

# Countryside for All Good Practice Guide



A Guide to Disabled People's Access in the Countryside

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# Foreword

I like, many other people, find regular access to the countryside is an essential balance to the pressures in our lives today. Ten years ago I first became concerned that people with disabilities could not enjoy that essential access to the countryside which should provide us all with opportunities to relax, explore, or even perhaps have an adventure. It should be enjoyed every day by all people independently or as a shared experience with family and friends.

In the last ten years there has been a lot of progress in improving countryside access opportunities for disabled people. The BT Countryside for All project, which I led as BT's Director of Corporate Affairs, has come and gone but left an impressive legacy which has been built on by many individuals and organisations in the voluntary, private and public sectors. Many of our partners in that groundbreaking project have made remarkable strides in promoting equal opportunities in countryside recreation. That group of partners have continued to meet, cooperate and share our efforts towards the common goal of providing countryside access for all.

Some very significant changes have taken place in the past ten years. The DDA is now firmly in place and new countryside access legislation has been passed in England, Wales and Scotland. These policy frameworks have created a more positive environment in which the rights of disabled people to enjoy the countryside along with everyone else are recognised. However, we have all learned that hard and fast rules are not the way forward.

Every countryside facility is different, every person has their own individual abilities and disabilities. The on-going need is to develop good practice which empowers countryside service providers to get the balance right and cater for everyone within the constraints of preserving the natural environment. At the same time disabled people are becoming more adept at campaigning for and advising on access provision that meets their needs.

Against this background the Fieldfare Trust has, along with many other organisations, continued its work based on the experience gained from the "BT Countryside for All" to expand the information and guidance available to users and managers alike. This Good Practice Guide incorporates all the sections in the first guide. It is expanded with four new sections which are significant in helping access managers to look at countryside access strategically. The concept of least restrictive access introduced in the first guide is enlarged so as to facilitate that approach, which seeks to make access improvements wherever and whenever reasonably practical.

All the information in this guide has value to anyone who both shares and wants to implement our vision of a countryside which includes high quality access opportunities for people with and without disabilities.



Ian Ash, Chair, Countryside for All National Forum

# Introduction

## Countryside for All

Disabled people are increasingly choosing to visit the countryside in their leisure time. This is partly due to the general rise in disabled people's expectations to be able to participate in the same activities as everyone else. Also there have been improvements in access provision for disabled people in the countryside over the recent past.

Everyone working to provide public access to the countryside now has a responsibility to do their job without discriminating against disabled people. The countryside contains many challenging and sensitive environments which at first sight may appear to present insurmountable difficulties with respect to providing access for all and for disabled people in particular. However, there are also a great many countryside situations where access for all can and should be provided to the benefit of all concerned.

'Countryside for All' does not mean that every country park, nature reserve or countryside path must be capable of accommodating all disabled people at all times. This would be unrealistic economically and probably undesirable environmentally. In simple terms 'Countryside for All' means that where good access can be provided it is provided and where it can't as much as possible is done to avoid restricting or limiting disabled people unnecessarily.



## The Good Practice Guide

This guide is divided into sections which will help disabled people and countryside access managers recognise what 'Countryside for All' means and how to work towards it. It provides a series of tools and outlines suggested processes which can lead to better countryside access for disabled people, with due regard to economic and environmental constraints.



The background to a great deal of information on access for disabled people in the countryside is not as substantial nor as longstanding as for built environments. This guide accepts the precept that the countryside cannot be managed in the same way as urban environments. Nonetheless, ergonomic research and development practices in built environments have done a great deal to establish the access needs of disabled people. These do not change when someone moves from the centre of Manchester to the heart of the Peak District.

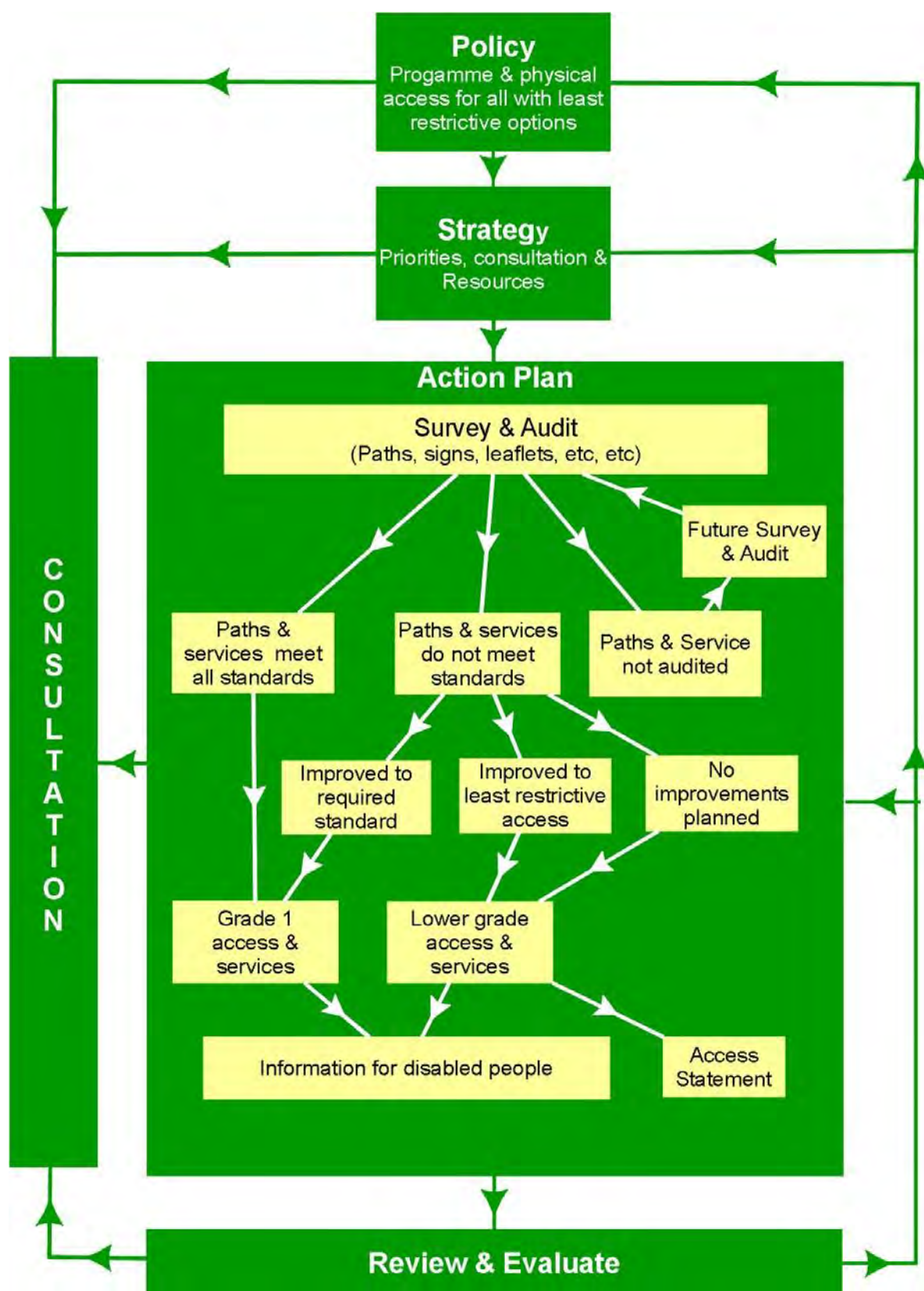


The challenge facing countryside access managers is therefore to find creative and innovative ways of providing access that fits into the countryside and meets the needs of disabled visitors. It is important to remember that access for disabled people is not just about the physical condition of paths and trails. These are important as the means to the end. 'Countryside for All' means disabled people sharing in the enjoyment, challenges and recreation that rural environments have to offer. It is no good having excellent paths that do not lead to exciting and interesting areas. Nor should the needs of people with sensory or intellectual impairments be forgotten when access improvements are being made.

Each of the sections of this guide contributes to an overall process that countryside access managers can follow to improve their provision for disabled people. The guide covers a significant part of this process as far as it has gone to date. Countryside access for disabled people is developing all the time and the Fieldfare Trust along with many other organisations is working to extend its experience, knowledge and skill in this field.



## The 'Countryside for All' Process



## Consultation

It can be seen that consultation is a important element throughout the 'Countryside for All' process. This means the views disabled people and representatives of disability organisations should be included at all key stages. Advice on how to network with disabled people are provided in the [Networking Guidelines](#).

## Policy

A policy states the aims of an organisation. Good policies on countryside access for disabled people will assist countryside managers and their customers. Policies exist to inform and lubricate both the internal workings and the external relationships of an organisation. Accordingly they should meet the needs of:

- ❖ those responsible for implementation  
(e.g. access managers, land owners, planners, contractors)
- ❖ those who are to be its ultimate beneficiaries.  
(e.g. disabled people, young people, elderly people, the public)

Guidance on why policies are needed and how to develop them is provided in the [Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#). The [Implications of the Disabilities Discrimination Act for Countryside Service Providers](#) outlines the importance of this legislation in the development of policies.

## Strategy

A strategy lays out how policies are to be achieved. The 'Countryside for All' approach rests comfortably with a strategic approach to planning countryside opportunities. It provides managers and the people they consult with the chance to balance improvements to the facilities being managed with the needs of prospective users and the resources available. A good strategy will review economic and environmental considerations and take account of all factors that might help or hinder the achievement of the policies on which it is based.

The strategic approach is covered in more detail in the [Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#). A comprehensive strategy also looks at how disabled people will get to the countryside, what information they need and how interpretation and events can enhance their experiences. The [Transport, Information, Interpretation and Events Management Guidelines](#) give supporting guidance for these planning processes.

## Action Plan

An action plan details what is to be done. As can be seen from the flow chart on [page 6](#) the starting point of the action plan is to collect information on current levels of accessibility. The [Accessibility Survey and Access Audit Guidelines](#) provide guidance on how to do this for the physical conditions on countryside paths and trails.

The [Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#) provide further detail on how to use survey and audit information to select paths for upgrading to fully accessibility routes (i.e paths which meet the [Countryside for All Accessibility Standards](#)). For routes that cannot reasonably be expected to reach these standards, the [Least Restrictive Access Guidelines](#) provide information which can be used to guide decisions on the removal of barriers and the best possible improvement of accessibility.

The next stage in the action plan is to use the information that has been collected from surveys,

audits and any improvement works, to inform disabled people of the opportunities available to them. Even if no improvement works have been undertaken the information collected on accessibility will be of value to many disabled people. Linked to positive information on access opportunities there should be an access statement which details what has been done to improve accessibility and explains what could not be done for whatever reason.

## Future Work

With respect to information on countryside access and access statements the Fieldfare Trust and other organisations are working to extend the guidance currently available. The [Information Guidelines](#) provide advice on what information disabled people may need and how it can be delivered to them. What is not yet available is a simple, user-friendly system for abbreviating countryside access information for disabled people. If such a system can be developed in the near future, it would readily be integrated into the 'Countryside for All' approach without changing its basic approach of making improvements wherever and whenever possible.

Access statements are a relatively new feature of urban planning and development. They provide for the promotion of positive achievements in access development and allow justification where it has not been possible to achieve all that might have been desirable. Certainly, in the countryside there are likely to be many areas where, for very good reasons, full accessibility cannot be achieved. Here the "Least Restrictive Access" should have been applied, even if that means no action was taken because of limited resources or other constraints. Access statements will become a tool for use in countryside situations and further guidance will be provided when appropriate processes have been developed.



## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who has given time, ideas, information and advice to assist the Fieldfare Trust in the production of the 'Countryside for All' Good Practice Guide. All the guidance in this publication was developed through the execution of practical projects involving disabled people. Additionally research into countryside and access issues in the UK and abroad has been used to refine the guidance and ensure, as far as has been practicable, that it incorporates the best information currently available and reflects the interests of the disability community and its rights to access in the countryside.

The following organisations welcome the approach of the 'Countryside for All' Good Practice Guide and recognise its content as a valuable addition to the information and advice that is currently available on good practice on countryside access for disabled people.



These organisations also accept the BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards as the basis for achieving good practice in the provision of countryside access for disabled people. The standards should be achieved wherever possible.

