

## **FOCUS GROUPS FOR DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL As part of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) consultation process**

( abbreviations used : PDNPA Peak District National Park Authority, DCC Derbyshire County Council, PBW Pennine Bridleway, ROW Rights of Way, PDNP Peak District National Park, YHA Youth Hostels Association, CRoW, Countryside and Rights of Way Act, CLBA Country Landowners and Business Association, NFU National Farmers Union, LAF Local Access Forum, Defra Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ).

### **Introduction**

We ran three focus groups lasting approximately 2 hours each for: local tourism interests and businesses; people representing conservation and woodland management interests, and landowners and land managers. These were held in Bakewell on May 24<sup>th</sup> and at Carsington Water on July 19<sup>th</sup> 2005.

A further discussion group was held in May 2006 with the Derbyshire Forum of Local Access Groups to specifically consider the needs of people who are partially sighted or who have mobility problems.

The purpose of these meetings was to provide an in depth exploration of issues and solutions relating to public rights of way and other access provision throughout Derbyshire. This would yield both new insights into attitudes and opinions as well as informing existing data from previous survey work for the RoWIP.

All the groups were able to give a clear and representative view of their sector and were pleased to have been consulted.

### **Overview of findings**

Not surprisingly each group reflected the interests and concerns of the group they were representing. So, for instance, the conservation group were concerned about disturbance to wildlife of new open access arrangements and the landowners were wary of bringing more visitors onto their land with the attendant problems as they saw them. However, they were also able to see a wider perspective of public access and didn't necessarily take a wholly negative stance on the RoWIP process. They were able to offer practical and realistic suggestions for improvements to the access network.

### **Concerns:**

The landowners and managers were mainly concerned about illegal / inappropriate use of paths and the need for 'give and take' in the ROW negotiation process.

The tourism people didn't want restrictions on their businesses and wanted a quality product to attract visitors into the area.

The conservation group wanted to minimise the environmental impact of public access and the effect particularly on wildlife.

The disability group had issues relating to the lack of information available to disabled people about where they could go, coupled with the limitations on the ground particularly relating to the nature of the path surface and the presence of poorly maintained or badly designed structures.

There was agreement between all the groups that the network itself, particularly in the national park, is good and has seen many improvements in recent years. The main gaps are seen as in the bridleway network and waymarking / signposting.

**Key themes and messages from all the groups:**

A need to work more with landowners / managers and negotiate reasonable access arrangements

Work to fill in the missing links in the network (especially bridleways) to create circular routes

More use by visitors of public transport and encouragement to do so whilst out walking / cycling.

More help for less confident users especially around signage

The importance of clear information and the role of education and interpretation

Tackle illegal and inappropriate use of ROW

Consider the mis-match between the costs incurred by landowners and income derived from public access

Ensure even coverage of ROW efforts across the county

Don't forget that supporting facilities are often more important to the accessibility of a route than the condition of the actual path itself

**Focus group analysis for local tourism and businesses**

**Who was in attendance**

8 local people who were from Denby, Castleton, Parsley Hay, Flash, Rushup, Chesterfield, Cressbrook, Matlock. Representing equine supplies, trekking centre, holiday accommodation, farming, gift and outdoor shop, B+B, tourism officer, mountain bike hire and shop and the YHA.

**General comments**

The group represented a good cross section of the sector and were able to speak from both personal use of the ROW network as horse riders, cyclists or walkers and also from their customers' points of view. Most were from within the national park, though a local tourism officer was able to provide the view from other parts of the county. They had a good knowledge of how ROW work and agencies involved (though there was a small amount of confusion about legal status and which agencies have responsibility for ROW and access). They were able to articulate concerns about difficulties and illustrate these with examples and suggest general ideas for improvements.

The main focus for discussion appears under themes listed below. Each paragraph contains the issues identified followed by ideas for improvement / remedies. Where direct quotes are used they appear in quotation marks.

