

Section 1 - Introduction

■ 1.1 What is a Rights of Way Improvement Plan?

Statutory criteria

The County Council has a statutory obligation to maintain the public rights of way network. Under the terms of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), the County Council has to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan by November 2007.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan will look at:-

- The extent to which local rights of way meet the present and future needs of the public.
- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open air recreation and the enjoyment of the local authority's area together with the use of the network by local people as a means to access workplaces, schools and other local facilities.
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and those with limited mobility or other impairments.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan will build on the day to day work already being carried out by Derbyshire County Council as it discharges its duty to assert and protect the public's right to use and enjoy the network of public rights of way in the County. Without losing sight of the statutory work, this new duty provides a unique opportunity for the County Council to move forward and plan strategically for how it will improve the management, provision and promotion of a wider rights of way and access network based on what the public have asked for.

■ 1.2 What paths and routes are covered by this Plan?

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan talks about 'local rights of way' these include the following paths and access opportunities:

- Public Rights of Way: Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open To All Traffic.
- Off road cycle tracks.
- Greenways: multi user, easy access off road trails and routes.
- Permissive paths, including those provided through woodlands, parks, estates or along canal towpaths.
- Open access land.

■ 1.3 Advantages of improved rights of way

The advantages of a well-maintained and improved rights of way network can be listed as follows:-

- Enables promotion of new and improved community access to schools, places of work, shops, town centre facilities & public transport interchanges.
- Reduces community severance through improved accessibility.
- Enhances and protects the natural environment, landscape and cultural heritage of the area.
- Reduces traffic congestion and associated pollution by encouraging car-free and sustainable travel options.
- Encourages healthier lifestyles through regular exercise, and interaction with nature and landscape.
- Promotes social inclusion through provision of alternative transport choices for low income families.
- Provides “Access for All” opportunities to promote independence and improved quality of life.
- Creation of new leisure facilities and links to visitor attractions or local amenities, for recreational enjoyment of the countryside.
- Attracting tourism to encourage neighbourhood renewal and economic regeneration.

There can also be disadvantages, particularly for landowners and local residents or to the ecology of a site if areas become too popular or overused or if the extra use of the network is not carried out in a responsible manner. All of these factors have also been taken on board in the production of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan with a strong emphasis being placed on encouraging sustainable and responsible use.

■ 1.4 What constitutes an improvement?

The Guidance from the Government does not contain any definition of an “improvement”, but it is envisaged that it might include:-

- Improved information and promotion, made available in different formats, including web based, large print, Braille, audio etc.
- A correctly recorded network of routes.
- Improved maintenance, repair and way marking.
- A reduced number of obstructions.
- New links to improve the network’s accessibility and connectivity.
- Improved access and removal of barriers for particular groups of users, including those with limited mobility and other impairments.
- Identification of new links to sustainable transport, and the benefits of healthy living, tourism and the local economy.

■ 1.5 The process of creating the Plan

Preparation

A programme for producing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan together with a timetable was prepared in consultation with the two Local Access Forums covering the County: the Derby and Derbyshire Local Access Forum and the Peak District Local Access Forum. The Plan deals with the whole of Derbyshire, including the Peak District National Park. We are also working closely with Derby City Council which is producing its own Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the City of Derby.

Assessing the condition of the local rights of way network

The assessment process comprised a full analysis of existing information about the extent and condition of the current network, together with a review of any relevant strategies and policies. We have contacted a wide range of organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to get their views on the key issues for Derbyshire and what improvements to local routes and trails would benefit either themselves or the people that they represent.

Formal consultation

Extensive consultation has already taken place in order to carry out the assessments required under the legislation and to find out what the public want from an improved path network. Copies of the questionnaires that were distributed can be found on the County Council's web page relating to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan at: www.derbyshire.gov.uk/leisure/countryside/Access_recreation/rights_of_way/improvements/

- A series of questions was submitted to the County Council's Citizens Panel in September 2004, which resulted in over 5000 returns. The Citizens Panel was set up by all the local authorities within the County as a representative cross section of Derbyshire's residents.
- A user survey aimed at the wider public, including both users and non-users alike, took place throughout December 2004 and January 2005, available to be filled in both online and as a paper copy. A total of 10,000 questionnaires were distributed across the county and in neighbouring areas. The response to the consultation was very encouraging with over 3,000 completed forms received.
- A key issues questionnaire was sent out to over 100 of the main countywide stakeholders and other local authorities within the county at the end of 2004.
- Over one third of the Parish Councils responded to a consultation which took place during April and May 2005.
- Focus groups held during May and June 2005 looked at particular topics relating to heritage & nature conservation, the local economy and issues affecting landowners or farmers. Contact was also made with the Derbyshire Forum of Access Groups. The aim of this Forum is to increase wider public awareness when raising disability issues at county and city level. A full report

of the findings from the Focus Groups can be found on the County Council's web site (see reference above).

