plan.	☒ ££	*						£√		

	Objectives	Actions	Benefit	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012-17	Resource	Policy Link	Key Partners
S4	Maintain a condition survey of the entire rights of way network, in order to keep an up-to-date asset register to help with management decisions. This should include logging any observations and evidence of climate change impacts as appropriate.	Train volunteer surveyors to maintain data.	☺		*	*	*	*	*	£√	CAPD	RA Volunteers
		Equip KCC staff with mobile technology to update CAMS database 'in the field'.			*					£+		
S5	Ensure that we are complying with the Disability and Discrimination Act. Seek guidance from the findings of the "By all Means" Diversity Review project in order to give the best opportunity to deliver countryside access for all.	All staff to receive DDA and Diversity training.	☺ +		*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 CAPD	IPROW
S6	Support and train staff in delivering a high level of customer service.	All staff to receive training in customer care.	☺		*	*	*	*	*	£√	VK T3 CAPD	IPROW
S7	Seek additional funding to deliver the objectives of the Improvement Plan	Pursue viable sources of external funding, including Interreg IV.	☺ + ££ ££		*	*	*	*	*	£→£ £√	CAPD	AONB PCs
S8	Develop the Kent Local Access Forum and Community Paths Project to enable more residents of Kent to get involved in the management of their local rights of way network.	Involve the Countryside Access Forum in the development of the Countryside Access Service and Improvement Plan.	☺ + ££ ££	*	*	*	*	*	*	£→£ £√	CAPD	AONB PCs KCAF

KEY

Policy Link

LTP	Local Transport Plan
VK	Vision for Kent
T3	Towards 2010
WS	Walking Strategy
CS	Cycling Strategy
KMSP	Kent & Medway Structure Plan
SEP	South East Regional Plan
AONB	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans
CAPD	Countryside Access Policy Document
SFPH	Strategy for Public Health in Kent

Benefit

+	Health & Well Being
⊗	Reducing car dependency
££	Rural economy
😊	Enjoyment

Resource

£√	Deliverable with existing resource levels
£+	Additional resource required
£→£	Potential for income generation or budget savings

Key Partners

Landowners

Kent Police

Schools

District Councils

Developers

Volunteers

Other Access Providers

Green Grid

KCC Planning

RA Ramblers' Association

BHS British Horse Society

KHS Kent Highway Services

CMPs Countryside Management Projects

AONBs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

KCAF Kent Countryside Access Forum

KaMBIT Kent & Medway Bridleway Improvement Trust

TROT Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust

PCs Parish Councils

NHS NHS (Health Walks Initiative)

SUSTRANS Sustainable Transport Charity

KTA Kent Tourism Alliance

TSE Tourism South East

KWM	Kent County Council Waste Management
BWG	Byways Working Group
IPROW	Institute of Public Rights of Way Management
HA	Highways Agency
NE	Natural England
CSS	Country Surveyors' Society

APPENDIX A DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Introduction

During the production of the Improvement Plan a number of demonstration projects have been implemented. In order to demonstrate what the Improvement Plan can achieve given the appropriate funding, details of four selected projects can be found below. All projects have either been research led, community led or delivered jointly with other partners and stakeholders.

Location - Eynsford

Statement of Action Reference –

N1	Establish a more complete rights of way network. This includes creating new links through consultation with members of the public and our partners.
ST2	Identify and investigate where the public rights of way network can provide safe alternative routes to avoid people having to walk, ride or cycle on busy roads.
ST3	Develop the public rights of way network to support the County Council's "Healthy Schools" initiative.

Description of Project -

The first demonstration project was the creation of a 300-metre accessible footpath in a field alongside the A225, between the villages of Eynsford and Farningham. The two villages are intrinsically linked by the fact that they share essential community facilities, for example the children from Farningham attend the school in Eynsford. Through the generosity and efforts of the local residents a field known as the Millfield was purchased. The trustees of this field worked in partnership with the County Council, to dedicate a footpath through the field. The new route provides an alternative to walking on a narrow and uninviting footway adjacent to the A225. As the route would be used by school children, mothers with pushchairs, and the elderly, the route was designed with a high level of accessibility.

To test the success of the project a pedestrian counter was installed. The counter is currently recording around 2,500 walkers per month.



Benefits - + ~~⊗~~ 😊

Cost - £27,000

Location – Biddenden

Statement of Action Reference –

M3	Make appropriate path surface and drainage improvements.
ST2	Identify and investigate where the public rights of way network can provide safe alternative routes to avoid people having to walk, ride or cycle on busy roads.
ST3	Develop the public rights of way network to support the County Council's "Healthy Schools" initiative.