### **The network itself**

It was recognised that the network and its use is currently key to most of the businesses present. “In terms of YHA it’s how people get from hostel to hostel, our users tend to be without cars or come to the Peak District and explore without cars. It’s key really”. “The bridleway network is core – if they weren’t there we wouldn’t exist”.

The view was that there have been many improvements over recent years and the network is generally good. “I’ve noticed a massive improvement in stiles and ability to navigate around the limestone plateau, still scope for improvement – so much easier. Bridleways are about where paths were 30 years ago. Paths are good now”. But the bridleway network is not as good, both in terms of condition and missing links. There was a feeling that the PDNPA focuses most on the needs of walkers. Outside the national park the view was that “The network doesn’t necessarily start off and finish on your doorstep and in our area we need it to be really easy to make us competitive with the Peak District”. “As a group of people, riders are desperate to get off the roads. This is where a RoWIP could help, by linking existing bridleways. It’s looking at small stretches where landowners could be approached for new access and it’s the same for cyclists and walkers”.

Suggestions for improvements were:

- To fill in the missing links to complete circuits especially for the bridleway network
- Negotiate concessionary access, possibly with permit systems for riders
- To develop a series of easy to use circular routes for all users

### **Supporting infrastructure**

Probably more important than the network itself, is the quality and availability of things like transport, car parks, accommodation and information. “It seems to me that 95% of the issues to do with ROW are to do with what happens before you get onto that path. It’s getting there, it’s publicity, it’s signing, facilities for leaving horse trailers, facilities for washing bikes and so on”. We talked a lot about the difficulties of encouraging people onto public transport and parking difficulties. The consensus was that there is actually quite a good public transport network but getting people to use it was difficult, though they did cite some successes eg. park and ride at the Roaches. All agreed that visitors would continue to want to come by car and any restrictions on that could affect their businesses detrimentally. “I think the only thing that works is positive discrimination - Closing car parks? - Yes, then people get very upset. But it’s the only way you’ll get people to change - My experience of closing car parks being in the tourist industry, is that it can work, but they go elsewhere. If they can’t come in their cars, they’ll go elsewhere”.

Suggestions for improvements were:

- Need to incentivise people to use the public transport system

- Encourage people once they have arrived at accommodation to get onto buses or walk.
- Supporting infrastructure for riders such as secure parking and accommodation on routes such as the PBW

### **Catering for different markets/ types of user**

We talked about the broad range of users to the PDNP and also more local use of paths elsewhere in the county. "The appeal of the PDNP is very broad to a range of users. The core market is not all that sophisticated compared to Silva compass users and GPS specialists, so you might want to look at the needs of those people". Of cyclists it was said "About 95% of our customers are well informed about paths etc. There are 2 classes of customers – half use easy trails such as old railways lines, the other half are serious mountain bikers". "Lots of people who stay at our B+B say "where can I go for a walk " and you've got to find out what kind of walk they want and then you can either send them up Kinder or keep them on the trails".

The view was that the main focus should be on less confident users in helping them get out and about and making it easy for this group to use the network. This came down mainly to information and signing ( see below ).

### **Managing conflict and preventing inappropriate use**

There was some discussion around real and perceived conflict between different users, particularly cyclists, walkers and riders. "It's an educational things and respecting other users. People are often unaware - you can't expect a cyclist to know how a horse will react". "There's a side issue there with user conflict. I think there's scope for differentiation of different grades of path. Riders, cyclists and walkers. Then tell people who has a right to use it". Main recommendations to counter these issues were to do with signing, education and information.

Suggestions were of a general nature focussing on:

- Education of all users
- As above, making sure different users were encouraged onto appropriate routes
- Control measures to keep off motorised users from footpaths and bridleways

### **Publicity, information and signing**

We debated the need for good waymarking and signposting especially from villages. People cited examples of the difficulty many visitors faced in trying to find paths from settlements such as Castleton. There was concern about 'over-signing' an area and avoiding standardisation of local styles, but the clear message was a need for "a complete overhaul as it's just evolved".