Evaluation

We have carried out a full analysis of the consultations that were carried out. This information was assessed against the context of the current network and how it is managed. This process involved the Local Access Forums and was completed by June 2006. The resulting report on the "Assessment of Needs" is included in Appendix B.

Statement of Action

Following the evaluation a series of themes and aims were identified with the help of members of the Local Access Forums and a Statement of the Action that the County Council proposes to take for the management of local rights of way and for securing an improved network was produced to include the following considerations:-

- The adequacy of current route provision and management.
- The existing and likely future needs of different groups of users and the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted people and those with limited mobility or other impairments.
- Identification of areas where provision for one or more group of user is considered to be deficient in the future and indicate the scale of these deficiencies.
- A description of other shortcomings that have been shown to exist.

Production of Draft and Final Rights of Way Improvement Plan

The final stages of the process are the production of this, the Draft Plan which we are consulting widely on for three months, followed by the publication of the Final Plan once the results of the draft consultation have been fully considered.

Section 2 - Setting the scene for Derbyshire

■ 2.1 Introduction to Derbyshire

The county of Derbyshire covers 2,551 sq km (985 square miles) or almost 2% of the land area of England. It is situated in the centre of the country and forms the north-west part of the East Midlands region. It is bordered by four other counties (Cheshire, Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire) and by the seven metropolitan districts of Barnsley, Sheffield, Rotherham, Kirklees, Oldham, Stockport and Tameside.

The county is divided into eight districts, those of Amber Valley, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales, Erewash, High Peak, North East Derbyshire and South Derbyshire. Amber Valley, Erewash and South Derbyshire surround the City of Derby, which is a unitary authority and is producing its own Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

■ 2.2 Landscape character

Derbyshire has a varied and diverse landscape character, ranging from the open moors of the Peak District to the flat floodplains of the Trent Valley in South Derbyshire. There are strong differences between the rural west and the urban east and between the upland north west and lowland south and east. The towns down the eastern side of the county form an almost continuous band of urban development.

By way of contrast, the Peak District National Park, designated for its outstanding natural beauty, covers most of the upland north west and attracts large numbers of visitors each year. Parts of South Derbyshire are located within the National Forest which is a major strategic project to create a new forest landscape across 200 square miles of Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire.



Curbar Edge in the Peak District

■ 2.3 Peak District National Park

More than a third of the county was designated as part of Britain's first National Park in 1951. The Peak District National Park, renowned for its "wild gritstone

edges, beautiful heather moorlands and gentle limestone dales”, is managed by the Peak District National Park Authority. As an independent body funded by central government, the National Park Authority is responsible for:-

- Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area;
- Promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public; and
- Fostering the economic and social well-being of local communities.

With more than 22 million visitor days each year, the Peak District National Park is one of the most visited in Europe. It is estimated that around 16 million people live within an hour’s drive, making the Peak District an easy place to reach. Most visits are made by day trippers rather than staying tourists. Almost 90% of visitors arrive by car, inevitably leading to traffic congestion and parking pressures.

Visitors are attracted by the area’s outstanding scenery, its peace and quiet and the opportunities for taking part in outdoor recreational activities such as walking, cycling, horse riding, rock climbing and caving. The network of public rights of way and trails, along with 524 square kilometres of open access land provide a valuable resource for both visitors and the National Park’s 38,000 local residents alike, enabling many people to enjoy its special qualities. Nearly 50% (2,433 kms) of Derbyshire’s public rights of way network lies within the National Park boundary.

The special qualities of the Peak District Moors have been recognised through the Moors for the Future Project, which was launched in 2002 with the principal aim of reversing the damage caused to large parts of this internationally important area by erosion, pollution, fires and over grazing. The project is managed by the National Park Authority and run by a partnership of organisations from both the public and private sectors. As far as access provision is concerned, the project has contributed to the restoration and repair of badly eroded paths across the moors, as well as carrying out improvements to a number of routes which allow easier physical access to moorland areas. It has sought to promote a better understanding and experience of the moorland landscape by all sections of society and to encourage visits to the moors by public transport.

■ 2.4 Population trends

The population of Derbyshire is just over 747,500 (mid 2005), almost a fifth of the population of the East Midlands and the eleventh largest of the English shire counties. Added to this, the City of Derby has a population of around 221,710. Many of its residents regularly travel into the surrounding county area for recreation and leisure visits. The largest town within the county itself is Chesterfield with a population of over 100,000. The next largest towns of Belper, Buxton, Dronfield, Glossop, Ilkeston, Long Eaton and Swadlincote all have populations in excess of 20,000.