Description of Project -

An existing muddy public footpath was identified by John Mayne primary school (a member of the Healthy Schools initiative) as a potential route for a new 'walking bus' scheme. A section of path was resurfaced to encourage healthy journeys to school whilst reducing the number of short car journeys and the safety implications of parked cars adjacent to the school grounds.



Picture: Aerial photo of route

Benefits - + ~~⊗~~ 😊

Cost - £3,000

Location – Betteshanger

Statement of Action Reference –

M3	Make appropriate path surface and drainage improvements.
D4	Develop multi-user routes that allow walking, cycling and horse riding from towns to the wider countryside.
N2	Increase provision for off-road horse riding and carriage driving.
N3	Increase provision for off-road cycling and mountain biking activity

Description of Project -

A new country park (Fowlmead) has been created by SEEDA, English Partnerships and Dover District Council on the former Betteshanger Colliery site. Access to the site on foot, cycle or horseback can be gained through two existing bridleways, which link to the settlements of Sholden and to Deal, allowing access to the mainline railway station. The routes have been resurfaced and signed in conjunction with Kent Highway Services to promote sustainable access to the new park.



Picture: Aerial photo of Betteshanger

Benefits - + ~~⊗~~ 😊 ££

Cost - £37,000

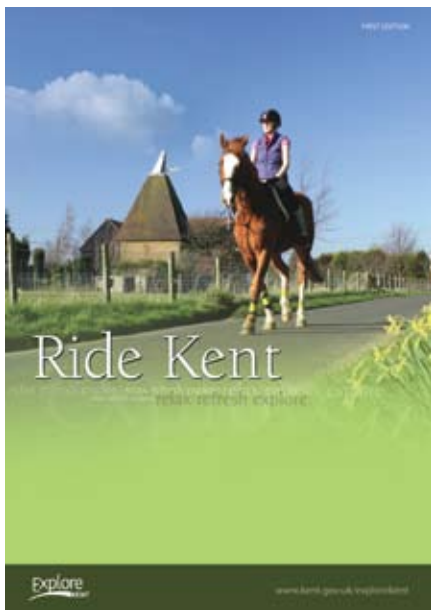
Project – Ride Kent Brochure

Statement of Action Reference –

K4	Produce and distribute information on Cycling and Horse Riding.
K7	Work in partnership to improve regional/national/international awareness of walking, cycling and horse riding opportunities in Kent to directly support tourism objectives.
E1	Provide support and guidance to landowners, to ensure they are aware of their legal responsibilities.

Description of Project -

In response to growing requests for information a new Ride Kent brochure has been produced with the assistance of the riding community. Within the brochure is included information on riding centres, riding safety, equestrian sports and suggestions on where to go riding in the county. Map information includes areas for horse box parking and horse friendly public houses. The brochure is an excellent starting point for riding in Kent whilst supporting equestrian business and the wider rural economy



Benefits - + 😊 ££

Cost - £5,500

APPENDIX B RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of the Improvement Plan is to deliver a countryside access network fit for modern needs and demands, and to encourage more people to get out and enjoy the Kent countryside. For this reason, extensive research was undertaken to find out what Kent's residents want from countryside access, the type of routes they would like, and where they want them to go. The themes and objectives of the plan have been specifically chosen following the public consultation. The research process has gone through four key phases.

1. Literature and policy review
2. Public consultation of current needs and demands
3. Consultation on the plan's objectives
4. Overview and prioritisation of specific projects

A separate document, detailing all of the research undertaken in the production of the Improvement Plan has, been produced and is available upon request. Below is a brief overview of the research completed.

Local Authority Officers and Rangers

KCC public rights of way officers and country park staff have provided a wide range of suggestions for improving countryside access in Kent. These members of staff will also be heavily involved in the implementation of access improvement projects in their respective areas.

Parish Councils

All 311 parish councils were sent questionnaires for the CAIP. Of these, 35 sent responses, which amounted to over 250 suggested improvements. Some parishes also enclosed detailed maps, demonstrating where they would like enhancements to be made.

AONBs and Countryside Management Projects

Thorough consultation has been carried out with Kent's ten Countryside Management Projects and two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They are considered to be key partners in delivering this plan.

User Groups

Local user groups such as the British Horse Society and the Ramblers' Association, have helped the County Council in assessing the needs of their specific user type

Kent Residents' Panel

The Residents' Panel consists of around a thousand Kent residents who volunteer to be consulted on various issues, in order to keep the County Council better informed of public opinion. Questions about the use and requirements of countryside access were put to the panel between 8 November 2004 and 9 February 2005. A total of 582 responses were received. Although the panel is open to all residents, membership tends to be slightly skewed towards the older end of Kent's population.