There was a strong feeling from most of the group that publicity about the access network could be better: "You can have all the bridleways and cycleways in the world, but if you don't market them - they all shy away from it because it's intangible and they don't know if publicity works and you need

cross collaboration between councils etc". Some thought that the focus of spending on some schemes (eg. PBW ) have been on the ROW itself at the expense of the promotion. "There's lots of spending money on gates, surfacing etc. on the PBW but there is a guide but no-one knows about it. Organisations don't get on together and don't speak to each other". Yet there was also a recognition that such things take time and individuals had some responsibility not just the local authorities. "I think this is a time issue. As things settle down, publications will appear. We sell hundreds of commercial cycle guides". "There's a need for more publicity. It's also up to individual tourism businesses to develop their own loops off the trail and publicise them".

Suggestions for improvements included:

- A review of signposting to make it clear and consistent
- Different levels of waymarking appropriate to the setting and target user groups
- Co-ordination of agencies producing literature
- Generally better promotion of existing ROW and access

### **Individual messages**

Don't take your eye off the economy

Must work together with all parties especially landowners

There is a need for cross county working

It's not as much about improvement as engagement

We should tell people what there is and where it is.

Enhance the product

Get people to use what we've got before attracting new ones to use the network

Education is the key to better visitor behaviour

### **Focus group analysis for conservation and woodland management**

#### **Who was in attendance**

The 11 people were representing the county council, PDNPA, defra, the wildlife trust, the Forestry Commission, Local Access Forum, English Nature, National Trust, National Forest and voluntary conservation interests. Their expertise covered ecology, Countryside Stewardship, development control, ornithology, badgers, botany, archaeology, woodlands and land use. They live in: Sheffield, Edale, Derby, Matlock, Tibshelf, Bakewell and other places within Derbyshire

Most people were walkers but there were no horse riders or cyclists.

#### **General comments**

The group were mainly composed of officers from key organisations with conservation of wildlife, landscape and archaeological interest in the national park and county. There were 3 people representing voluntary conservation bodies. All were very knowledgeable about their subject and area and held clear views about the effects of visitor usage of the access network on conservation issues. Most, whilst arguing their point about protection of conservation interest were able to take a wider view and recognise difficulties in getting an acceptable balance. "If you don't give people access to areas of

wildlife interest you will never get their interest for its conservation. On the other hand I also recognise that some aspects of the wildlife of the county are very vulnerable to trampling, disturbance, or whatever - it's a question of trying to find a balance".

### **Key themes:**

#### **Managing visitor pressure and minimising disturbance**

We discussed at length concerns about increased visitor pressure and whether this would have a detrimental effect on both the landscape and wildlife. A fairly typical comment was: "Particularly when you start to promote routes especially privately published guidebooks, the impact of extra trampling and erosion. The balance is very important. You get problems especially when riders, cyclists and trail riders move in and you end up with a sea of mud". On the other hand, evidence from both the PDNPA and the National Trust suggests there may not be too much - "There's very little evidence to show that recreational impact affects breeding bird populations". "Be careful about overstating the wildlife problems – certainly do cause problems with other users and landscape damage. It's relatively small. Are we too precious?". There was also very little evidence that the new open access was causing problems apart from a few limited examples. "However, evidence is that few people are going off paths on new access land. There are only a few small pockets of problems to do with specific species and particular areas". We also talked about disturbance from dogs, fire risk and successful measures to manage visitors and keep them to a defined route eg. the surfacing of parts of the Pennine Way.