Section 2 - Setting the scene for Derbyshire

The remainder of the county is made up of smaller towns and villages, mostly concentrated down the eastern and north western edges of the county. Around 16% of Derbyshire's population lives in sparsely populated rural areas where the population density is less than one person per hectare, compared with more than fifteen people per hectare in urban Chesterfield. A sparsely populated central area, much of which lies at altitudes of 300m or more, includes a major part of the Peak District National Park with a resident population of around 38,000. This highly dispersed population creates fundamental difficulties in the provision and delivery of services.

The 2001 census revealed that in Derbyshire:-

- Over the 25 year period between 1991 and 2016, the population is expected to increase by 8.5%, with many people being attracted to the county from Derby and the surrounding conurbations of Sheffield, Manchester and Nottingham.
- Between 1991 and 1999, South Derbyshire saw an 11% increase in its population, almost four times the national average.
- The county has a rapidly ageing population, with an estimated rise in the number of retired people of over 27% predicted between 1991 and 2016. In particular the proportion of the population above retirement age is noticeably higher than the national average for Bolsover and the Derbyshire Dales areas.
- 19.4% of Derbyshire's population has a limiting long term illness. Levels are higher in the Bolsover, Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire areas.
- There is a sizeable ethnic population living within Derby City. Outside of the city, non white ethnic groups make up a total of 0.9% of the population, living mainly in Erewash, Chesterfield and South Derbyshire.

This information reinforces the need to give consideration to an ageing, less mobile population and to improve the accessibility of the local rights of way network for a diverse range of people.

■ 2.5 Transport trends

Derbyshire is well served by both road and rail. The M1 motorway runs up the eastern side of the county and provides easy access to the north and south of the country. The A50 corridor gives access to Wales, the M6 and the north west of England. There are regular and frequent rail services to London, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester from Chesterfield and Derby. The East Midlands airport is situated just outside the county at Castle Donington. Manchester airport is also within easy travelling distance from the northern part of the county.

In line with national trends, the growing level of car ownership in Derbyshire has led to increasing traffic and congestion on the roads across the county. In 2001, 77% of all households owned at least one car, with a third owning two or more cars. This higher than average level of ownership may be attributed, in part, to the lack of an alternative form of transport in some rural areas of the county. It should be noted that

almost a quarter of households are without access to a car, particularly in the more deprived areas of Bolsover and North East Derbyshire.

As with elsewhere in the country, there is a heavy reliance on the private motor vehicle for many types of journey within Derbyshire - 70% in 2001 for travelling to work. Improving the local rights of way network and encouraging its use for utilitarian journeys will help with tackling congestion. Through initiatives, like the development of the multi user Greenway network and "Safe Routes to School", there is the opportunity to encourage more walking and cycling countywide, as an alternative to the car for journeys to work, local services, schools and for leisure, particularly if this use is promoted in conjunction with public/community transport.

■ 2.6 Public rights of way in Derbyshire

Extent of the network

Derbyshire has 5,121km (more than 3,000 miles) of public rights of way, equivalent in length to the county's road network. They represent an important means of gaining access to the countryside where they are mainly used for recreational and leisure purposes. Within urban areas the network of public rights of way not only provides links to the surrounding countryside, but is more likely to be used for everyday journeys.

There are four types of public rights of way:-

- Public Footpath
- Public Bridleway
- Restricted Byway (formerly known as RUPPs)
- Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)

Section 2 - Setting the scene for Derbyshire

The public rights of way network is made up as follows:

Table 2 Public rights of way in Derbyshire

Type of Route	Available to	No. of Routes	Length (km)	% of Derbyshire's network (by length)	Comparable figures for England (%)
Public Footpath (FP)	Pedestrians (inc wheelchair users)	8549	4662	91	78
Public Bridleway (BW)	Pedestrians (inc wheelchair users), horse riders and cyclists	424	389	7.6	17
Restricted Byway (RB) - these have now replaced RUPPs	Pedestrians (inc wheelchair users), horse riders, cyclists and horse drawn vehicles	85	62	1.2	3
Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)	Pedestrians (inc wheelchair users), horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn vehicles and motor vehicles	8	7	0.14	2
Total		9066	5121		

From this it can be seen that there are not many routes available to horse riders and cyclists compared with the network available to pedestrians. The footpath network alone is almost ten times longer than the length of bridleways, Restricted Byways and BOATs combined. Cyclists and horse riders are restricted to using 9% of the network, with the situation for drivers of horse drawn carriages or recreational motor vehicles being even more limited.