The various sections of this guide were produced by Fieldfare through its own research and projects or through partnership involvement in other practical projects developing better access opportunities for disabled people. The content of the guide does not necessarily reflect the views of the organisations that have been partners in Fieldfare's projects. Those projects include:

BT Countryside for All  
Waterways Access for All  
Core Path Network Planning  
Access Auditing Forest Paths  
Open Country  
Fieldfare Millennium Awards  
Access for All Advisory Service

Countryside for All Advisory Group  
British Waterways  
Argyll & Bute Council & Scottish Natural Heritage  
Forest Enterprise  
Harrogate Borough Council  
Millennium Commission  
Countryside Agency

## The Guide's Sections

Accessibility Standards	◆	These sections are essentially unchanged from those in the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines with respect to their main content and advice on improving access and opportunities for disabled people.
Networking Guidelines	◆	The contact details of many of the organisations mentioned in the texts have been up dated.
Information Guidelines	◆	Additional photographs to illustrate practical examples of countryside provision have been included.
Transport Guidelines	◆	The content of these sections is derived from extensive practical work undertaken within the BT Countryside for All project between 1993 and 1997. Disabled people were involved in more than 30 local projects to help compile these sections. Additional consultation was undertaken through the BT Countryside for All Advisory Group and with a wide range of local and national countryside and disability organisations.
Interpretation Guidelines		
Events Management Guidelines		

Least Restrictive Access Guidelines	◆	These sections have been produced by the Fieldfare Trust building on projects it has undertaken with, amongst others Scottish Natural Heritage, Forest Enterprise, and Argyll and Bute Council. Consultations with disabled people and disability organisations were a major element in all these projects.
Countryside Path Network Guidelines		
Accessibility Survey and Access Audit Guidelines	◆	Because of the time scales involved in producing this guide consultation on these sections has not been as extensive as for the sections above which were included in the BT Countryside for All Good Practice Guide.
Guidelines on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 for Countryside Service Providers		

Information Sheets	◆	The Information Sheets in the BT guide provided technical information on the dimensions relevant to countryside access for disabled people together with examples of various types of countryside furniture. The design examples have been omitted as there are now other guides available that give more detailed construction specifications for many kinds of countryside furniture.
	◆	The Information Sheets have been restricted to those giving dimensions and design guidance specifically relating to the needs of disabled people. They are electronic scans of the BT Guide sheets and have not been edited for content.

## Navigation Tips

The Good Practice Guide on this CD-ROM can be read using Adobe Acrobat Reader. The program can be installed from the CD or from the Adobe web site ([www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)). Help files are available with the program and further assistance may also be available from the Adobe web site.

Links	Throughout the Guide <a href="#">text highlighted in blue</a> links to another relevant section or to a relevant web site. Click on the blue text to go directly to that section. (The hand cursor will change to a pointing finger when a link is available)
Return	To return to the page you were looking at, right click the mouse and select Go to previous view
Return to contents	On each page (bottom left) there is a <a href="#">return to menu</a> link. Click on this to return to the contents page of the section you are currently in.
Bookmarks & Thumbnails	To view Bookmarks or Thumbnails of the pages in a current document click the icon on the Adobe Acrobat Reader tool bar to open the Navigation Pane on the left hand side of the screen. Then click the tab for Bookmarks or Thumbnails. To reduce the size of the Navigation Pan click and drag the right hand border or click the Bookmark or Thumbnail tab again.
Field of View	To change the field of view to increase or decrease text size use the page icons or the '+' and '-' symbols on the tool bar
Continuous / Page View	To change the view so that all pages flow continuously, or one page at a time, click View on the main menu, then click Continuous or Single Page
Cursor Movement	In Continuous View you can drag the page in view up or down with the mouse by holding down the left mouse button and moving the cursor (The open hand cursor changes to a fist)
Guide Contents	To return to the contents page of the introduction in order to access other sections of the Guide click the return to menu link on each page (bottom left) to return to the contents page of the section you are current in. Then click the <a href="#">Contents of Good Practice Guide</a> link at the bottom of the contents list.

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# Let us know what you think



## Feed-back Form

### About the Guide

1	Have you found access to all parts of the Guide satisfactory? (Are you able to link between sections and to view everything clearly and in sufficient detail? How easy has it been to use the CD?)	
2	Are the contents of all the sections clear and relevant to your involvement in countryside access for disabled people? (Please give details)	
3	How do you think the new sections support the original Standards and Guidelines? (Are you pleased with the additional information provided? Do they help you in your work? )	
4	Are there any sections of the Guide that you feel do not adequately cover the sort of information you need? (Please give details)	
5	What changes would you like to see us make to the Guide?	
6	What other aspects of countryside access for disabled people would you like to see covered in an update to the Guide?	
7	Please make any other comments you have about the Guide.	

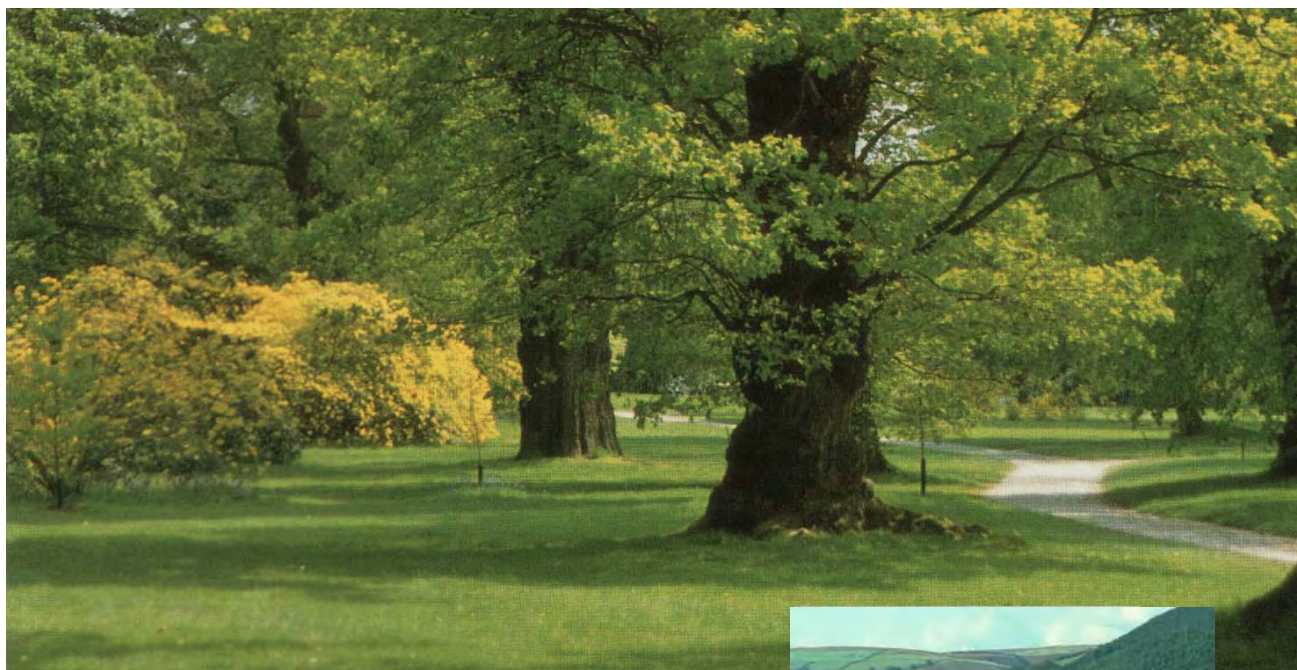
### About you

Name: Address:	
Telephone: Email Address:	
Organisation: Where did you hear about the Guide?	

Please print this form, fill it in and send to:  
The Fieldfare Trust, 7 Volunteer House, 69 Crossgate, Cupar, Fife, KY15 5AS  
Or email us at: [info@fieldfare.org.uk](mailto:info@fieldfare.org.uk)



# Accessibility Standards



Setting standards for countryside paths and trails

A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Accessibility Standards

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## Standards of accessibility

These Accessibility Standards, first established through the BT Countryside for All project will help people who provide countryside services to make paths and trails more accessible. They will also help disabled people recognise accessible paths, and campaign for them when there are none.

Countryside accessibility standards are based on two things:

The standards for access in towns, and cities.

People expect different levels of accessibility away from the towns and less easy access is acceptable in the countryside.

This means that levels of accessibility in the countryside are not exactly the same as in towns and cities. However, the Standards represent good levels of access for everybody who uses the countryside including those with disabilities. The standards do not define people or their abilities. They provide measures of the physical conditions on countryside paths and trails that most visitors will find acceptable. There is one standard for each of the different areas where people will expect different levels of access.

These standards include the principles of designing for everybody. This is sometimes known as universal design or inclusive design. This recognises that people are different. Tall people, short people, those who cannot see, those who cannot walk or use wheelchairs, people who cannot hear, children, adults, men and women should all have the same chance to enjoy the countryside.



Standards will not lead to every path and trail in the countryside being the same. You should keep the local character and variety of paths and trails. In any case, it will not be possible to bring all paths in a large network up to standard. ([See Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#)) The standards should prevent unnecessary barriers being placed along paths. Even if you cannot reach the standards you should have as few barriers as possible and do whatever you can to improve the access. ([See Least Restrictive Access Guidelines](#))

Since the standards were first published there have been a number of developments that you should take into account in addition to your use of the standards. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has brought in the requirement that all service providers avoid discrimination against disabled people. Particularly relevant for countryside managers will be the duties that come into force in October 2004 which require the removal of physical barriers to access for disabled people. The British Standard (BS8300:2001) has redefined the measurements appropriate for many aspects of access for disabled people in the built environment.

The Code of practice to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and BS8300:2001 are very useful references to supplement your use of the BT Countryside for All standards of accessibility for countryside paths and trails.

## Using the standards

The standards are relevant to all paths. Some paths will already be up to standard. On those that are not, you can achieve improvements whenever you develop an existing path or build a new one. Having standards does not mean you will have to rebuild all countryside paths immediately.

It will take a long time to upgrade paths and trails which can reach the standards. At particularly popular countryside sites, improvements will be urgently needed to meet public demand. In other places improvements may only be possible when you carry out other work. You may carry out improvements to countryside paths and trails for the following reasons.

**Management decisions** - You may decide as your commitment to good customer service you want to make sure your paths are accessible for as many people as possible.

**Opportunity** - Any new facility should be accessible from the very beginning. You can improve a path when you do repair or reconstruction work.

**Answering Complaints** - If you receive complaints and requests from disabled people and the public in general these should lead to access improvements.

**Law** - The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 includes conditions which make it illegal to deny disabled people access. From October 2004 service providers are required to remove or alter physical barriers which prevent disabled people gaining access. ([See Guidelines on the DDA for Countryside Service Providers](#))

The value of the standards is that, where people meet them, the likelihood of further improvements being needed is greatly reduced. However, the standards are a minimum and you should aim to do better wherever possible.

## Putting the standards into practice

The standards are particularly valuable if you are not certain how good the access you provide should be. There is a simple process to follow in the diagram on page 5.

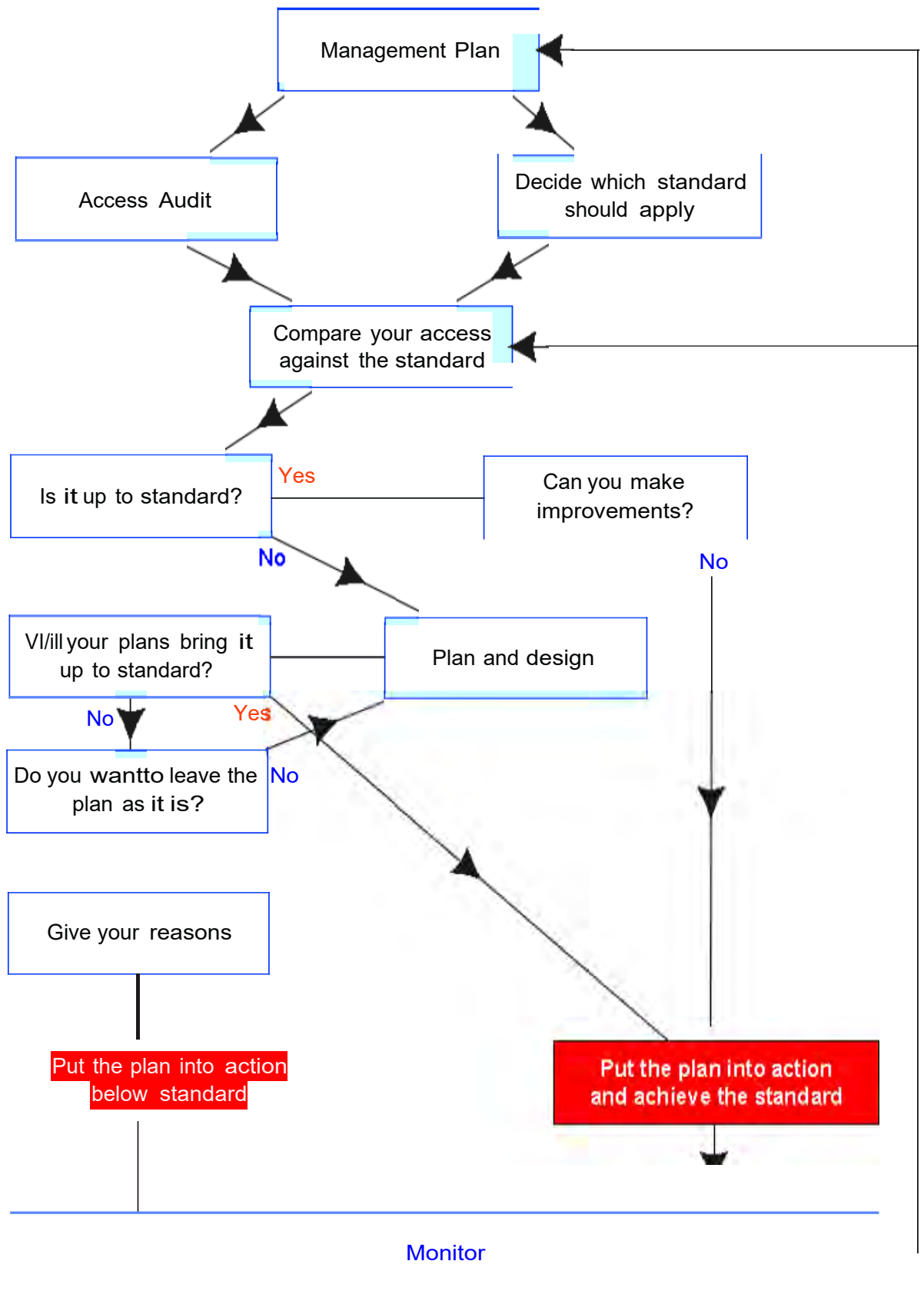
### Management and planning

You should start looking at whether people can use your site effectively. ([See The Access needs of Disabled People in the Countryside](#)) This means seeing if they can enjoy the natural, adventurous or relaxing things your site has to offer. Improvements to access should be part of your general countryside management planning exercise which covers services, facilities and programmes for all visitors. This means creating access to the areas, the views and the features of interest which are the reasons why people visit your site. Access for all is part of the general process of countryside planning and management. It should not be an afterthought.