Public Questionnaire

General public consultation has taken place, using a questionnaire identical to that used for the Kent Residents' Panel survey. In total, 707 questionnaires were completed during a number of events, ranging from the Kent County Show in 2005, to eleven shopping centre surveys at three different locations, and also from a feature placed in the County Council's Kent Trails magazine.

Suggestions for Improvement

Many different types of suggestions for improvements to Kent's public rights of way network have been received. To date, 2,774 suggested improvements have been received and mapped on the County Council's Geographical Information System (GIS), and will be assessed and prioritised on the basis of how they meet the plan's objectives.

Consultation on Objectives

A consultation document on the objectives of the Improvement Plan was published and advertised during January and February 2007. Broad public consultation was considered to be a good way of prioritising the objectives to establish which fifteen of them were the most important to residents. 297 forms were completed and returned, the results of which can be found in the “Making it Happen” section.

APPENDIX C DISABLED ACCESS RESEARCH

Local Research

By All Means

The Rural White Paper (2000) promised a Diversity Review by 2005 of how to encourage more disabled people, BME groups, inner-city residents and young people to visit the countryside. The Kent-based 'By All Means' project forms part of this review. The project tests ways of increasing countryside visits and opportunities by breaking down barriers to participation.

A final report was submitted to Natural England in August 2007 with full assessments of various sub-projects that were run during the course of the research. These were:

Ask the Experts – Pan-disability consultative groups assisted with the improvement of a number of countryside access sites, with the objective of making them as accessible and inclusive as possible.

Meeting up – Getting Out. – In order to raise awareness of recreational opportunities in the countryside, a series of meetings and visits was organised. These were targeted at countryside access providers, care providers and disabled people. They also tested methods of encouraging more disabled people into the countryside. Some examples of the projects are:

- 'Branching Out' mixed-ability walking group
- 'Activity Tasters' and one-off activities
- Environmental Art

Life Skills – The project has used camping weekends to encourage a wider educational experience of the countryside in adults with learning difficulties.

Cycling – The project has been monitoring the progress and development of two disabled cycling clubs, as well as the psychological and health benefits cycling provides for participants.

Explore Kent Website – a workshop to identify how users with visual impairments interact with the website, assess whether the information on the website, if accessible, is useful to these users, and to identify areas of the website that could be improved. A full report on the findings of this workshop can be made available upon request.

A copy of the full By All Means project report can also be made available upon request.

Increasing Access to the Wider Countryside for Disabled People. KCC/Countryside Agency (Feb 2003).

This report, commissioned by the Countryside Agency, looked into the process required for the development of the "Walks for All" publications. The publications provide a series of walks that are specifically designed to meet the needs of disabled and partially-sighted people. The project built on existing expertise within KCC and emerging national best practice. Through consultation with a variety of disabled users and groups, the research project delivered three best practice products that are now essential components in delivering accessible countryside access.

New map symbols. A key of accessibility symbols was included within the "Walks for All" packs. These are now used on a variety of Explore Kent promotional products. Many are now also used on the Explore Kent website. They provide a countywide standard, essential for giving clear, consistent and useful information.

Publication Production Checklist. This useful guide sets out the process and content required for the promotion of fully-accessible easy-access walks.

Data Dictionary for GPS surveying routes. Adapted from the National Route Evaluation and Classification System (NatRECS), the Kent Countryside Access Service produced a comprehensive data dictionary for

surveying any public path, including the rights of way network. This data dictionary includes specific information required for the assessment of easy-access routes. The dictionary was used for the County Council's public rights of way condition survey and country park surveys carried out in 2007.

Access for All, the User Perspective. KCC/Environment Agency Feb 2003

In 2003, *Access for All – the User Perspective* was published. Supported by site-based user research, the project explored the needs of disabled people on land managed by the Environment Agency in Kent (which covers approximately 15% of the public rights of way network). The report provides useful insight into the attitudes of disabled people and others with mobility restrictions to the countryside, riverside and coastal paths in Kent.

National Research and Reference Documents

The Fieldfare Trust published the *BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines* in 1997⁴². An extended version of this was made available on CD in 2005. It remains the only source for national standards on acceptable conditions and barriers for disabled people. The document provides prescriptive physical standards assigned to different classifications of landscape or terrain – three 'zones' were established with accompanying standards and measurements. It is suggested that for land falling outside of managed sites, the principle of 'least restrictive access' should be applied. The CD version also includes very useful countryside path network guidelines.