Footpaths represent a higher than average proportion of the network which suffers from local fragmentation, problems caused by cul de sac paths which do not connect to a road or which change status along their route, for example from bridleway to footpath at a parish boundary.

The distribution of public rights of way is not evenly spread across the county. Areas with higher levels of population, like Chesterfield, do not necessarily have good access to rights of way. Many parishes lack a bridleway network or have poorly connected routes forcing users onto the roads.

However this has to be set against the background of other access opportunities which may help to fill the gaps in the public rights of way network. Like those afforded by the county's unsurfaced non classified highways, the expanding network of Greenways, additional routes which may be generated by the Discovering Lost Ways project, permissive paths, country parks and countryside sites, nature reserves, canal towpaths, new Access Land and areas of woodland with dedicated access.

Condition of the network

All highway authorities must survey a random sample of their public rights of way network during May and November each year in order to be able to report to Government on its condition. The national Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 178) measures ease of use of the network and is used as a comparison of performance between different authorities.

This annual survey should cover at least 5% of the total length of the network and is carried out using a nationally agreed methodology to determine the percentage of paths which are easy to use by the general public, based on a range of elements including the presence of signs, condition of stiles, gates, bridges and path surfaces, along with any obstructions. Paths are required to meet strict criteria in order to pass the test and if a particular path fails the survey on any of the elements, it fails overall.

The BVPI 178 figure of the percentage of rights of way (by length) defined as easy to use in Derbyshire for 2005 was 67.7%. The results for previous years are shown in Table 2, along with the targets which have been set for the period between 2003 and 2007.

Over the last three years there has been a steady improvement in the overall percentage of rights of way that are easy to use by the general public from 51.5% to 67.7%. The lack of roadside signposts has been a significant factor in reducing performance, but the Authority's continued investment in this aspect of the work has paid off to the extent that whilst the results from the May 2003 survey showed that 65% of the paths were correctly signposted, this had increased to 81% in November 2005. The problems associated with ploughing and cropping and other obstructions on paths, which are out of the Authority's control to a certain extent, now appear to be the main contributory factors to a lower performance level and efforts continue to deal with the backlog of complaints as speedily as possible. This is being combined with the publication of advisory leaflets and targeted campaigns amongst the landowning community. During 2005/06, performance in these areas improved by 30% and 23% respectively.

**Table 3 Condition of the rights of way network in Derbyshire
Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 178**

% paths “easy to use” (by length)	Spring	Autumn	Overall Pass Rate	Target
2003	51	51.9	51.5	63
2004	55.3	59.5	57.3	65
2005	67.4	68.1	67.7	65
2006				70
2007				75

■ 2.7 Delivering access through partnership working

At officer level there has been contact with adjoining local authorities, to negotiate cross border routes, particularly potential cycle ways and Greenways and also to discuss the sharing of data collected during the consultation stages. The needs of rights of way users do not conform to administrative areas and this cross border working will be strengthened.

The delivery of improved rights of way maintenance, and enhancement measures on the rights of way network, is likely to be reliant on partnership working with local groups, parish and town councils. We will be exploring options for local partnerships.

Derbyshire Countryside Service

As a Highway, Surveying and Access Authority, Derbyshire County Council is responsible for protecting and maintaining the public rights of way network, keeping the Definitive Map and Statement up to date, setting up Local Access Forums for its area and has certain powers relating to land mapped as open country and registered common land under the CRoW Act 2000. Much of this work is delivered by the Countryside Service working in partnership with other organisations, local communities and voluntary groups.

The County Council was one of the first authorities to establish a Countryside Service in response to the 1968 Countryside Act. Since then the Service has developed and expanded, now actively managing public rights of way throughout the county, along with a portfolio of countryside sites outside the Peak District National Park. It also works in the wider countryside on access and environmentally based projects. The Service consists of three area teams (north, west and south) working with a centrally based team of specialist staff, including the rights of way section.

Peak District National Park Authority

Whilst the National Park Authority is directly responsible for managing areas of open access land, public rights of way in the National Park remain the responsibility of its seven constituent highway authorities, including Derbyshire County Council.

The County Council works in close partnership with the Peak District National Park Authority on many aspects of access and rights of way management. The Park manages its responsibilities for access and rights of way through the Access and Recreation Service. The National Park Rangers are also part of this Service and contribute to routine rights of way maintenance as part of their wider duties, as well as playing an important role in dealing with conflicts which may arise between different recreational users, land managers and conservation interests.

There is a formal 'Accord' or service level agreement with Derbyshire County Council. This recognises the common goals of both authorities and sets out a formal procedure for the maximisation of resources, providing the basis for annual funding from the County Council for an agreed programme of access related work, ranging from installing signposting and waymarking to initiating and undertaking major public path projects which contribute to filling gaps in the network.