Figure 1: Putting improvements in place



## Access audit

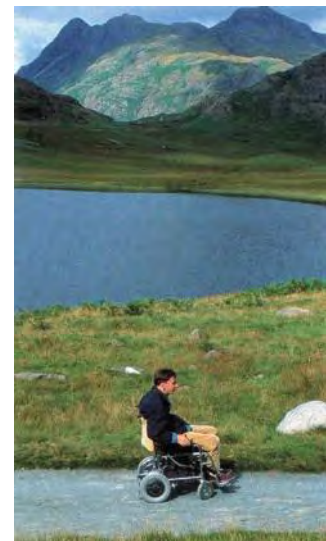
Carry out a check to see what the access to your site is like. You can find an overview a procedure for doing this in [Appendix 1](#) and further advice in the [Accessibility Survey and Access Audit Guidelines](#). These procedures will help you compare what you find with the standards you should be trying to achieve.

## Deciding which standard to use

As people move away from towns and cities they expect different things. They often want to get away from the man-made environment. They will usually accept the different levels of access that are typical of the countryside. It is important to decide the countryside setting of a path or trail so you can see which minimum access standard you could use. [Appendix 2](#) provides a guide to identifying countryside settings using a number of environmental factors: the activities people take part in, and what they expect the access to be like. Countryside settings are not a description of the landscape. To determine what level of access should be available for disabled people according to the quality of the landscape would be to discriminate against them. Access for all should be available to all kinds of landscapes including the 'best'.

## Comparing your access to the standards

The next stage is to compare what is actually on the ground (shown by your access survey and audit) against the standard for the countryside setting of the path or trail. For any path or trail to come up to standard, none of its features must fall short of the minimum standards. Either the path reaches the standard or it does not. If a path does not come up to standard it does not mean all disabled people will not be able to use it. Everyone has the right to use even quite poor paths according to their own abilities. You will find other information to help you improve access in the other Guidelines and Information Sheets in this guide.



## Design and planning

You need to develop facilities and services for everyone that are interesting and attractive. The standards allow you to use local stone on path surfaces and great variety in the way paths are created. Planting and other path-side features can provide interest without reducing access. Gates are necessary in the countryside and they are acceptable if they are wide enough and their opening and closing mechanisms are easy to use. However, a stile across any path is a barrier to many users.

Once you know whether a path is, or is not, up to standard you should take action. You can improve paths which are up to standard and make them more user-friendly. If routes clearly fall below standard, you need to do some design and planning to make sure you improve the path to the least restrictive access (which may be to the standard) and in an appropriately economical way. You will be able to see how much improvement you need by comparing the access against the standards for each countryside setting.

## Recording your reasons for not reaching the standards

Many countryside management organisations have made great strides towards access for all. Because there were no standards up to now it made it difficult for some organisations to know exactly what improvements to make. However, it also made it difficult for them to challenge unreasonable demands for access improvements where they would not be practical or appropriate. If it is not possible to bring a path up to standard, you should give your reasons.

You need to make sure you have done what you reasonably can.

You need to assess changing circumstances so that you can make the path up to standard at a later date.

You need to reduce the risk of complaints from people with disabilities.

You need to explain to visitors with disabilities why the path is not up to standard.

There are two main reasons why path improvement work may not achieve the standard:

cost; and

conservation.

With modern technology and engineering skills almost anything is possible, at a cost. However, it is not reasonable to expect you to carry out improvements whatever the cost. Paths straight up and down very steep hillsides are a clear example of where the cost of reaching the standards may be too high. And the cost to conservation may be too high as well. If there are special features on the land it may not be reasonable to threaten them with work to improve access. The test of whether something is reasonable will probably be different in each case, but if you know your reasons it will be helpful if you get a complaint.

In the case of many individual paths you may decide that it is not reasonable to provide access to the level of the standards. However, over a whole country park or a wide network of countryside paths, it is unlikely that it would be reasonable for none of the paths to be accessible to all. ([See Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#))

## Putting improvements in place

When you put improvements in place, use the option which creates the fewest barriers. You should always try and do better than the standards. This does not just apply to people with disabilities. For example, you should include the needs of children in your designs.

## Monitoring

Monitor the improvements regularly. See if you could make further improvements to overcome problems still affecting visitors.



## The BT Countryside for All Standards

The measurements in the standards do not cover everything likely to affect people with disabilities while they are in the countryside. There are many different ways in which to improve countryside programmes for people with disabilities. How easy a country park leaflet is to read for blind people or those with language difficulties may well affect whether they enjoy a site ([See Interpretation Guidelines, and Information Guidelines](#)). If you provide sign language interpreters, it could greatly improve a deaf person's visit to a country fair ([See Events Management Guidelines](#)).

It is difficult to set standards for some things. Within a picnic area there should be seats and benches at various heights to meet the needs of the range of people likely to use them. We deal with different areas not covered by the standards in guidelines and the Information Sheets.

The paths and trails in the UK give people with and without disabilities the chance to enjoy the countryside. If you achieve the BT Countryside for All Standards and use the supporting guidelines you will meet the needs of a great many more people.

We have set one standard to apply in each of a series of different countryside settings. As people move away from the towns into the countryside they expect access to be different. You will find more detail on using the standards in the different countryside settings in [Appendices 1 and 2](#).

[Table 1](#) gives the appropriate access measurements for paths and trails within three types of countryside settings. We have chosen the measurements in the standards and evaluated them with the full range of people with disabilities in mind. We consulted with disability and countryside organisations to make sure that these standards are realistic for the countryside settings in which they apply.

Most wheelchair users, people with mobility or stamina difficulties, visually-impaired people using long canes or with guide dogs, and other users should be able to use the paths to these standards. Other users such as parents with push chairs will also find these paths more convenient.

We have drawn up the standards for people who can walk and those who use aids to help them move around. People who use wheelchairs, walking frames or crutches are included. Powered aids (including those previously called invalid carriages) should also be catered for.





Table 1 BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards

	Path Surfaces (see note 1)	Path Widths (see note 2)	Width restrictions (see note 3)	Barriers (see note 4)	Maximum distances between passing places (see note 5)	Maximum distances between rest areas (see note 6)	Maximum steepness of ramps (see note 7)	Maximum height rise between landings on ramps steeper than 1:20 (see note 8)	Maximum slope across a path (see note 9)	Maximum step levels (see note 10)	Surface breaks (grills, board-walks) (see note 11)	Clear walking tunnels (see note 12)
Urban and formal Landscapes For example countryside areas with a lot of man-made features	Hard, firm and smooth surface with very few loose stones and none bigger than 5mm	1200 millimetres (millennium Miles)	At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along the path 1,000mm for no more than 1,600mm along the path	There should be no steps, stiles, and no fences, hedges or walls to restrict access	50 metres (m)	100m	1 in 12 (for example for every 12 metres you travel you can rise one metre)	750mm (for example landings should be every 9m along ramps of 1 in 12)	1 in 50	5mm	The largest break in the surface of the path should be no more than 12mm measured along the line of the path	1,200mm wide x 2,100mm high
Urban fringe and managed landscapes For example, countryside areas near towns or managed recreation sites	Hard and firm surface with very few loose stones and none bigger than 10mm	1,200mm	At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along the path 1,000mm for no more than 1600mm along the path		100m	200m	1 in 12	830mm	1 in 45	10mm		1,200mm wide x 2,100mm high
Rural and working landscapes For example, farmland and woodland with public rights of way	Hard and firm with some loose stones and chippings not covering the whole surface. The stones should be no bigger than 10mm	1,000mm	At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along the path 1,000mm for no more than 1,600mm along the path		150m	300m	1 in 10	950mm	1 in 35	15mm		1,000mm wide x 2,100mm high
Open Country, semi- wild and wild For example, mountains, moorlands and remote countryside	People expect to make their own way, not to have this environment changed to provide access.  If paths and trails are provided in this setting, they should meet the standard for the rural and working landscapes setting (as shown in the row above).											

## Appendix 1      Checking the access

These notes and the form that follows give you a rough guide of how to assess whether your paths and trails have good enough access. You can use the information to see whether a path or trail is up to standard, and where you can make improvements. ([See also Accessibility Survey & Access Audit Guidelines](#))

### Carrying out the check

#### Choosing a path or trail

You need to be clear about the length of the path or trail you want to check. It would not be a good idea to check the whole of the Pennine Way all in one go. But dividing a route into 50-metre sections may not give people a clear picture of the access. The points to follow in choosing a route are shown below.

**Access points** - Include the access points that lead into a country park or the start of a trail within the check you carry out.

**Use** - If visitors to your site already use a particular route, you should cover it all.

**Features** - Check routes leading to and from important features. You should check car parks, visitor centres, view points, picnic areas, toilets, and any other particular features of your site.

**Usefulness** - If there is a circular walk, you should check the whole thing. However, straight routes are just as important, especially on old railway lines and canal tow paths.

### Collecting information

The information you collect successfully is a measure of what you actually have. The notes on the following pages will help you understand the measurements we use in the standards. The guidelines and information sheets will give you a great deal of extra detail. You should collect all the information you need as either:

the length of the path or trail which the measurements of the standards apply to within the overall length you are assessing; or

the number of times the measurements of the standards apply in the overall length of the path or trail you are assessing.

## Notes on the measurements in the standards

### 1 Path surfaces

You can get more details of path surfaces in [Information Sheet 2.2](#). The important factors are the size and amount of loose stone and other material on the path. Loose material which is more than 10mm deep is not a good surface for many people, and would prevent a path coming up to standard. Ignore pot holes or other small level changes ([see note 10](#)) if you have a clear path width ([see note 2](#)) around them.



### 2 Path widths

The width of a path or trail is important to allow for people passing, including wheelchair users, visually-impaired people using long canes or with guide dogs. ([See Information Sheets 1.1 and 2.4.](#))



### 3 Width restrictions allowed

Some restrictions to the width of paths cannot be helped, for example, at gates, or in areas which pass such things as buildings, trees or walls.

### 4 Barriers

Some features in the countryside create barriers to many people with disabilities. ([See Access Needs of Disabled People in the Countryside](#)) Any path with a stile, steps or other similar obstruction along its length will not meet the standards. However, we know these features are necessary in the countryside. The information sheets give details of some of these features and how you can use the options with least barriers.



### 5 Passing places

Passing places are important to allow people, particularly wheelchair users and families with push chairs to pass. ([See Information Sheet 1.1](#))



### 6 Resting places

Many disabled people who cannot walk long distances need places to rest. Rest areas should cater for all users and include at least one seat or perch. You also need to provide space for wheelchair users off the path. ([See Information Sheets 1.1 and 3.1](#))



7 **How steep the path is**

The steepness of the path is important for many people, especially some wheelchair users who find steep ramps a barrier. Measure the gradient accurately in different places. Do not use an average over a long length of path. ([See Information Sheet 2.1.](#))



8 **Height rise on ramps between landings**

For people who have difficulty walking up slopes, the distance they have to travel before taking a rest is important. A flat rest area with enough space to stop and not be in the way, should be 1200mm long and 1500mm wide. ([See Information Sheet 2.1.](#))

9 **Slopes across paths**

Wheelchair users and people with balance or coordination problems can find cross slopes difficult or very hard work over any distance. This applies particularly if the path slopes in one direction across the path. If there is a camber, (in other words the path slopes from the centre towards both edges) providing a central ridge along which people can travel, the slopes can be up to 1:35.

10 **Step levels**

Very small steps can form barriers or give difficulties to wheelchair users and people who can trip. This will apply wherever there are pot holes, cobbles or slabs, changes in path surfaces, and at the start of ramps and gates. You should deal with kerbs as shown in [Information Sheet 2.5](#)

11 **Surface breaks**

Changes in a path's surface can prove difficult for wheelchair users and people using canes or sticks. The holes in grills, cross drains and the gaps between the planks of boardwalks should meet the standards. ([See Information Sheet 2.3.](#))



12 **Clear walking tunnel**

Many visually-impaired people and others who have to concentrate on where they walk may face a safety risk from overhanging branches and so on. ([See Information Sheet 2.4.](#))





## Evaluation

Once you have collected all the necessary information there are two stages of evaluation.

Assessing whether you meet the standards.

Assessing what would be reasonable improvement work.

If any one of the areas in your check does not meet the necessary measurements, then the path or trail is not up to standard.