Suggestions for improvements were:

- More research about the impact of visitors on upland breeding birds
- Working with Defra on Stewardship to counter some negative attitudes of landowners and farmers to new access

#### **Encouraging responsible behaviour and reducing conflict between users**

There was a long discussion about the impact of motorised vehicles, particularly 4X4's. The main concern was around the impact on rare flora, but also the visual effects. There was also a recognition that conflict between other users is often more one of perception than reality. "In fact often it is only a perception and anecdotal. The reality is there are few problems with the new access. With good management problems can be lessened". Other concerns were about the management needed to control illegal use. "On new bridleways, need to make sure appropriate structures are installed to stop motorised use". "Cracking down on illegal use still a major problem". "Vehicular access restrictions are a ROW enforcement issue". "Removal of barriers for people with disabilities, may bring problems of illegal use. Need resources to prevent illegal use". During discussions about new access routes in the National Forest it was said "We encountered few problems of inappropriate use. But we know policing is a big side of it. Needs to be self policing as landowners often live away from the woodland".

Suggestions for improvements were:

- Resources for enforcement and policing of illegal use
- Careful design of barriers to allow legitimate use of ROW

### **The condition of the network**

Generally it was thought that the county has a good network.” We must have one of the most dense networks of footpaths, but some parts of county have a poor network of bridleways. The network of trails that DCC, PDNPA and Sustrans have been ploughing money into go part of the way”. But there were still some problems in addition to the poor provision of bridleways in some parts of the county. “It’s still quite difficult to find a route you want to do - a circular route, eg. gaps, end up walking on roads, paths obstructed or not well maintained, big stiles are difficult for some people”.

“From horse riders the main complaint is they want the network to start right outside the stable or livery yard. Don’t want to drive - you’re stuffed if you can’t find a good starting point to park the horse box. Walkers pretty well catered for, but riders and more so cyclists, seem to lack a good network”.

There was a small amount of concern about the actual condition and maintenance of ROW. “Another issue is cyclist access to bridleways becomes an issue of surfacing, visual appearance. Creating motorways into the countryside or ecological effect of introducing lime rich material into acidic areas”. There was a perception that ROW are underfunded. “Lack of resources for ROW management and maintenance”. “Budgets need to reflect resources to improve the path, not just maintenance”. “Lots of money spent on CRoW with relatively small numbers benefiting. If a similar amount spent on ROW network would be a huge amount of public benefit”.

A few minutes were spent discussing sources of future funding with a recognition that the Local Transport Plan might be a good source.

Suggestions for improvements were:

- More funding for ROW maintenance
- Take care with surfacing and do it sympathetically for both visual and ecological impact
- Look at the network and try to fill in gaps, especially for bridleways
- Work on identifying bridleway access where people want to ride from

### **Working with other organisations**

There was much discussion around relationships with farmers and landowners with a feeling that: “There is still is a negative view towards walkers”. “That perception was increased by CRoW”. “Need to address both perceived concerns of landowners and also the public’s understanding”. “A bit of a beleaguered attitude amongst some farmers. Need to be aware of their concerns and working with other organisations to keep them on board”. This wasn’t universal, with stories of positive responses coming from landowners with new access in the National Forest. The group recognised that often the economic benefit of visitors doesn’t always go to farmers.

Suggestions for improvements were:

- Organisations like Defra and the PDNPA should be looking at the economic benefit of ROW users to farmers
- There should be continued work to keep landowners on board and counter negative attitudes

### **The importance of signage, information and interpretation**

We spent quite a lot of time on the importance of signposting and the role that interpretation can play in improving the visitor experience.

The group stressed the importance of helping less confident users by good waymarking: "A need for the well waymarked and signed routes especially in areas like the National Forest where we are getting new visitors. I think in this day and age the well waymarked path is essential. And from the landowners' point of view, most were pleasantly surprised people kept to paths and didn't drop litter. If people felt secure and guided along a path it does work". "Your new countryside users – if they have a good experience, that's great, but if they get lost in a muddy field they won't do it again. It's a very important element for those users".

The group were quite clear about the role of improving people's appreciation of landscape and wildlife significance: "Information and interpretation are important too. Basic info' does improve people's experience. It's a question of how you do that without plastering the countryside with a lot of notice boards and signs". "There's a lot more to working on the ROW network than just the physical work. We need the resources to do the information and interpretation work". "In some places like the Magnesian Limestone area looks boring, but needs careful interpretation because it's special and under threat by being farmed right up to the margins"

There was however a degree of scepticism about how available funds were for this kind of work: "You can often get that money if it's project – a PBW project, a Moss Valley project, a Healthy Walking project. But for general ROW don't have the resources".