Local Access Forums

Two Local Access Forums cover the county. The Derby and Derbyshire Local Access Forum and the Peak District Local Access Forum have a formal advisory role in strategic access and outdoor recreation issues, advising local highway authorities and the Peak District National Park Authority on the improvement of public access to land in their area for the purpose of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area. The Local Access Forums have been and will continue to be actively consulted throughout the production of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Derbyshire. They will play a crucial role in providing advice and guidance to the County Council on the delivery of the Plan.

The Peak District Local Access Forum has been established jointly between Derbyshire County Council and the Peak District National Park Authority. It includes land both outside and inside the National Park. Similarly the Derby and Derbyshire Local Access Forum, has been established between the County Council and Derby City Council.

There is a close working relationship between officers from the County Council and those from both Derby City Council and Peak District National Park Authority over the working of the Local Access Forums and in the production of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Derbyshire.

Local councils

South Derbyshire District Council operates a full agency agreement for dealing with rights of way maintenance and the removal of unlawful obstructions on the County Council's behalf.

The County Council has local agreements with 145 town/parish councils under its minor maintenance scheme which has been in operation since the 1960s. Parishes in the scheme undertake practical work, including way marking, clearance of undergrowth and surface repairs, to help improve the rights of way network in their area. The cost of carrying out this work is reclaimed from the County Council.

Land managers

Landowners and farmers also have an important role to play in looking after rights of way. They are responsible for maintaining stiles and gates across paths on their land, reinstating paths after ploughing, keeping paths clear of growing crops and cutting back overhanging vegetation. Members of staff work closely with the farming community to ensure that paths are reinstated and kept free from obstruction. The Authority has also produced several leaflets providing advice on ploughing and cropping issues and the availability of grants for stiles and gates.

The Field Path Maintenance Scheme, introduced in 1996 encourages landowners and farmers to help manage the network of paths on their land in conjunction with the County Council. The scheme includes payments to farmers for the clearance of surface vegetation from field edge paths, work which would normally be carried out by the County Council.

Section 3 - Policy context

■ 3.1 Introduction

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan sits alongside and complements many other strategies, plans and documents. In fact the threads that underpin the aims and themes within the Improvement Plan are found within a host of other documents indicating the wide range of interests that overlap with rights of way and wider countryside access issues.

■ 3.2 Corporate strategies

The Derbyshire Community Strategy (2006-2009) provides a blueprint for joint action by almost all the public, private and voluntary organisations in the County. Progress on all the priorities outlined in the Community Strategy is determined through Derbyshire's Local Area Agreement (2005 - 2008) and via constituent organisations' own corporate plans and strategies. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is set within the context of these countywide strategies, agreements and plans. Two of the twelve key indicators under the Sustainable Communities heading are fundamental to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan:-

- To increase the percentage of the total length of Rights of Way in the local authority area that are easy to use by the general public.
- To increase public access to the countryside.

In addition Derbyshire County Council's Council Plan for 2005-2009 and the Countryside Management and Development Strategy (2004 - 2009) both provide a commitment to develop and implement the Rights of Way Improvement Plan as part of the Council's commitment "to create well connected sustainable communities".

■ 3.3 Local Transport Strategy

The Derbyshire Local Transport Strategy 2006 to 2021 sets out seven Transport Objectives for delivering the Strategic Transport Aim: To improve local accessibility and promote healthy and sustainable travel choices. Of the seven objectives set to achieve the Strategic Transport Aim in Derbyshire's Second Local Transport Plan, five are highly relevant to a well developed and managed local rights of way network. These are:

- Improve access to facilities by healthier and more sustainable travel modes;
- Implement prioritised public rights of way improvements, where relevant to the shared priorities;
- Encourage the use of healthier and more sustainable travel opportunities;
- Support the development and implementation of travel planning; and
- Ensure new facilities are located where they can be accessed by means other than the private car.

■ 3.4 Local Transport Plans

In recognition of the contribution that local rights of way can make towards transport, recreation and health issues, the Government has stated that it will be making Rights of Way Improvement Plans a distinctive strand within the second phase of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) process from 2006.

The Government guidance states that Highway Authorities should:-

- Clearly establish the shared aims and establish a definite link between Rights of Way Improvement Plans and LTPs.
- Ensure that, as public highways, rights of way are embraced by the LTP process and recognised in LTPs as a key ingredient in the development of an integrated transport network that provides choice in a variety of transport modes.
- Recognise the invaluable role rights of way can play in assisting LTPs to achieve the shared priority and quality of life objectives.