The information you have collected is very valuable for deciding what improvements you need to make. The check you have carried out will provide guidance on where you have problems and how many you need to overcome.

Evaluate what is reasonable to do to reduce barriers, and whether this would bring a path up to standard. You must look at the cost and see whether it is possible. You also need to consider the effect on the environment.

# BT Countryside for All Accessibility assessment form



Name of trail				
Section of trail to be assessed	From:	To:		
Overall Length				
Countryside Setting (see Appendix 2 to decide the one setting that applies)	Urban and formal settings	Urban fringe and managed settings	Rural and working settings	Open country and semi-wild and wild land
Your name				
Date of assessment				
Weather conditions				

Enter measurements in the empty boxes. An entry in the shaded box means your path or trail does not meet the standards.

1	Length of path or trail with surface as described	Length	Urban/formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/working
	Sealed surface, for example, tarmac, concrete, smooth slabs or a boardwalk		D	D	D
	Hard, firm and smooth surface with very few loose stones and none bigger than 5mm		D	D	D
	Hard and firm surface, with very few loose stones and none bigger than 10mm		U	D	D
	Hard and firm, with some loose stones and chippings not covering the whole surface and stones no bigger than 10mm		U	U	D
	Path not hard and firm, or covered with large, loose material bigger than 10mm		U	U	U

2	Path width (length of path or trail with full surface width)	Length	Urban/ formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/ working
	Length of trail with width at least 1200mm		D	D	D
	Length of trail with width between 1000mm and 1200mm		U	U	D
	Length of trail with width at least 1000mm		U	U	U

3	Width restrictions (gates, barriers and so on)	Number	Urban/ formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/ working
	Number of sections of path or trail which are less than 815mm wide for more than 300mm along the length of the path or trail		U	U	U
	Number of sections of path or trail which are less than 1000mm wide but more than 915mm wide for no more than 1600mm along the length of the path or trail		U	U	D
	Number of sections of path or trail which are less than 915mm wide for more than 1600mm along the length of the path or trail		U	U	U

4	Barriers	Number	Urban/ formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/ working
	Number of barriers (stiles, fences and so on blocking the path)		U	U	U

5 Distances between passing places (areas on or next to the path which are at least 1500mm x 2000mm)	Length	Urban/ formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/ working
Length of path with passing places less than 50 metres apart		D	D	D
Length of path with passing places more than 50 metres but less than 100 metres apart		U	D	D
Length of path with passing places more than 100 metres but less than 150 metres apart		U	U	D
Length of path with passing places more than 150 metres apart		U	U	U

6 Distances between resting places (areas on or next to the path which are at least 1200mm x 1500mm)	Length	Urban/ formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/ working
Length of path with resting places less than 100 metres apart		D	D	D
Length of path with resting places more than 100 metres but less than 200 metres apart		U	D	D
Length of path with resting places more than 200 metres but less than 300 metres apart		U	U	D
Length of path with resting places more than 300 metres apart		U	U	U

7 Steepness of path or trail	Length	Urban/ formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/ working
Length of path steeper than 1:20 (for every 20 metres you walk along you will rise one metre)		D	D	D
Length of path steeper than 1:20 but less than 1:12		D	D	D
Length of path steeper than 1:12 but less than 1:10		U	U	D
Length of path steeper than 1:10		U	U	U



8	Height rise on ramps between landings measuring at least 1200mm x 1500mm	Number	Urban/formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/working
	Number of path sections steeper than 1:20 but less steep than 1:12 with a height rise of more than 750mm but less than 850mm between landings		U	D	D
	Number of path sections steeper than 1:20 but less steep than 1:12 with a height rise of more than 830mm but less than 950mm between landings		U	U	D
	Number of path sections steeper than 1:20 but less steep than 1:12 with a height rise of more than 950mm between landings		U	U	U

9	Cross slope of path or trail	Length	Urban/formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/working
	Length of path with a cross slope no steeper than 1:50		D	D	D
	Length of path with a cross slope steeper than 1:50 but less steep than 1:45		U	D	D
	Length of path with a cross slope steeper than 1:45 but less steep than 1:35		U	U	D
	Length of path with a cross slope steeper than 1:35		U	U	U

10	Small steps	Number	Urban/formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/working
	Number of small steps higher than 5mm		U	D	D
	Number of small steps higher than 10mm		U	U	D
	Number of small steps higher than 15mm		U	U	U

11	Surface breaks (grills, gaps in boards and so on)	Number	Urban/ formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/ working
	Number of breaks in the surface of the path of more than 12mm wide measured along the line of the path		U	U	U

12	Clear walking tunnel	Length	Urban/ formal	Urban Fringe	Rural/ working
	Length of path clear of overhanging branches and so on for a width of 1200mm and a height of 2100mm		D	D	D
	Length of path clear of overhanging branches and so on for a width of 1000mm and a height of 2100mm		U	U	D
	Length of path with overhanging branches and so on within a width of 1200mm and a height of 2100mm		U	U	U

It is very important that a different standard applies in different countryside settings. It means disabled people will have the same range of experiences in the countryside as the rest of the community. Standards of access are lower in more remote countryside because people accept the countryside is less accessible than towns and cities. An outdoor walk provides a very different experience according to whether you go for a stroll in parkland, a hike across farmland or a trek through mountainous country.



People are the starting point for deciding the different countryside settings in which the three standards apply. The standard for each setting is high enough so that few people will face barriers but not too high that you can only achieve them by changing the environment so that it spoils people's experiences.

[Table 2](#) below shows important features of countryside settings. They relate to things which will influence people with and without disabilities to choose activities in a variety of environments.



## Table 2. Countryside settings

Countryside setting	Urban and formal landscapes	Urban fringe and managed landscapes	Rural and working landscapes	Open country, semi-wild and wild land
Management	The opportunities are structured and controlled. There are many facilities, services and programmes.	The opportunities are controlled, though often very informally. There are some facilities, services and programmes.	There will be fewer managed opportunities and few facilities and services. Some programmes may be available	There will be very few managed opportunities and facilities, services or programmes.
Challenge and risk taking	No risks or challenges exist unless they are created and used by people	Very few risks or challenges unless they are created and used by people.	Few risks or challenges but people may need some basic skills in self-management in the outdoors.	Many risks and challenges available and people will need outdoor skills.
Naturalness	Mostly man-made environment. Many exotic and well-kept landscapes though they can appear natural.	Modified natural environment though often with resource management to improve natural environments.	Mixture of modified and natural environments often mixed with countryside production activities. (For example, farming and forestry.)	Natural environments with little evidence of humans affecting them.
Feeling involved with other users	High possibility of meeting and getting involved with other people on the site and in activities.	Possibility of meeting and seeing evidence of other people and of getting involved with them.	Possibility of meeting and seeing other people and evidence of them.	Low possibility of meeting other people, and little evidence of them.
Independence and self-reliance	All visitors can go alone or in groups. There are support services frequently available.	All visitors can go alone or in groups. There are support services occasionally available.	Most visitors can go alone. Some may need help. There are few support services available immediately.	Only some visitors can go alone. Many will expect to go with friends. Support services are very rarely near at hand.



Challenge, risk taking and using outdoor skills increase as visitors go into more remote countryside. Many people with and without disabilities will choose activities on the edge of towns and cities because there is less risk. Others will be disappointed and enjoy a less satisfying experience if they are not faced with some challenge. Naturalness is something which many people will use to choose a countryside venue for their activities. While many tree-less Pennine moors are grazed and managed for grouse shooting, people do not see them as changed by human activity. They often visit them for that reason.

A visit to a nature reserve or a country park for public use will almost certainly involve contact with other people. You may meet people casually and frequently. A trip to the mountains of Scotland is more likely to be planned to avoid other people. Many people would expect to be able to manage on their own in a town or city because they know that help is not far away. In more remote areas people expect less help to meet its challenges and that support services may not be immediately to hand. Lastly, people expect different services to be available in different countryside settings. You expect toilet facilities, interpretation and other visitor services in more formal environments where activities are likely to be more organised.

### Defining the setting

The first stage in deciding which standard you should use on any particular path or trail, is to see which countryside setting category broadly applies. The following approach is a pragmatic rule-of-thumb that you can use quickly and easily to identify the countryside setting for the paths of an area and the access standard that should apply to them.

As people move from formal settings through the edges of the towns and cities and into country landscapes and open country or wild land they expect:

- to come across more challenge and risk;
- to see a more natural environment;
- to meet fewer people;
- to be more independent; and
- their activities to be less formally organised or managed less often.



Table 3 below uses this rule to identify which countryside setting applies to a path. At points along a countryside path or trail you should give a score using this table. You should repeat the process for all areas so you can get standards which apply to all paths and trails.

# Table 3 Scoring System for choosing standards

Feature	Expectation	Criteria	Score
Visitor Centre encouraging or helping people enjoy the countryside	More chance of meeting other people. Evidence of management. Less challenge or risk.	Visitor centre less than 500 metres away	10
		Visitor centre between 500 metres and 1000 metres away	5
Parking areas of 20 spaces or more (including lay-bys and road-side parking)  Parking areas of 20 spaces or less (including lay-bys and road-side parking)	More chance of meeting people. Less naturalness	Parking area less than 500 metres away	8
		Parking area between 500 metres and 1000 metres away	4
		Parking area less than 500 metres away	6
		Parking area between 500 metres and 1000 metres away	3
How the land lies	More naturalness. Greater challenge or risk	Steepest slope of ground on which land lies is greater than 1:6	- 3
Habitation	Less naturalness. More chance of meeting people.	Groups of at least 100 buildings within 100o metres	8
		Groups of at least 25 buildings within 500 metres	6
		Groups of at least 100 buildings between 1000 metres and 500 metres	3
Character or path	Some naturalness. Management. Need to rely on yourself more.	Path surface tarmac or concrete	2
		Path surface not constructed (in other words earth trodden by use, or across open ground)	- 4
Public transport point	More chance of meeting other people. Need to rely on yourself more.	Bus stop, station and so within 1000 metres	5

Scoring for Table 3	Score	Standard
	More than 20	Urban and formal landscapes
	15 to 20	Urban fringe and managed landscapes
	10 to 17	Rural and working landscapes
	Less than 10	Open country, semi-wild and wild land

There are overlaps between the scoring bands because our countryside is very varied. You need to change which standard applies to a path if the score does not appear to make sense for that particular environment.

### Possible reasons for choosing higher standards

In spite of being some distance from a visitor centre, car park or buildings the path is very popular and has a large number of visitors.

The path leads to a site of special interest, perhaps the best view in the area, or a unique historical feature.

The path connects to other routes which have a high level of access.

### Possible reasons for choosing lower standards

The path is close to visitor centres and car parks but people visit it because it provides a remote countryside experience.

Once you have decided which standard should apply to a countryside area, you need to decide whether the path and trails can be made up to standard. It might not be reasonable to change a path to reach the correct standard:

if it costs too much;

if it spoils the landscape;

if it has an effect on the ecology of the area;

if it creates safety risks; or

if it spoils things for other people using it.

The acid test is whether those responsible for providing and maintaining countryside paths can show they have done everything possible to reach the right standard.

## Organisations represented on the BT Countryside for All Advisory Group (1993 -1997)

Access Committee for England	Fieldfare Trust
BT	Forestry Commission
Country Landowners Association	MENCAP
Countryside Commission	National Trust
Countryside Council for Wales	RADAR
Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru	Ramblers Association
Disability Action - Northern Ireland	Royal National Institute for the Blind
Disability Scotland	Scope
Disability Wales - Anabledd Cymru	Scottish Natural Heritage
English Nature	Scottish Sports Council
English Sports Council	Sports Council Northern Ireland
Environment & Heritage Service, N Ireland	Sports Council for Wales

## Other organisations and individuals that responded to consultations on the development of the BT Countryside for All Standards

Access Matters	Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers
British Horse Society	National Farmers Union
Centre for Accessible Environments	National Federation for the Blind
DSS Disability Unit	National Trails Officer Group
Disabled Drivers Association	Northamptonshire County Council
English Tourist Board	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Roger Fitzwater	Scottish Countryside Rangers Association
Go 4x4 It	Shrewsbury Borough Council
Guide Dogs for the Blind Association	Harold Smith
Holiday Care Service	Sustrans
Hotel & Holiday Consortium	Trail Riders Fellowship
Institute of Leisure & Amenity Management	Windsor & Maidenhead Users Group



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# Networking Guidelines



Supporting joint working between people who provide countryside services and disabled people



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Networking Guidelines

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# Introduction

These guidelines are designed to make it easier for people who provide countryside services and disabled people to work together. They are based on the direct experience of projects involving networking between people who provide countryside services and disabled people. They aim to take you through the whole networking process, so that you can make decisions about how networking is going to work best for you.

Networking is not just for people in management - it's a process that anyone can use to help achieve their aims, and it's all based on common sense.

The guidelines describe what networking is about, and its advantages for disability groups and people who provide countryside services. We go on to look at how networking fits into how you plan your projects, and what this can mean in practical terms.

The way you choose to network will depend on your project goals, so we describe a variety of networking options, with details of what to consider in each case. There are no right and wrong options - choose what works best for you and your partners. Finally we give a brief overview of the review and evaluation process, to give you some ideas on checking if your network is working effectively.