Suggestions for improvements were:

- A review of signposting and sympathetic waymarking in areas used by casual walkers
- Better funding for interpretation
- Unobtrusive interpretation in appropriate places

### **The need for environmental impact assessment**

Some of the group were concerned about the environmental impact of both new routes and surfacing of existing ROW. They wanted both the visual and ecological effects to be taken into account: "Has to be proper environmental assessment of all new routes at an early stage – at local level as well as strategic". "Should the RoWIP have environmental standards laid down in it? eg. should consider landscape character and ecological impact".

Suggestions for improvements were:  
Environmental impact assessment of all new footpath work

### **Individual messages**

ROW need more resources  
An integrated approach for recreation, archaeology and wildlife  
An early assessment of impact of new projects  
Encourage the responsible use of any network  
Consultation and a holistic approach to the experience of using ROW  
Good information for people who want to use ROW  
Consultation on an area basis  
Improving users' experience and interpretation  
Good information about where we can encourage additional concessionary routes

### **Focus group analysis for landowners and land managers**

#### **Who was in attendance**

14 people from both the PDNP, south and south east Derbyshire and the Derbyshire Dales. They were representing large estates, farmers, quarrying interest, parish councillors, the CLBA and NFU and several members of both the Peak District and the Derby & Derbyshire LAFs.

#### **General comments**

Most of them were 'wearing more than one hat' ie. a farmer and LAF member, or parish councillor, land manager and CLBA representative. They were able to speak from their own experience and that of groups they were representing. All had a good knowledge of ROW and had had dealings with the PDNPA and / or the county and districts and the National Forest.

All were able to recount stories of both good and bad episodes to do with public access and associated behaviour. Most could see both the positive and 'negative' benefits of RoWIPs and other CRoW provisions, but the overall impression was one of pessimism and scepticism. All were, however, willing to work with both the national park and DCC to improve access, but had clear ideas about how that should be done. **Three strong themes** emerged which appear in detail below, with the main focus being on a call for careful negotiation between the county council and landowners and land managers to arrive at solutions of mutual benefit. The **fourth** section below deals with their views of the condition/status of the network and allied issues.

#### **Working with landowning interests**

We came back several times during our discussions to the relationship between the local authorities / national park and landowners/managers. Some had experienced the national park staff ( rangers ) as being helpful and quick to respond to requests for ROW work, though there were comments about undue pressure to open up more access points onto Open Access Land. There was less praise for DCC and the districts who were seen as slow to respond to maintenance issues and requests for diversions etc. They perceive that there is confusion to do with who is responsible for ROW -"Lack of joined

up thinking to do with monies going through parish council and where it comes from eg. which local authority?"

Often existing and new access was seen as a cost or burden to the landowner with no direct recompense. "But we did realise during foot and mouth the importance of tourism. But the biggest mismatch is between those providing the access and footpaths and those who derive financial benefit from tourism. From the farming point of view we have to accept recreation because we receive subsidies and the public will only support that payment if they derive benefit from the countryside. But there is that mismatch". "Where I live in SE Derbyshire there's no tourism to speak of and we get no benefit from the ROW, but we accept the system. We would like to see them used properly and rationalised".

There seemed to be agreement that landowners and farmers are not keen on getting new access on their land, but the county council and users groups are – "What I'm interested in is what are they going to offer. Are we going to be forced down the compulsory purchase route, is there going to be trading allowed? - new ROW for cul de sacs. That could work. But if there are diktats from user groups that there won't be any rationalisation, that won't work".

We discussed the Lost Ways project and there was concern from one or two people about it. "If DCC is seeking a new route across somebody's land and in the background is a Lost Way claim coming people will be wary".