There are two Local Transport Plans that cover the County: the Derby Joint LTP and the Derbyshire LTP. They are fundamental to the setting of policy and guiding the implementation for walking and cycling initiatives. The documents set out the strategies and programme for transport over the five year period 2006 - 2011 to meet a series of objectives. These shared objectives include: accessibility, safety, tackling congestion, improving air quality and quality of life.

Accessibility

Accessibility includes the need to enable people to access employment, education, health care, food shopping and leisure needs, by foot or cycle. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan ties in most closely with the accessibility theme. It forms an important element of the Accessibility Strategies prepared during the production of the second Local Transport Plans for the County.

Congestion and the economy

The congestion shared priority also covers the economy. In this context it is worth bearing in mind the economic value of the leisure and tourism industry to this county. In determining priorities for investment in the public rights of way network, the economic value of visitors to the countryside must be factored in.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

An environmental report has been produced for each of the Local Transport Plans as a result of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive¹ which requires environmental considerations to be built into plans more effectively and consider the medium and long term environmental consequences of the plans. Rights of Way proposals set out in the LTP have been considered in the above report alongside other areas.

1 <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/eia>

■ 3.5 Other plans and strategies

A list of other initiatives, plans and strategies that support or have a direct link to the preparation and development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan can be found in Appendix C.

Section 4 - Key themes

■ 4.1 Key themes

Three key themes have emerged from the public consultation which will underpin the Rights of Way Improvement Plan:

- **Theme A - Encourage routes that support the local economy and boost tourism**
- **Theme B - Give more consideration to matters relating to conservation and biodiversity**
- **Theme C - Promote the sustainable use of the network, encouraging healthier and more sustainable travel choices**

A well managed local rights of way network will complement all of these themes, providing benefits to health promotion, for social inclusion (being available to those people who do not own a car), for biodiversity and heritage (providing wildlife corridors and forming part of the local heritage) and providing economic benefits, helping local tourism and the local economy.

■ 4.2 Theme A - Encourage routes that support the local economy and boost tourism

The principles behind this theme emphasise how the access network can benefit the local economy, supporting local businesses, tourism and leisure outlets.



Tapton Lock Visitor Centre on the Chesterfield Canal

The importance of the countryside and the public path network to tourism and the wider local economy is increasingly recognised and well documented. The economic value of rights of way became very evident during closures caused by the Foot and Mouth epidemic in 2001. During that time, many small businesses struggled as visitors and locals, unable to use rights of way which were closed, avoided the countryside altogether.

The East Midlands region attracts 1.125 billion leisure day visits to the countryside; with an average spend of £8.60 per person². It is not known what proportion of these visits are to Derbyshire but it is likely to be a fairly high percentage as the county is important for both leisure day visits from home and as a tourism destination, having

2 GB Leisure Day Visits 2004. Report of the 2002/03 GB Day Visits Survey



as it does the only National Park in the region. The top two reasons for visiting the countryside were a) to walk, hill-walk or ramble (35%) and b) to eat or drink (15%).

Actions in the Statement of Action in Section 5 relating to this theme provide good links to Derbyshire County Council's Community Strategy, the Peak District National Park Management Plan, to the District Local Plans and the Regional Tourism Strategy.

Table 4 provides an indication of the current outdoor access opportunities in Derbyshire which will contribute to or complement the use of local rights of way:-

Table 4 Outdoor access opportunities in Derbyshire

<p>Peak District National Park:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The first to be designated in the country and the most visited of all the National Parks for day visits. <p>Trails:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National trails: Pennine Bridleway, Pennine Way• Long distance trails and paths: Trans Pennine Trail, High Peak Trail, Tissington Trail, Derwent Valley Heritage Way, Midshires Way• Local trail network: Monsal Trail, 5 Pits Trail, Rowthorne, Upper Derwent Dams, Limestone Way, Sett Valley Trail, Nutbrook Trail, Mickleover to Egginton Greenway, Ripley Greenway, Trent Valley Greenway <p>Country Parks and other managed sites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shipley, Elvaston and Poolsbrook Country Parks• National Park Visitor Centres <p>Historic Houses and grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chatsworth Estate,• National Trust properties and estates: Calke Abbey, Kedleston Hall, Hardwick Hall, Sudbury Hall, Longshaw Estate, High Peak Estate• Haddon Hall <p>Open Access Land:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kinder Scout and Bleaklow, East Peak District Moors, Gritstone Edges (with associated rock climbing interests), Goyt Valley• Limestone Dales <p>Water:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reservoirs with public access: Carsington Water, Upper Derwent Dams and Ladybower Reservoirs, Foremark, Staunton Harold, Ogston, and Linacre Reservoirs• Canal towpaths: Chesterfield Canal, Cromford Canal, Trent and Mersey Canal <p>Woodlands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Forest - numerous woodlands with public access plus Rosliston Forestry Centre• Woodlands owned or managed by the Forestry Commission - such as Cromford Moor, Goyt Valley <p>Tourist/Visitor attractions that often link with countryside access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matlock area: Heights of Abraham• Castleton area: Cave attractions• Market Towns: Ashbourne, Bakewell

This list is designed to give a flavour of the access network and opportunities that exist and must be seen in the context of the wider rural environment including working farmland, gardens, tourist attractions and the location of places to eat and drink. There is a need for the wider access network to provide the links between these places and local businesses, where people live or stay.