We hope that you will find these guidelines useful in developing your projects. Remember, networking is just a way to develop working partnerships which make it easier to get out there and create access for all in the countryside.

## Networking: What is it?

Networking is a fashionable piece of jargon for a process which has been going on for years. It has lasted because it involves:

- sharing** information, experience, ideas, goals, commitment, and resources;

- learning** skills, technical knowledge, and different perspectives;

- co-operating** on courses of action; and

- doing it** - planning, putting it into practice, influencing, monitoring, saving money, and raising money.

Networking is a way of getting people to start sharing their ideas, problems and good practice. People can then go on to use the contacts developed through networking in a variety of ways. These can include improving physical access to a local site, or influencing the development of an organisation's policy on providing countryside access for all.

## How does it work?

Networks can work at a variety of different levels.

One-to-one, in the office or on the phone, sharing information and contacts or solving problems.

At neighbourhood or site level, people may come together to share their knowledge and expertise to tackle local issues.

Town and district networks can draw from a slightly wider community, again to look at issues across a range of facilities and services.

County, regional and national networks give great scope for sharing experiences and good practice across a wide area. They can be effective forces for improvement and change.

## What's in it for you?

If you provide services in the countryside, networking with your customers including disabled people can help you in the following ways.

### Assessing service delivery

Getting feedback from visitors can show you how disabled people use your site, and if there are problems. You can find out if you are providing the kind of services people want, and if everybody can take part in the activities on offer.

### Solving problems

If you find that there are barriers for disabled people, involving them in designing ways around the barriers leads to efficient and cost-effective solutions which work for everybody.

### Building confidence

Developing an understanding of other people's views increases everyone's confidence in working together. We also know that members of the wider disabled community are more likely to use facilities which have been checked and approved by disabled people.

### Attracting more visitors to the countryside

Accessible sites will attract a wider range of visitors, including elderly people, children, disabled people and their families and friends.



### Raising environmental awareness

Attracting more visitors to accessible venues is likely to increase the number of people committed to caring for the countryside. By helping people to understand conservation issues we can head off possible problems between improving access and protecting the countryside.

For disabled people, networking with people who provide countryside services can result in the following.

### Improved services

Everyone should be able to use countryside services. Disabled people can use their experience to give advice on how mainstream services can be adapted to make them accessible to everybody.

### Giving people power

Working actively within a network gives disabled people the chance to use their skills and experience to make a positive contribution to the design and decision-making process.

### More choices

Knowing that what's on offer and is accessible allows people to make real choices about whether or not to go to the countryside.

### Enjoying the countryside

In the end, it's about being able to get out there and have fun!





## It works!

Dorset Wildlife Trust said:

"Working with disabled people has given us a much better idea of their needs, and we have set up good links that will allow us to get their advice on facilities at other nature reserves and our new Trust headquarters... we have learnt that it is far better to work with people with disabilities to make sure the facilities meet their needs, than carry out the work without consultation."

Gipping Valley Countryside Project said:

"The (BT Countryside for All Grants) Scheme has been invaluable.. .in making you look at how you have been working as a countryside project. Too often projects have been carried out without enough consultation or working with the people that it's aimed to benefit"

The Tong-Calverley Countryside Project worked with disabled volunteers to make access improvements to Calverley Wood. They said:

"It was terrific to involve people with physical disabilities in a project which opens up access to physically disabled people - pure poetry!!"

A member of a BT Countryside for All working group said:

"As a blind person taking part, I was pleased to be able to contribute to the debate... and now look forward to a continuing association with all who manage this wonderful asset we can now hope to enjoy."

### Overview of project Planning

1

Set your Goals  
What do you want to achieve?



2

Decide your approach  
What's the best way to achieve your goals?



3

Decide who to work with  
Who can help you achieve your goals?  
Who else has the same goals?



4

Choose your networking format  
What's the best way to work together?



5

Do it



6

Review and evaluate

## 1 Set your goals

The networking process doesn't exist on its own. It's a way of tapping into a wider pool of knowledge and experience which can help you achieve your project goals more easily.

Your first step is to decide what your project goal is. You can have goals at a number of levels, and you can relate them to a number of objectives.



Small-scale short-term tasks, such as improving access to a path in a country park.

Broader-based activities, like setting up an area forum to make people more aware of the countryside opportunities on offer.

Policy objectives, such as setting up a consultation process to take account of the needs of disabled people when you manage your site.

In each case, networking can help you get there more efficiently and effectively than if you were to go it alone.

## 2 Decide your approach

Whatever your 'countryside for all' goals are, planning for networking has these factors in common.

### Identifying your resources

Start by identifying your own skills, knowledge and experience. Then look at what other involvement your project needs to make it work effectively.

List the contacts you have already got and who could help you achieve your goal more easily. Find out who else is already doing something similar and if they are willing to share their experience with you. Check if there are people whose jobs cover all or parts of the work you will be doing. Ask around for leads on other people you should involve in any consultation process.

Decide how much time you have got for carrying out this consultation. You should allow for any delays in contacting people, or in finding a suitable date for everyone to meet.

Work out how much money you are going to need. The consultation process will involve some costs, and may mean you need to make on-the-ground improvements. If you haven't got a budget to cover these, now's the time to find out about funding options, what grants are available, and so on.

## Working with disabled people

Getting disabled people's angle on problems can lead to simple and inexpensive solutions. Start by talking to disabled people who might be interested in getting involved, and explain what you're trying to achieve. You can then answer any questions they may have. That way everyone is clear about the basic objectives from the start. It's also less likely that the project will lose its way.

Networking with other people doesn't mean you give up ownership of or responsibility for your project. And it doesn't mean that everyone involved in the network needs to have exactly the same aims. What is important is that there is some common ground so that you have a basic understanding of where different people are coming from. You should be able to use at least some of what they say to move the project forward.

Also remember to take account of disabled people's needs. If they help you with your project, can you help them with theirs? Can you offer them a chance to improve their own skills through being involved in the project? If they're volunteers or are unemployed, is it appropriate to offer help with transport or travel expenses?



## Working together

In 'countryside for all' networks you are likely to meet and work with new people. Everyone has different ways of working.

As a disabled person, do you prefer to work one-to-one direct with service providers, or do you find a group-based approach more effective? Do you prefer to have somebody with you who can help you put across your point of view? If you're being asked to go to meetings or site visits, explain any needs you have (such as transport or access) to allow you to take part effectively. Then your needs can be planned for and included from the start. Once that's out of the way, you can concentrate on the job in hand.

As a service provider, remember that although disabled partners may need extra support, they are used to dealing with and adapting to the world as it is. So, don't panic and think that you can't ask people to come and audit a site which is not already very accessible. It is important to explain to people what the current situation is. Ask them what you can do to make sure they can take part fully. If you need extra equipment, for example wheelchairs or a hearing induction loop, work together to find out where you can get hold of them. Concentrate on what people can do not what you think they can't do.

Different ways of networking throw up different practical issues about working together. If you are sensitive to the needs of other people you won't go far wrong.

If in doubt, ask.

## Deciding on the best format for you and your partners

You will be used to consultation procedures that work for you - perhaps you're a committee member, or you like one-to-one discussions where you can talk around the issues more informally. Go back to your project goal and see which networking options will be best for you.

For example, if you're planning on-site improvements, you may need to justify your proposals before a formal planning committee. If you need back up on the day from partners, do they know how formal committees work, or will you need to fill them in beforehand? If you're auditing a site, a more informal approach may make people taking part more confident about saying what they really think. Be prepared for criticism and react positively.

Networks should lead to conclusions and decisions and not just become talking shops. The people involved should agree how to take decisions. Everyone should feel that their voice has been heard before you move forward.

## Ongoing review and evaluation

Throughout the time you're working together, you should be checking to make sure that you're still on course. Be prepared to review your original aims. The people involved may make you think about different approaches. You may find you want to involve extra people in the network to increase the range of skills and expertise to draw on.

At the end of the project, collect feedback from everyone. Think about what went well, what went badly, what you would do differently another time, and how you're now going to share your good practice more widely.



In the next section we look at networking options in more detail to help you decide which one is likely to work best for you.



### 3 Decide who to work with

You may find that one way of networking best suits you, or that you need to use a range of options to achieve your goal. You might want to talk to national organisations to find out what is going on that you should know about. But you will probably end up working with other people in your local area. In this case you may also want to look at some of the other options we have described.

Remember to base your approach around your project goal, taking into account your own needs and those of your partners.

Find out what's already going on, and who might be interested in networking with you.

Decide who needs to be involved at a local level to make your network a success. Some or all of the following might have a role.

#### Working with social services

##### The advantages

Users of day centres and residential units represent a large number of people who might want to visit the countryside. Social services departments of local councils can be a valuable source of information, technical advice and contact points. Making contact with councillors and social services staff can be useful so that they know what you are trying to achieve. Some councils will hire out accessible minibuses to outside groups, and can sometimes help with funding.

##### The disadvantages

It can take time to make contact with the appropriate people. Hard-pressed staff may not see the benefits to their clients of going into the countryside.

##### Tips for success

Each council has a social services directory. You can telephone for information about centres near you.

Speak to centre managers and explain that you want to contact staff and users interested in the countryside. Most centres have user groups and you could ask for your information to be given to them.

Put together a package to sell the idea of getting involved in the countryside. Many staff may be keen on the environment, but won't necessarily consider it an option for their group. Remember that some people may not feel totally confident about visiting the countryside, so be prepared to go and talk to them.



## Networking with disability groups

### The advantages

You get to find out first hand what facilities and services disabled people want.

Their daily experience of overcoming access problems can lead to you designing efficient and cost-effective solutions.

If you have consulted disabled people about access, and acted on their advice, they are more likely to promote your site within the disability network. Access groups have experience of carrying out access audits and providing advice on improvements.

### The disadvantages

Many disability groups concentrate on access issues in towns. It may take time to find people interested in the countryside.

### Points to consider

You can use the national contacts list in the appendix at the end of these guidelines to find out about disability organisations. Or, contact your local DIAL (Disability Information and Advice Line) or Disability Information Service, or ask the Council for Voluntary Service, or library for local contacts.

Use disability awareness training if you need to.

Disabled people may not feel confident about visiting the countryside. Talk to them in an environment in which they feel comfortable, for example, at an access group meeting or a day centre.

Ask them about any access needs they have. For example, do they need a lift to the site, or do they need agendas and minutes of meetings on tape?

Create a positive atmosphere where people can say what they really think.

Explain any site management problems, and open up the debate on ways of improving access.

Work with people with a range of disabilities to make sure that improvements meet everyone's needs. Access officers may have wider knowledge than individuals representing their own personal interests.

## Working with people who provide countryside services

### The advantages

You can influence and work with service providers to create access for all. You can increase your own knowledge and use of the countryside.

### The disadvantages

You may need to reassure providers that improving access won't involve carving up the countryside or use up their entire site budget.

### Points to consider

You can use the national contacts list in the [Appendix](#) at the end of these guidelines to find out about countryside opportunities in your area. Or, if you already know what's available, go along and introduce yourself to site staff.

Visitor access is only one area of the service provider's responsibilities. Plan your approach. Be clear about the benefits of improving access, and how you can help them achieve it.

Be prepared to spend time putting your case and getting the service provider on your side.

How can you help improve the service on offer?

Can you or your contacts offer awareness training to providers?

Could you advise them on what questions other disabled visitors might want answered?

Can you organise a group of people with different disabilities to carry out a site audit?

Problems on site may mean the provider can't deal with all the improvements you suggest. But, there is usually some scope for action.

## Case study: Pathways to Partnership

At Northamptonshire County Council the countryside service and social services jointly funded a new post of network officer. The aim was to develop links between the two departments. And, they also wanted to give disabled people using social-service day centres the chance to visit the countryside more often.

The network officer identified those day centres where staff or users said they were interested in finding out more about the countryside. Rangers were given disability awareness training, and they then went into the centres to talk to staff and users. They had a display board showing the various country parks and what they have to offer the visitor. They also offered environmental activities. This gave people a taste of the countryside, and allowed them to make choices about where to go and what to do.

In some cases it also opened the eyes of the centre staff as they saw people responding more positively than they had expected. It was important to get the staff involved and to motivate them by showing them how good the programmes on offer were. The staff then saw it as a positive opportunity for their group.

Rangers also found it was necessary to consider what they were going to offer the carers, and to accept that they might have different priorities. At one centre the staff thought that their members would not have an interest in going to the countryside. However, they did help their group and the ranger to talk to each other, and in fact the group turned out to be really keen on the idea. This positive response reassured the staff, and has now led to regular joint outings with another centre. Such co-operation was very positive, and shows the effect the user group had.

Once interest amongst users and staff had been aroused, the rangers then arranged a visit to one of the parks, where the group met the same person who had been to their centre.

### Outcomes

This active approach has led to ongoing ranger involvement at some centres.

- Two centres are going to set up environmental gardens, and another has asked 'their' ranger to come and help with its activity week.
- Five of the centres now visit the countryside regularly, and the others have more involvement than they did before. Two now have specific "Discovery Days" arranged for them.
- A training day has been held to show social services staff ways of leading countryside activities so that they feel more confident about leading visits to the countryside.

The rangers' experiences with the centres also had a positive effect on their other visitor programmes.