Sense and Accessibility (Countryside Agency -CAX26), published in 2001, gave guidelines on information provision in accessible formats. KCC adopted and developed this guidance during the production of the Walks for All packs.

The Countryside Agency produced "*By all Reasonable Means*" in October 2005, providing best practice information about inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people. The guide is designed to help countryside and urban green space managers and landowners to improve accessibility to their sites, routes and facilities.

The British Standard (BS 5709) followed in 2006, which provides the only nationally-agreed standards for gaps, gates and stiles. Its objective is to provide good access for all legitimate users while providing stock-proof structures where they are genuinely required. Few existing stiles and gates conform to this standard – in Kent a large percentage do not, and the picture is probably the same across the country. However, it is beginning to be used more widely, as DEFRA and CoAg are specifying the need to meet the standards in connection with grants.

APPENDIX D DISTRICT POPULATION FORECAST

Strategy-based (Sept '06): Population Forecasts (All Ages)

Based on actual housing completions 2001/06 and Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy HP1

All figures have been separately rounded to the nearest hundred and therefore may not sum.
Percentages have been calculated using unrounded numbers.

Strategy (Sept '06)	Total Population				Change			
					01 to 11		01 to 16	
	2001	2006	2011	2016	no.	%	no.	%
Ashford	103,000	111,100	118,300	127,600	15,300	14.8	24,600	23.9
Canterbury	135,400	138,900	139,300	140,200	3,900	2.9	4,800	3.6
Dartford	86,000	90,900	100,900	108,700	15,000	17.4	22,800	26.5
Dover	104,600	106,000	106,200	106,800	1,600	1.5	2,100	2.1
Gravesham	95,800	95,800	97,100	97,400	1,300	1.4	1,600	1.6
Maidstone	139,100	144,600	145,900	147,900	6,800	4.9	8,800	6.3
Sevenoaks	109,200	108,500	108,300	107,000	-1,000	-0.9	-2,200	-2.0
Shepway	96,300	98,300	98,100	97,200	1,800	1.8	800	0.9
Swale	123,100	125,400	128,500	131,100	5,300	4.3	8,000	6.5
Thanet	126,800	129,000	129,800	130,300	3,000	2.4	3,600	2.8
Tonbridge & Malling	107,800	112,600	113,000	115,200	5,300	4.9	7,500	6.9
Tunbridge Wells	104,000	105,300	105,700	104,100	1,600	1.6	100	0.1
KCC Area	1,331,200	1,366,300	1,391,100	1,413,600	59,900	4.5	82,400	6.2

Kent County Council
Analysis & Information Team
14/12/2006

APPENDIX E GLOSSARY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Glossary

ANGSt	Accessible Natural Green Space
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BAM's	By All Means Diversity Review
BHS	British Horse Society
BME	Black & Minority Ethnic Groups
BOAT	Byway Open To All Traffic
BVPI	Best Value Performance Indicator
CAIP	Countryside Access Improvement Plan
CAMS	Countryside Access Management System
Cinque Port	Ports given privileges through Royal Charter
CROW	Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000
DCLG	Department for Communities & Local Government
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
DfT	Department for Transport
DH	Department of Health
Green Grid	Access & Wildlife corridors within Kent Thameside Developments
KCAF	Kent Countryside Access Forum
KCC	Kent County Council
KORVA	Kent of Road Vehicle Association
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LTP	Local Transport Plan
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
NERC	Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act
NHS	National Health Service
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PIPKIN	Prioritising Investment Programmes on the Kent Integrated Network
PROW	Public Rights of Way
RA	Ramblers' Association
RAMSAR	International Wetlands conservation Treaty signed in RAMSAR, Iran 1971
ROWIP	Rights of Way Improvement Plan
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RUPP	Road Used as a Public Path
SAC	Special Area Conservation
SEEDA	South East England Development Agency
SPA	Special Protection Action
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SUSTRANS	Sustainable Transport Charity
TRF	Trail Riders Federation
TRO	Traffic Regulation Order
TROT	Toll Rides (off road) Trust
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHI	Walk for Health Initiative
WHO	World Health Organisation

Acknowledgements

With thanks to all those staff, parish councils, volunteers and other organisations that have contributed to the development of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan. Over sixty responses were received on the draft consultation and many comments have been incorporated into this version. Particular thanks goes to the Ramblers' Association, British Horse Society, Natural England, KCAF and KCC staff without whose valuable contributions the Plan could not have been completed.

This plan is available in other formats, please call 08458 247 600.

Copies can be requested and the additional information referred to in the text can be obtained by writing to :-

The Countryside Access Service
Kent County Council
Invicta House
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 1XX

Or by sending an e-mail to :- prow@kent.gov.uk

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