Several people stressed the importance of taking time to agree changes and the importance of personal contact: "They must allow a good amount of time to negotiate. I have a fear they will take years to do the RoWIP then give landowners 21 days to do something". "Respecting the rights of landowners. Can't impose". "Need face to face contact before ideas are printed on a map even if it is a draft". "My biggest fear is that it's going to be one way. Should be a trade off, a balance. Okay creating new routes, but landowners must be able to divert difficult or unused routes". "I'll create a new route to improve things eg. a circular route, if I can lose a couple of others".

Suggestions for improvements were:

- "A much quicker method of negotiating and changing routes. A more sympathetic attitude to it too".
- "Could there be an independent arbiter?"
- "To talk to people properly. Working with all landowners"

### **Illegal use of ROW and enforcement**

There was a lot of discussion about inappropriate behaviour from visitors as well as illegal use of ROW. Much of it was focussed around public misconceptions about new rights of access to Open Land, plus problems caused by dogs, litter, threatening behaviour and uncontrolled parking.

There was concern that if there are more 'easy access routes' ( including wheelchair accessible routes ) and cycle ways, there would be more opportunities for mis-use by mini bikes and motor bikes.

Other issues centred around parking and visitor behaviour: “Car parking is getting more difficult in villages and side roads. Cars in gateways and on corners”. “We are very reluctant to approach people with dogs off leads because our staff get abuse. It’s the same with farmers. We need help”. “Society in general. Need to get out message nationally about dogs and behaviour. Dogs mess now gets transferred onto fields”.

Ideas for improvements included:

- “We need more help with wardening and managing people”
- “ Parking is to do with enforcement”

### **Education, information and visitor awareness**

We talked at length about visitor awareness, particularly around the new rights of access and there were several anecdotes about how members of the public had misunderstood the CRoW provisions: “People come with the mindset of ‘right to roam’. I think farmers on the urban fringe will get the worst of it. Those in the Park generally are a bit better. I came across a couple next to our lane the other day, picnic chairs out etc. and I asked them what they were doing and they said right to roam”.

We also discussed how the Ordnance Survey show access points on their 1:25,000 maps and visitors’ abilities to read and understand maps. “People don’t change maps very quickly. I think it [ understanding of Open Access ] will slowly increase”. “The problems are not on the Access Land itself. It’s access to and from it. At end of day people cut down from it back to their cars”.

We talked about waymarking, information provision such as guidebooks and education. There was general agreement that: “The issue of signage is important. If well signed, people will stick to it”. “I think it’s important as the average walker wants to remain inconspicuous. We found where paths are better waymarked everyone’s a lot happier”.

There was also agreement that education, particularly of young people is important as a way of encouraging responsible behaviour. The phrase ‘rights and responsibilities’ was used several times. “I do think education of children is important. They pass it on to their parents. They will become more responsible. If we don’t get to them we’ll go backwards”. Education was seen as part of the remit of the Countryside Agency and also DCC.

Ideas for improvements were:

- Education programmes for young people
- Walking festivals and guided walks
- Clear messages from the Countryside Agency and DCC
- Television campaigns by celebrities such as Bill Oddie to promote responsible walking
- Interpretation is important

## **The access network**

When asked about improvements or changes to the network, most discussion centred around diversions of redundant or 'inconvenient' routes ( as outlined in the section on working with landowners above ). We also highlighted the inadequacy of the bridleway network: "The network of bridleways is a big challenge. Get horses off the road. Lack of bridleways, they don't link, or come out at a dangerous point on the road". " Need to be more of them. Often associated with business. Slightly tricky eg. let's impose a bridleway on you the landowner but the business over there benefits. Even more so with tracks that can be used by motor vehicles. My personal view is if you want to ruin a track you should pay for the privilege or recompense in some way".

There was a brief exchange about the condition and maintenance of the network with a call for consistency of grants for stiles, etc. Most admitted it might be appropriate to surface some heavily used routes to stop the path widening.