For more information contact: Countryside & Tourism Services, Northamptonshire County Council  
PO Box 163, County Hall, Guildhall Road, Northampton NN1 1AX  
Phone: 01604 237227

## Networking with national organisations

Add to your local knowledge by talking to some national organisations, to find out what's happening on the wider scene, and to get some extra pointers on possible local contacts.

### The advantages

They can point people in the right direction of appropriate local contacts.

Their national strategies and policies can help guide local practice.

They can provide information to local groups, and help share good practice.

They can bring together different local practice to prevent things being done more than once.

They may provide grant aid and other help.

They give technical information on the needs of specific disability groups.

They may know of other national 'countryside access for all' projects.

They may have more 'clout' than small local groups or individuals.

They can give disabled people information on 'where to go and what to do' in other areas of the UK, and give service providers examples of good practice in their area.

### The disadvantages

It can take time and effort to make the right contacts. Covering all areas of the country may be difficult. National policies and priorities may make it difficult for local officers to respond to new ideas from other organisations.

The appendix lists contacts for some useful national countryside, disability and sports organisations and local authorities.



## 4 Choose your networking format

Having agreed who you want to work with, you need to decide which networking format will work best for you. Developing and using informal contacts is a great way of networking. There are also more formal ways of gathering people's opinions, which you may want to consider.

### Suggested ground rules for all meetings

Give everyone a chance to have their say. Agree some ground rules at the beginning. The Chair can then enforce these rules.

If there's a blind or partially-sighted person present, start with everyone introducing themselves so that the person can find and identify each speaker during the discussion.

Only one person should speak at a time. This gives everyone the chance to make their point.

Speak clearly. Don't cover your mouth when you're speaking. This will make it easier for people to lipread.

If you don't understand someone's speech, get them to repeat what they're saying until you do.

Don't interrupt, or try to guess what someone's trying to say. Give them the space to say it themselves.

If you are presenting graphics to a meeting involving blind or partially-sighted people, you should explain what you are showing.

Wherever you're coming from, don't feel that you have to comment on every issue. It's better to say you don't know than to offer comments or advice on an area you don't know anything about.



## Formal committees

### The advantages

Formal committees provide an organised structure for discussion and decision making. Members usually share responsibility for the outcomes of the group.

Committees do not have to focus on specific tasks or projects.

They're an easy way of drawing together people to share knowledge and experience.

They can be a powerful tool for creating and influencing policy.

They are a good way of getting people more committed to a project.

### The disadvantages

The formal meeting structure may be unfamiliar and even a bit frightening for people new to committees. Quieter members may not be able to make their voices heard. Organisational policy and practice may make it difficult or challenging to meet suggested new or different approaches. Success will depend on the amount of time and other resources available. Committees don't achieve anything, it's their members who take action.

### Oiling the wheels of the machine

Remember to identify people's needs beforehand. It can save you from embarrassment, and may also save you money.

Consider the following.

Think about where you're going to meet

Make sure everyone will be able to get there. You may need to arrange transport or help with transport costs.

Make sure the venue is suitable for wheelchair users.

Make sure there are accessible toilets.

You may need to provide a hearing induction loop.

### Information needs

Make sure that everyone knows what the meeting is about.

Check if you need to produce any written material in other formats such as large print or on tape. Pass this information round at least one week before the meeting to give people time to read it.

## Support needs

Find out whether any members of the group need support to give them the ability to make a full and positive contribution to the work of the committee.

Check if you need to make signers or lip speakers available.

It might be a good idea to have a session on disability awareness.

Consider running a session for new members on how committees work.

### Case study: The Dartmoor Countryside Access Group

To improve countryside access for all, Dartmoor National Park Authority has worked with local access groups and interested individuals. The authority set up the Countryside Access Group. The group brings together disabled people, health care staff and people who provide countryside services. They meet every one to two months at venues around Dartmoor.

They had two main objectives

To raise awareness, and give advice to countryside planners so that they can take account of disabled people's needs in the countryside.

To provide a voice for these visitors during the planning and development process.

Their successes

They have produced a poster and a flyer describing what the group does, and visited exhibitions.

They hold regular meetings, and pass their minutes to 10 other access groups.

They were involved in the Plymouth to Burrator Traffic Management Strategy Group.

They have carried out a number of site access audits.

They survey sites, and revise the 'Access for All' publication, which is sent to disabled people around Devon.

For more information contact:

Dartmoor National Park Authority  
Parke, Haytor Road  
Bovey Tracey, Newton Abbot  
Devon TQ13 9JQ  
Phone 01626 832093

## Working groups

Working groups are not the same as formal committees.

### The advantages

Working groups are less formal than committees, so people may feel more confident about taking part.

Members of working groups do not always share responsibility for the outcomes of the group.

Members co-ordinate their own work with other members of the group.

Working groups focus on specific tasks or projects to test out and learn from new ideas and practices.

They can draw together people from different organisations to share knowledge and experience.

They should involve people with a variety of disabilities, and develop solutions which work for everybody.

### The disadvantages

If the main objectives are not clearly stated and kept to, the project may lose its way or fizzle out. Quieter members may find it difficult to make their voices heard. Success will depend on the time and other resources available. Developing solutions which work for everyone may take longer.

### Making it work

#### Who to involve

People who manage recreational land in the area, local disability groups, and people with specialist knowledge.

#### Making contacts

It may take time to get the most appropriate people involved in your group. Allow for this in your timescale.

It might be appropriate to invite local parish or district councillors along so that they know what you are trying to achieve.



Refer back to your project objectives, and try to get people with a range of disabilities involved. For example, if your project is looking at the interpretative needs of visitors to a country park (explaining to them what is important about the site), people who are blind or partially sighted, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and people with learning difficulties should all be involved.

Do not make comments on issues about which you have no experience. That's why you've got a network of skilled people together, each with their own area of expertise.

Remember that one solution might not work for everyone. For example, the physical access needs of people who are blind or partially sighted may be different to those of wheelchair users. It is important to listen to everybody before developing new services.

### Milton Keynes Countryside Forum

In Milton Keynes a working group was set up for six months. It looked at improving networking between people who provide countryside services and disabled people. It was made up of people from Buckinghamshire County Council, Milton Keynes Borough Council, Milton Keynes Parks Trust, and Milton Keynes Transport and Access Group.

During those six months, working group members met regularly and identified the main barriers to effective local networking. These included not knowing what disability groups there were in the area, or what skills and knowledge their members could bring to the networking process.

To start with, some people didn't want to criticise access at countryside sites. A two-day seminar helped overcome this and find areas of common ground for all network members. It also gave everyone a chance to have their say on ways of working together to improve future countryside access.

The working partnerships were so successful that a countryside forum has been set up to tackle access problems. In time they hope to share their knowledge and experience across the whole county.

For more information contact:

Milton Keynes Borough Council  
Civic Offices  
1 Saxon Gate East  
Milton Keynes, Bucks.  
Phone: 01908 691691



## Setting up information points, directories and databases

### The advantages

Collecting countryside information at one central well-publicised point provides users with a 'one-stop shop' where they can easily find out what's on offer in the area.

Tell people about best practice which other service providers can learn from.

You can easily update database information and share it widely across a range of local organisations.

### The disadvantages

It can take a lot of time and resources to research and collect data, especially for directories and databases. You need to keep the information up to date, otherwise it can become worthless.

### Points to consider

Use local information systems already in place. Talk to Social Services, Disability Information Officers (often based within County Council Offices), the local Disability Information and Advice Line (DIAL), the Council for Voluntary Service, and the Library Service. Find out what systems they already use to share information.

Involve other partners and include countryside access information in the directories and databases you already have.

Agree a central information point which most people in the community will use, for example the library, the Council for Voluntary Services, or the tourist bureau. Make sure that in future it carries information on where to go and what to do in the countryside.

Include addresses and the phone, fax and minicom numbers of relevant countryside sites, together with a named contact if possible. This is so that people can choose the easiest way to make contact, and will be able to get hold of the right person first time.

Information staff need disability awareness training.

The central information point should also hold contact points for local disability groups.

Publicise the information point in the community and within your own organisation. Include community development and arts workers, and people who may have to deal with general enquiries from the public such as information officers and receptionists.

You should also tell Disability information Officers, access groups and organisations like DIAL about any new information networks. That way, if they can't answer a query themselves, they can direct the caller to somebody who will be able to help.

Disabled people trust information which has been approved by other disabled people.

### Case study 1: Northamptonshire County Council Countryside Centre

The Northamptonshire County Council countryside service manages a countryside shop in the centre of Northampton. This gives people a convenient place to learn about countryside opportunities across the county.

For more information contact:  
Northampton Countryside Centre  
9 Guildhall Road  
Northampton  
NN1 1DP  
Phone 01604 237220

### Case study 2: Buckinghamshire Disability Information Network

In Milton Keynes the Buckinghamshire Disability Information Network has a database. It has information on providing services, technical aids, holidays and other disability-related topics.

Departments within Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Borough Council, including social services and community development, have access to this database, but the rangers didn't know it was there.

People from the various local authorities identified the need to publicise the database, and the advantages of using it as a networking tool, more widely within their organisations. The database was recognised as the best way of getting information across to local disabled people. Countryside forum partners will work together to audit sites. They will then pass the information on to Milton Keynes Centre for Integrated Living (MKCIL). Disabled people contacting MKCIL will then have access to countryside information which they can rely on.

The group has a long-term objective of setting up an information point which the wider community can use. For more information contact:

Milton Keynes Centre for Integrated Living  
330 Saxon Gate West  
Milton Keynes, Bucks MK9 2ES

Phone 01908 231344

### Case Study 3: The “Out and About” newsletter

The 'Out and About' newsletter was set up by the Countryside Commission Eastern Region to improve networking between disabled people and people who provide countryside services in Eastern England.

The newsletter contains:  
reports from disabled people about countryside facilities;  
articles on specific issues (for example gate design); and  
information on countryside volunteering opportunities.

They send it to at least 200 disability and countryside groups. Countryside and disability organisations are taking it in turns to produce it.

For more information contact:

Liz Kelly

Greensand Project

47 Hightown Road

Luton, Beds

LU2 0BW

Phone: 01582 481851



## Setting up links in the wider community

### The advantages

Being involved in the work of other groups having similar aims may provide ideas on new ways of working.

Taking your ideas to people shows your commitment to improving access.

It also shows your responsibility for encouraging others to become involved.

Involving important local people (for example forward planners, parish councillors) with your project can help spread the message to a wider audience.

If you can help other groups achieve their aims, they may be more likely to help you achieve yours.

### The disadvantages

Not all issues dealt with by other groups will be relevant to your aims. How effective your involvement is will depend on the time and other resources you are able to put to it.

#### Case Study: Seaford Access group

One of the rangers at Seven Sisters Country Park is a member of Seaford Access Group. Suggestions for access improvements at the park are given straight to a named ranger. They also discuss ways of making the improvements, and plan them in partnership.

The ranger has gained a knowledge of disability issues. She has passed this knowledge on to colleagues at Sussex Downs Conservation Board. Everyone is benefiting from this arrangement, and access across a range of sites will be improved as a result.

Contact:                      Seven Sisters Country Park, Exceat, Seaford,  
East Sussex BN25 4AD  
Phone 01323 870280

- 5 Want to give some of these ideas a try?  
Think about it, plan it, and then.....

# DO IT!

## 6 Review and evaluate

Evaluation should play an important part throughout your project. In this section we look at evaluating the effectiveness of networking to achieve your goals.

### Evaluation checklist

#### Phase 1

Set your project goal, and develop a network of partners who can help and advise you.

#### Check

Make sure you have got the appropriate people involved.

Make the network bigger or smaller if you need to.

Check that everyone is clear about the overall objectives.

Make sure everyone is going to get something out of it.

#### Phase 2

#### Working together

#### Check

Meet members' needs so that everyone is able to take part fully. Be prepared to use a different approach to keep things on track. Check that the objectives are still acceptable, and if not change them. Review how things are going regularly, and check everyone is happy.



## Phase 3

### Project review

#### Check

Invite regular feedback on progress from network members.

At the end of the project, ask again for comments.

Review the networking process as well as the success of the project.

Ask what everyone thought about the project.

Find out what worked and what didn't work.

Find out if everyone felt they had been fully involved.

Find out what you have all learnt from networking.

Share your good practice with others.

## Phase 4

**Party! Why not celebrate and thank everyone for their help in making your project a success?**

**Go on, you deserve it!**

## Appendix

Some useful national organisations and how they can help you

### Countryside

#### [British Trust for Conservation Volunteers](#)

36 St Mary's Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 0EU

Phone: (01491) 821600 Fax: (01491) 839646

There is also a network of regional offices throughout the UK. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers is Britain's largest society carrying out practical conservation work. It has over 84,000 volunteers working on projects to improve the environment. It welcomes volunteers with all abilities to take part in its projects.

#### [British Waterways](#)

Willow Grange, Church Road, Watford, WD1 3QA

Phone: 01923 201 120

British Waterways manages and cares for 2,000 miles (3,219km) of canals, rivers and docks, buildings, structures and landscapes. This 200-year old network of inland waterways has a unique history and environment which improves the quality of life for people and communities close to them. British Waterways manages and promotes access and recreation across the waterways network.