The County Council has started to identify such links by putting together its vision within the Local Transport Plan process for a largely off road county-wide strategic cycle network, based on Greenways and hence with wider multi user benefits, see Figure 1. This network is aimed at creating multi user links between the main centres of population in the county, between existing transport interchanges and providing links from urban to rural areas. A cycle map for Derbyshire based on the strategic cycle network has already proved its worth in terms of its potential to attract visitors from outside the area as well as for local people to use. 80,000 copies of the leaflet have been printed and distributed in less than 3 years to Tourist Information Centres, libraries and other venues, including major tourism outdoor shows.

Other such themed leaflets or short break packages identifying opportunities for cycling and walking in the county will make a significant contribution to the local economy.

What people wanted

Respondents from all the consultations placed a high priority on the need to provide attractive routes that link cafes/pubs/places of interest that benefit the local economy and tourism ventures.

A focus group which met to discuss the needs of tourism and other local businesses, recognised that the access network and its use is currently key to most of the businesses present. Consequently they wanted “a quality product to attract visitors into the area”. The group represented a good cross section of the sector and were able to speak from both personal use of the rights of way network as horse riders, cyclists or walkers and also from their customers’ points of view.

The main results from the focus group can be summarised as follows:-

- There have been many improvements over recent years to the footpath network, which is generally good; it was the bridleway network that needed improvements in their view, both in terms of its condition and missing links.
- Equally as important as the network itself, is the quality and availability of the supporting infrastructure: public/community transport, car parks, accommodation and information.
- The view was that the main focus should be on less confident users by helping them get out and about and making it easy for people to use the network. This came down mainly to information, publicity and signing.

A full report of the results from the focus group can be found on the County Council’s web page relating to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

What we will do:

We will encourage the management of the network within the context of providing attractive routes that benefit the local economy and boost tourism.

We will seek opportunities to raise the profile of Derbyshire as a walking, horse riding and cycling destination.

We will continue to develop a multi user Greenway network for everyday and recreational journeys which contributes towards the development of the County's Strategic (largely off road) Cycle Network.

The main Aims in the Statement of Action that support this theme relate to Aims 3 and 5; namely to provide a more connected and accessible network and then to improve the publicity and use related to it. The Statement of Action identifies which action points relate to this theme.

■ **4.3 Theme B - Give more consideration to matters relating conservation and biodiversity**



Walking for Health Group in Chesterfield

The principles relating to this theme will illustrate the commitment that the County Council has towards biodiversity issues and wider conservation matters including both heritage and nature conservation. It is also timely in that from 1st October 2006, all public sector bodies will have to consider biodiversity in the work they do. The new duty comes under Section 40 of the Natural Environment

and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, the aim being to raise the profile of biodiversity in England and Wales, eventually to a point where biodiversity issues become second nature to everyone making decisions in the public sector.

Other strategies that have been consulted in relation to this theme and that will provide guidance in how we work on access projects include: -

- UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK Biodiversity Partnership 2002).
- A Biodiversity Strategy for the East Midlands (East Midlands Biodiversity Forum).

- Peak District Biodiversity Action Plan - A Living Landscape.
- Lowland Derbyshire Action Plan.
- District Plans: Greenprints for Biodiversity.
- The Landscape Character of Derbyshire produced by Derbyshire County Council.

The Peak District National Park comprises a significant element of Derbyshire Dales and the High Peak Districts of the county and was designated in order to “conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area”. The county has several significant landscape areas that give it a strong identity. The importance of recognising the local distinctiveness of different parts of the county was stressed during the consultation and the part that individual areas of the county contribute to Derbyshire’s biological diversity.

The access network is inextricably linked to the landscape of Derbyshire. The majority of people use the access network in order to enjoy the scenery and wildlife, as well as the network of paths and trails helping to define that same landscape.