Suggestions for improvements:

- Consult landowners about design and construction of path furniture
- Fill in gaps in the network, but allow 'trading' of routes
- Surface paths where appropriate

## **Final messages**

Co-operation

Don't impose, negotiate

Listen

Using common sense

Loss and gain

Consideration of farmers and landowners views

Educating at a young age, getting the message across about enjoying and respecting

A ranger service

Achieving a balance

Keep it simple, don't overcomplicate

No point of sanctions if no enforcement

RoWIPs are seen to be as helpful to land managers as they are creating new footpaths etc.

## **Focus group analysis for disability issues**

### **Who was in attendance**

12 Members of the Derbyshire Forum of Local Access Groups comprising representatives of 6 local access groups from around the county (Ashbourne, Derby City, Amber Valley, Buxton, Glossop and High Peak) together with 2 local authority access officers (from Derbyshire County Council and North East Derbyshire District Council).

### **Information:**

They wanted the following information:

- Nature of surface
- Gradient
- What furniture/barriers are on the route
- Proximity of associated facilities such as disabled car parking, toilets, seating, accessible public transport links
- Information about how to reach a path or trail from car park

Information to be provided in leaflet/paper form or by a direct link provided to a purpose built webpage. People who are partially sighted and who use a screen browser find it difficult to search through normal web pages.

### **Surfacing:**

(required both around car parking area and on trails/paths and other access points):

Good surfacing for wheelchairs:

- A hard surface, free from loose material such as gravel. Preferences were expressed for tarmac or concrete (without grooves)
- A well compacted, rolled stone surface

Poor surfacing for wheelchairs:

- Loose gravel or cinder surface
- Surfaces that become slippery when wet such as grass.

Attention needs to be given to improve surfacing around gateways or other pinch points to avoid standing water etc.

Consider whether some form of physical barrier or other segregation is needed where different surfaces are provided in parallel to prevent wheelchairs or partially sighted people from straying off the hard surface onto a soft surface e.g. sandy section provided for horse riders)

### **Structures:**

Design: considerable thought needs to be given when installing any form of barriers.

- The “A” frame barriers were universally unpopular as being inaccessible for motorised scooters. Many purpose-built kissing gates are also not accessible.
- Consider the need for gate latches to be accessible from either side and whether they can be operated by someone in a wheelchair
- The message was to consult with local groups where possible. Several offers were forthcoming of people in wheelchairs who were available to test out structures to see how accessible they are
- Support was given to the idea of promoting the least restrictive option of encouraging gaps – gates – stiles (in order of preference) where structures are needed on paths

Seating: seating or informal resting points need to be established along paths promoted as being easily accessible. Something as informal as an upturned log is all that is needed in some cases.

### **Safety issues**

Multi-user routes: more education needed to make other users aware of limitations of less able users. A simple message of fitting bells to bikes so that cyclists could warn people of their approach (blind, partially sighted or hard of hearing people may not hear cyclists approaching otherwise).

If segregation of users is to be encouraged consider how to do this so that partially sighted or blind people know where they should be.

Illegal use of paths by motorbikes was regarded as a problem and potential safety issue.

### **Other provision:**

Examples of good practice were quoted of making all terrain motorised scooters available for loan at suitable locations (Severn Trent Water at Carsington and proposed through the Moors for the Future scheme). People who had such machines often did not have the means of transporting them to other places. It was asked whether facilities such as these could be made available in more locations.

### **Suggested Action points/Quick wins**

The following were suggested for inclusion in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan:

- Each Local Access Group to identify routes in their own area that either:
  - i) are already suitable to be promoted for use by people in wheelchairs or who want an easy access route
  - ii) where very little work is required to bring a route up to the above standard
- For DCC to carry out the minor improvements suggested and then promote these routes and set itself the target of completing a certain number of these schemes per annum.
- For DCC to identify and promote any suitable routes that it is aware of (set a target of a certain number of routes per annum). Include the routes in individual Access Group leaflets if available and also target information to get to disabled people.
- Encourage any cycle hire facility in the County to fit bells onto any bikes.