#### [Country Land and Business Association \(CLA\)](#)

16 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PQ

Phone: (0207) 235 0511 Fax: (0207) 235 4696

The CLA is a voluntary association made up of owners of agricultural and other countryside land. It gives advice and useful information to its members. It has links with the Countryside Landowners Association Charitable Trust (see next listing).

#### [Country Landowners Association Charitable Trust](#)

The Secretary c/o 16 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PQ

Phone: (0207) 235 0511 Fax: (0207) 235 4696

The Country Landowners Association Charitable Trust is part of the Country Landowners Association. It can offer funding to projects working to improve access to the countryside for disabled people. It also helps with countryside education projects for disabled and non-disabled people.

#### [Countryside Agency](#)

John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

GL50 3RA

Phone: (01242) 521381 Fax: (01242) 584270

There are also regional offices around England. The Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission) works to conserve the beauty of the English countryside, and to help people enjoy it. It doesn't directly own or manage any land, but can give advice and practical help (including grant aid) on making the countryside more accessible to everybody.

### [Countryside Council for Wales](#)

Plas Penrhos, Fford Penrhos, Bangor, Gwynedd, Wales LL57 2DN

Phone: (01248) 385500 Fax: (01248) 355782

There are also five area offices around the country. The Countryside Council for Wales is a government agency which works to conserve the beauty of the Welsh countryside, and to help people enjoy it. Contact the Countryside Council for Wales for advice and practical help (including grant aid) on making the countryside accessible to all. It can also give you information about National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Many of these are open to the public. The Countryside Council for Wales also leads a Welsh Access Forum. Disability Wales is a member of the forum. The forum publishes advice and guidance on access opportunities in the Welsh countryside.

### [Countryside Management Association](#)

c/o Centre for Environmental interpretation, Manchester Metropolitan University,  
St. Augustines, Lower Chatham Street, Manchester M15 6BY

Phone: (0161) 247 1067 Fax: (0161) 247 6390

The Countryside Management Association promotes efficiency amongst countryside managers. It encourages them to protect the countryside through practical conservation, improvement, education and access. Membership is open to all countryside managers.

### [Countryside Recreation Network](#)

CRN Manager, Sheffield Hallam University, Unit 1, Sheffield Science Park, Howard Street,  
Sheffield, S1 2LX

Phone: (0114) 225 4494 Fax: (0114) 225 4488

The Countryside Recreation Network is a UK wide network. It links people concerned with countryside and related recreation matters, and gives them easy access to information. The network covers a number of organisations and individuals. A regular newsletter provides a forum for members to share views and good practice. There are also meetings and conferences.

### [Environment and Heritage Service, Department of the Environment](#)

35 Castle Street, Belfast BT1 1GU

Phone: (02890) 251477 Fax: (02890) 546660

The Environment and Heritage Service is an agency within the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. It aims to protect and conserve the natural and man-made environment, and to encourage people to appreciate it now and in the future. Contact the Environment and Heritage Service for advice and practical help (including grant aid) on making the countryside accessible to everybody. It can also give you information about Country Parks, National Nature Reserves (most of which are open to the public) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

### [English Nature](#)

Northminster House, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire PE1 1 UA

Phone: (01733) 455000 Fax: (01733) 568834

There are also local teams based around England. English Nature gives the Government advice on nature conservation in England. It promotes, directly and through others, the conservation of England's wildlife and natural features. Contact English Nature for information on its National Nature Reserves, some of which are open to the public.

### [Fieldfare Trust](#)

7 Volunteer House, 69 Crossgate, Cupar, Fife, KY15 5AS

Phone: (01334) 657708

The Fieldfare Trust works to improve access to the countryside and environmental education for disabled people across the UK. It gives training and consultancy advice to people who provide countryside services, and also runs projects which give disabled people the chance to take part in countryside activities.

### [Forest Enterprise](#)

231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh, Lothian, Scotland EH12 7AT

Phone: (0131) 334 0303 Fax: (0131) 334 3047

Forest Enterprise is an agency which is part of the Forestry Commission. It is responsible for the management of the Commission's forests and woodlands throughout Great Britain. Local offices are listed in the telephone directory. You can also ring the Commission's information line given above.

### [National Trust](#)

36 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AS

Phone: (0870) 609 5380 Fax: (0207) 222 5097

There are also regional offices in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The National Trust works to preserve places of historic interest and natural beauty in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Much National Trust land is countryside, and parts of it are open to the public. The Trust has a Disability Advisor. It also produces a free 56 page annual guide called 'Information for Visitors with Disabilities'. This gives details of its most accessible sites. Trust staff also share their knowledge of improving countryside access with other people who provide countryside services.

### [National Trust for Scotland](#)

Wemyss House, 28 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, Lothian EH2 4ET

Phone: (0131) 243 9300

The National Trust for Scotland works to preserve places of historic interest and natural beauty within Scotland. Contact them for information on accessible National Trust sites in Scotland.

### [Ramblers Association](#)

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP  
Phone: (0207)339 8500

The Ramblers Association promotes rambling, and protects rights of way. It also campaigns for access to open country, and defends the beauty of the countryside. There are local Ramblers Association groups throughout Britain, and new members are welcome.

### [Royal Society for Nature Conservation](#)

(also known as the Wildlife Trusts)

The Green, Witham Park, Waterside South, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN5 7JR  
Phone: (01522) 544400 Fax: (01522) 511616

The Wildlife Trusts are a nationwide network of local trusts. They work to protect wildlife in towns and in the countryside. They want to see a UK which is richer in wildlife. The Wildlife Trusts manage more than 2000 nature reserves around the UK. Many of these are open to the public. The trusts welcome volunteers to help with practical conservation work.

### [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#)

The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL

Phone: (01767) 680551 Fax: (01767) 692365

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is the charity that takes action for wild birds and the environment. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds owns and manages nature reserves. It also researches conservation problems, campaigns for solutions, and educates and advises others. Contact them for information on nature reserves and birdwatching in your area.

### [Scottish Natural Heritage](#)

12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 2 AS

Phone: (0131) 447 4784

There are also regional offices around the country. Scottish Natural Heritage works to conserve Scotland's unique and precious natural heritage. This means the wildlife, the habitats and the landscapes which have developed in Scotland through the long partnership between people and nature. Contact Scottish Natural Heritage for advice and practical help (including grant aid) on making the countryside accessible to all. It can also give you information about its National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Some of these sites are open to the public.



## Disability

### [British Council of Organisations of Disabled People](#)

Litchurch Plaza, Litchurch Lane, Derby, Derbyshire DE24 8AA

Phone: (01332) 295 551 Fax: (01332) 295 5810

Minicom: (01332) 295 581

The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People is the national umbrella body of organised groups of disabled people in the UK. There are over 95 independent organisations controlled by disabled people which are linked to the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People. It promotes equal rights for disabled people, and can give you contacts for Councils of Disabled People and Centres for Independent and Integrated Living in your area.

### [British Deaf Association](#)

1-3 Worship Street, London EC2A 2AB

Phone: (0207) 588 3520 Fax: (0207) 588 3527

Minicom: (0207) 588 3529 or (0207) 496 9539

The British Deaf Association has local groups throughout the country. It organises a variety of group activities for deaf people, and gives advice to individuals and parents on development and education. A monthly news magazine is also available.

### [Centre for Accessible Environments](#)

Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street, London SE1 2NY

Phone: (0207) 357 8182 Fax: (0207) 357 8183

The centre is committed to the provision of buildings and environments that are accessible to all users, including disabled and elderly people. It also works for better building design. The centre publishes technical design guidance and a journal, 'Access by Design'.

### [Disability Action](#)

Portside Business park, 189 Airport Road West, Belfast, Northern Ireland BT3 9ED

Phone: (02890) 297881 Fax: (02890) 297882

Disability Action in Northern Ireland aims to remove handicap from disability, by working to make sure that people with disabilities get their full rights as citizens. Contact Disability Action for details of its 160 plus member groups in Northern Ireland, which cover every aspect of disability.

### [Scottish Disability Equality Forum](#)

c/o SCVO 18-19 Claremont Crescent, Edinburgh EH7 4QD

Phone: (0131) 556 3882

SDEF is a national umbrella organisation concerned with disability. It provides information and coordination to improve services and opportunities for people with disabilities in Scotland.

### [Disability Wales / Anabledd Cymru](#)

Wernddu Court, Caerphilly Business Park, Van Road, Caerphilly, CF83 3ED

Phone: 02920 887325

Fax: 02920 888702

Disability Wales works to promote recognition of, and support for, all disabled people in Wales. It provides an information service, gives professional advice, and works closely with central and local government to encourage the development of effective policies and legislation. Disability Wales can put you in touch with disability groups around the country.

### [Guide Dogs for the Blind Association Adventure Group](#)

Hillfields, Burghfield, Reading, Berkshire RG7 3YG

Phone: (01734) 835 555

Fax: (01734) 834 744

The Adventure Group runs holidays catering for blind and partially sighted people of all age groups. The holidays are graded to suit people's fitness and ability.

### [MENCAP: The Royal Society for mentally handicapped children and adults](#)

MENCAP National Centre, 123 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0RT

Phone: (0207) 454 0454 Fax: (0207) 696 5540

MENCAP provides a wide range of services for people with learning disabilities, their families and professionals who work with them. MENCAP also runs the Gateway Clubs, which provide leisure and recreation for people with learning disabilities. Contact MENCAP to find out about groups in your area.

### [National Federation of the Blind of the UK](#)

Sir John Wilson House, 215 Kirkgate, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 1JG

Phone: (01924) 291313

Fax: (01924) 200244

The National Federation of the Blind works to improve the standard of life for blind and partially sighted people by bringing pressure on statutory and voluntary agencies. It promotes the full integration of blind and partially sighted people into the community. The National Federation of the Blind has branches across the UK, and gives information to its members in appropriate formats. Contact the Headquarters for more details.

### [People First](#)

Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2 6HG

Phone: (0207) 713 6400

Fax: (0207) 833 1880

People First promotes self-advocacy for people with learning difficulties and other disabilities. Members take the right to speak for themselves, and to take responsibility for themselves and others. People First produce practical guides to help people provide information which is easy to understand. There are a growing number of People First self-help groups around Britain.

## [RADAR](#)

12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF

Phone: (0207) 250 3222 Fax: (0207) 250 0212

Minicom: (0207) 250 4119

RADAR is a national organisation which works with and for physically disabled people. It acts as a pressure group to improve the environment for disabled people, campaigning for their rights and needs, and challenging negative attitudes and stereotypes. RADAR's regional Information Officers can advise you about groups and activities in your area.

## [Royal National Institute for Deaf People](#)

19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL

Phone: (0808) 808 0123 Fax: (0171) 296 8199

Text: (0808) 808 9000

The Royal National Institute for Deaf People is the largest voluntary organisation in the UK representing deaf, deafened, hard of hearing and deaf/blind people. It wants to see deaf people being able to exercise their right to full citizenship and to enjoy equal opportunities. It works towards achieving this by providing a range of quality services and by raising people's awareness and understanding of deafness and deaf people. Contact your Royal National Institute for Deaf People Regional information Office for more details.

[Royal National Institute for Deaf People South West](#), 13B Church Farm  
Business Park, Corston, Bath BA2 9AP

Phone: 01225 874460 (voice and text)

[Royal National Institute for Deaf People South East](#), 39 Store Street, London  
WC1 E 7DB

Phone: 0207 813 2480 (voice and text)

[Royal National Institute for Deaf People Midlands](#), 117 Halgley Road,  
Edgbaston, Birmingham B16 8LB

Phone: 0121 455 8663 Text: 0121 454 1368

[Royal National Institute for Deaf People North](#), National Computing Centre,  
Armstrong House, Oxford Road, Manchester M1 7ED

Phone: 0161 242 2316 Text: 0161 242 2272

Fax: 0161 242 2317

[Royal National Institute for Deaf People Northern Ireland](#), Wilton House, 5  
College Square North, Belfast BT1 6AR

Phone: 028 9033 1320 Text: 028 9033 1320

Textphone: 028 9032 7616

[Royal National Institute for Deaf People Scotland](#), Floor 3, Crowngate  
Business Centre, Brook Street, Glasgow G40 3AO

Phone: 0141 554 0053 Text: 0141 550 5750

Fax: 0141 554 5837

### [Royal National Institute for the Blind](#)

105 Judd Street, London, WC1H 9NE

Phone: (0207) 388 1266

Fax: (0207) 388 2034

The Royal National Institute for the Blind works to improve the quality of life for blind and partially sighted people. It provides a wide range of services, including Holiday and Leisure Services, which provides information and advice on a variety of leisure activities, including countryside recreation. It can also give you technical information, and advice on designs which take account of the needs of blind and partially sighted people.

### [SCOPE](#)

12 Park Crescent, London W1N 4EQ

Phone: (0207) 636 5020

Fax: (0207) 436 2601

SCOPE, and the 187 local groups linked to it, provide a variety of services throughout England and Wales for children and adults with cerebral palsy. These include education, skills development, residential and independent living schemes, micro technology support and specialist social workers.

### [Spinal Injuries Association](#)

76 St James's Lane, London N10 3DF

Phone: (0208) 444 2121

Fax: (0208) 444 3761

The Spinal Injuries Association is run by wheelchair users and their friends for paraplegics and tetraplegics and their families. It aims to help individuals to achieve their own goals, bring about the best medical care, and get more scientific research into paraplegia. Local Spinal Injuries Association groups operate in many parts of the country.