Derbyshire has a large number of sites with special designation for wildlife importance:

Table 5 Sites of ecological importance for Derbyshire:

<p>European importance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x Special Protection Area • 4 x Special Areas of Conservation <p>National importance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x National Nature Reserves • 87 x Sites of Special Scientific Interest <p>County level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1100 Wildlife sites outside the National Park designated by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

What people wanted

A focus group that was run to discuss the links with conservation concentrated on the following issues:-

- The need to provide a balanced approach which did not overstate the wildlife problems.
- The management needed to control illegal use of rights of way.
- The actual condition and maintenance of rights of way.
- The issue of surfacing: both visual and ecological impact.
- To improve the appreciation of the landscape and wildlife significance.
- The ecological impact of access on bird breeding populations, trampling of vegetation etc.
- The contribution that farmers and land managers can make.

Suggestions for improvements were:-

- Working with Natural England on Environmental Stewardship to counter some negative attitudes of landowners and farmers to new access.
- Resources for enforcement and policing of illegal use and encouraging responsible use and more general funding for rights of way.
- Take care with surfacing and do it sympathetically for both visual and ecological impact.
- A review of signposting and sympathetic way marking in areas used by casual visitors and better funding for appropriate interpretation.
- An early environmental impact assessment of all new access work.
- An integrated approach for recreation, archaeology and wildlife, such as looking to see if additional works could be carried out such as scrub clearance, hedge planting or ground works.

Results from all the consultations showed that people rated this theme very highly. The Statement of Action identifies which action points relate to this theme.

What we will do:

We will ensure that all maintenance methods and use of surfacing materials are in keeping with the ecological surroundings and the landscape character of the area.

We will ensure that we consider, from the outset, the environmental impact (both from an ecological and archaeological perspective) of all new access projects.

We will adopt an integrated approach to the development of access projects where possible in order to investigate whether wider environmental projects can be delivered to benefit wildlife and heritage.

■ 4.4 Theme C - Promote the sustainable use of the network, encouraging healthier and more sustainable travel choices



Multi use of the Five Pits Trail

The principles relating to this theme will seek to establish how rights of way can contribute towards a healthier environment for people, encouraging them to cut down on car use, increase opportunities for them to take part in physical activity and establish closer links between rights of way and public/community transport. All of which will work towards improving the quality of life for people.

Well managed public rights of way and other off road access routes will encourage people to make healthier and more sustainable transport choices, and thereby help to reduce congestion, pollution and road accidents. The use of the local rights of way network in this context needs to be considered in the light of both recreational use and more utilitarian use for people to go about their everyday activities.

An increased use of off-road paths and trails by school children or local commuters, walking or cycling to school or work can have an important localised effect on traffic congestion and the resulting improvements in air quality. Encouraging the use of off road routes is healthier and can also be safer particularly in terms of encouraging “Safe Routes to Schools” that avoid routes with traffic.

What people wanted

The initial results from all the consultations emphasised various issues that needed to be given a priority. The most important improvement that was identified was the need to concentrate on providing good quality circular routes within the network.

Similarly, there are pointers towards the need to encourage more people to undertake non-car journeys whether it is for recreation and leisure or for utilitarian reasons. Within the surveys

- 60% of people stated that they used a car to get to where they wanted to walk or ride.
- less than 3% of people used public transport.

Improvements to the wider network of local rights of way and to the attitude of people using the network will therefore have a positive impact on achieving the wider transport priorities. We will concentrate on giving consideration on how to deliver these, as described below:

Although traditionally the use of local rights of way was for “utilitarian” purposes: access to work, shop, school, church etc, in more recent times usage of the rural network at least has largely been for recreational and leisure purposes. This was borne out in the results from the analysis of the consultation exercises:-

- Over 90% of people, in the case of walkers, referred to using rights of way in order to enjoy the scenery and views.
- However 80% of path users referred to the benefits of exercise and keeping fit.
- 24% of walkers and 29% of cyclists stated that they use local rights of way and other off road routes for utilitarian purposes in order to access shops, school, workplaces and other local amenities.
- In the Citizens Panel, 56% of respondents indicated that they used local rights of way at least once a week, 65% of them walking less than 5 miles, with 30% walking from home.

Section 4 - Key themes

These factors all point to the contribution that an improved and well-maintained network of off road routes can make to the wider accessibility planning objectives and provide the means for people to enjoy the county's countryside and other open spaces.

What we will do:

We will carry out maintenance and surface improvements on the local rights of way network targeting paths in greatest need of repair or with the potential to benefit the greatest number of users.

We will target rights of way improvements on those routes that best address accessibility requirements and/ or have the potential to benefit the greatest number of users:

- routes in and around urban areas,
- routes that provide direct access between settlements,
- routes from settlements out into the countryside.

We will look for opportunities to promote the use of local rights of way, both circular and linear routes in conjunction with public transport.

The Statement of Action identifies which action points relate to this theme.