### [Wales Council for the Blind](#)

3rd Floor, Shand House, 20 Newport Road, Cardiff, Mid Glamorgan, CF24 0DB

Phone: (02920) 473 954

Fax: (02920) 455 710

The Wales Council for the Blind promotes the welfare of blind and partially sighted people in Wales. It also acts as an advisory and consultative body on visual impairment issues.

### [Wales Council for the Deaf](#)

Glenview House, Courthouse Street, Pontypridd, Mid-Glamorgan, CF24 0DB

Phone: (01443) 485 687

Fax: (01443) 408 565

Minicom: (01443) 485 686

The Wales Council for the Deaf is a national organisation which promotes the welfare of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people throughout Wales. Its publications include Wales Hi - a quarterly magazine, The Volunteer - a newsletter, information leaflets on various aspects of hearing impairment, and the Welsh Book of signs.

## Local authorities

### Local Government Association

Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ  
Tel: 020 7664 3000 Fax: 020 7664 3030

The Local Government Association works to promote the interests, powers and duties of its member authorities including the County, District, City and Borough Councils within England & Wales. The Association can put you in touch with all the Local Authorities in England & Wales.

### The Association of Local Authorities of Northern Ireland

123 York Street, Belfast BT15 1AB  
Phone: (02890) 249286 Fax: (02890) 326645

The Association of Local Authorities works to promote the interests, powers and duties of its member authorities including the District, City and Borough Councils within Northern Ireland. The Association can put you in touch with all the Local Authorities in Northern Ireland. Or, you can try 'The Municipal Year Book', which you will find in the reference section of most libraries. This contains information on most aspects of local government, and has contact points for social services, countryside departments and recreation departments.

### COSLA (The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5XZ  
Phone: (0131) 474 9200 Fax: (0131) 474 9292

COSLA is the Association of Local Authorities in Scotland. It works to promote the welfare and good government of the people of Scotland. COSLA can put you in touch with all Scottish Councils. Or, you can try 'The Municipal Year Book', which you will find in the reference section of most libraries. This contains information on most aspects of local government, and has contact points for social services, countryside departments and recreation departments.



## Voluntary Organisations

### [National Council for Voluntary Organisations](#)

26 Bedford Square, London WOI B 3HU

Phone: (0207) 713 6161

Fax: (0207) 713 6300

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is a national resource centre which provides advice and information for voluntary organisations. It represents over 850 different voluntary organisations, including those working for countryside and disability organisations. It can put you in touch with your local Council for Voluntary Organisations.

### [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations](#)

The Mansfield, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh, EH3 6BB

Phone: 0131 556 3882

Fax: 0131 556 0279

Textphone: 0131 557 6483

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations is a national umbrella organisation promoting the independence and interests of the voluntary sector in Scotland.

### [Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action](#)

Wilton House, 5 College Square North, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT1 6AR

Phone: 028 9033 1320

Fax: 028 9033 1320

Textphone: 028 9032 7616

The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action is a national umbrella organisation promoting the independence and interests of the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland.

## Sports Organisations

### British Blind Sport

4-6 Victoria terrace, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV31 3AB  
Phone: (01926) 424247

British Blind Sport is the voice of the blind sporting community. It is responsible for organising national championships, training and selecting international teams, and for work at grass roots level. It also provides information on sport for blind and visually impaired people.

### British Sports Association for the Disabled

Head Office, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND  
Phone: (0207) 490 4919 Fax: (0207) 490 4914

The British Sports Association for the Disabled works to provide sport and physical recreation for disabled people. It has regional offices throughout the country and a number of individual affiliated sports clubs.

### Scottish Sports Association for Disabled People

The Administrator, Fife Institute of Physical and Recreational Education,  
Viewfield Road, Glenrothes, Fife KY6 2RB  
Phone: (01592) 415700 Fax: (01592) 415710

The Scottish Sports Association for Disabled People is the co-ordinating body of sport for all disabled people in Scotland. It can offer comprehensive specialist advice service on most aspects of participation in sport and recreation for people with disabilities.

### Sport Scotland

Caledonia House, South Gyle, Edinburgh EH12 9DQ  
Phone: (0131) 317 7200 Fax: (0131) 317 7202

Sport Scotland is the national agency responsible for encouraging the development of sport and physical recreation for people in Scotland. It works to improve the provision of sports facilities and promotes high standards in sport. Contact them for details of local sports development officers.

### Sport England

16 Upper Woburn Place, London, WC1 K OQP  
Phone: (0207) 273 1500 Fax: (0207) 383 5740

Through its headquarters and nine regional offices, Sport England works in partnership with sports providers to develop opportunities for disabled people to take part in sport. especially young disabled people, and people competing at a high level. Sport England's headquarters offers a limited enquiry service to external callers, including contacts for national organisations. Regional contacts for facilities, organisations and sports development officers are available from regional offices.

### [The Sports Council for Northern Ireland](#)

House of Sport, Upper Malone Road, Belfast BT9 5LA

Phone: (02890) 381 222

Fax: (02890) 682 757

The Northern Ireland Committee on Sport for disabled people advises the Sports Council for Northern Ireland on matters of policy and grant aid. It has a development officer who works to extend participation and raise levels of sporting performance amongst disabled people.

### [Sports Council for Wales](#)

National Sports Centre for Wales, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff,

Mid Glamorgan, CF1 9SW

Phone: (02920) 300500

Fax: (02920) 300600

The Sports Council for Wales is committed to developing and improving sporting and recreational opportunities in Wales, regardless of ability. People with disabilities are currently under represented in all sports in Wales, so they need to be the focus of special attention. The Council aims to increase participation in sport by people with disabilities, to raise levels of performance and excellence, and to encourage integration wherever possible.



**Fieldfare Trust**

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The Fieldfare Trust  
7 Volunteer House  
69 Crossgate  
Cupar  
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KY15 5AS Telephone:  
01334 657708  
E-mail: [Info@fieldfare.org.uk](mailto:Info@fieldfare.org.uk)



**Fieldfare Trust**

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# Information Sheets



Information on the countryside access  
needs of disabled people



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Information Sheets



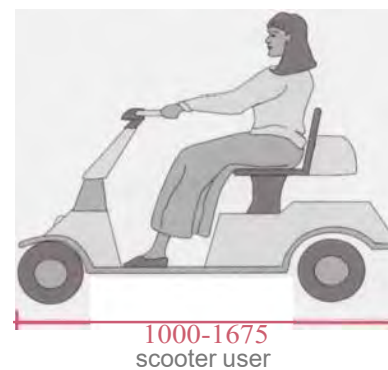
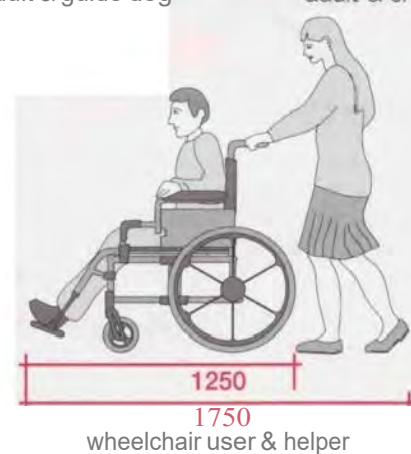
The Information Sheets in this electronic version of the Good Practice Guide are optical scans of the original sheets. As such they have not been edited for content in anyway. Not all the original Information Sheets have been reproduced here. Since the publication of the first edition of the Good Practice Guide other design guides with a high level of technical detail have been produced. The aim of these Information Sheets is to provide dimensions and measurements relevant to access for disabled people that can be used to refine the design of countryside furniture so as to make it accessible. The Fieldfare Trust will be revising and extending these Information Sheets in the future. The aim will be to focus information on the specific issues that influence disabled people's access. The revisions will also take account of information that has become available since the original publication of the Good Practice Guide, with particular reference to 'Disability Access - BS8300:2001'.

Please note many of the Information Sheets run to more than one page.

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Space allowances	1.1	<a href="#">Path users / Path width</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
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# Path Users/Path Widths



The width of paths in the countryside will depend on a number of factors:

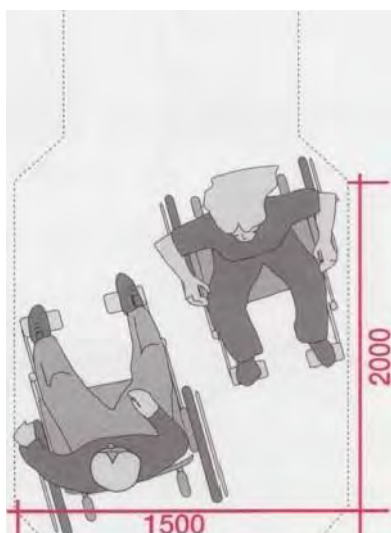
- Who you expect to use it. For example, pedestrians only, cyclists, horse riders, motorised vehicles or a combination of some or all of these.
- How many users you expect. Busy paths need to be wider.

N.B. All measurements are in millimetres



1200 min  
useable surface

- To be accessible countryside paths should have a minimum of 1200mm useable surface width. This allows two people to walk along side by side and support each other if necessary.
- The path width may be reduced to 815mm for a maximum of 300mm, for example at a gateway.
- To allow for free movement of two-way traffic by all pedestrians (including wheelchair users and double pushchairs) the minimum path width should be 2000mm.
- Path edging is not essential but a clear visual distinction between the path and adjoining ground will be helpful.
- People with visual impairment need to be able to feel the difference underfoot between the path surface and the ground next to it.
- Wide paths will not be accessible unless they are well maintained to ensure no vegetation encroaches and the surface remains firm and stable.



#### Passing Places:

- Where the path width is less than 1500mm passing places every 50m will allow two wheelchair users to pass each other.
- Passing places should be 1500mm wide and 2000mm long. This will allow enough space for two wheelchair users plus helpers to pass each other.

**This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines**

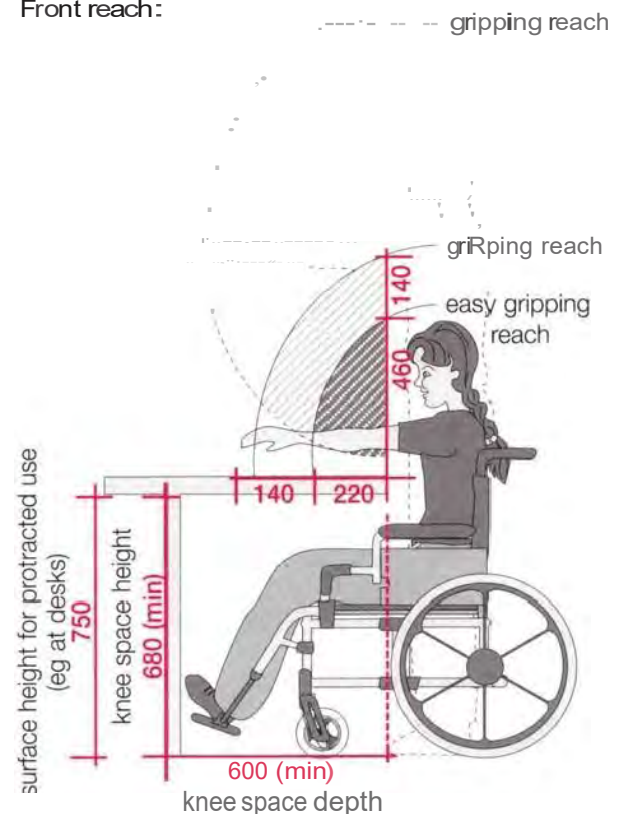
N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

# Reach Ranges

People have different reach ranges. Placing display material within easy reach of a 6 year old wheelchair user and in reach of an adult will make it accessible to most people.

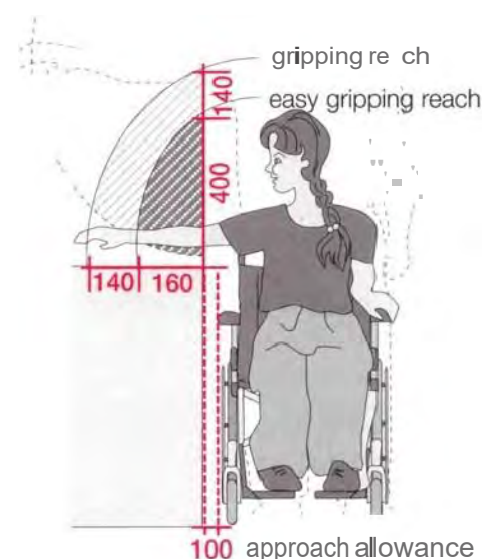
- The 'easy gripping reach' for a 6 year old wheelchair user is
  - 220mm to reach straight ahead extending in an arc to 460mm above the table.
  - 160mm to reach sideways extending in an arc to 400mm above the table.
- The 'gripping reach' for a 6 year old wheelchair user is
  - 140mm beyond easy gripping reach to reach both sideways and straight ahead.
- Displays, dispensers and controls should be placed within the 'easy gripping reach area'. Some facilities which are expected to be used less frequently may be placed within the 'gripping reach area'.
- Wheelchair users using table top displays need
  - clear knee space depth of 600mm
  - under table height clearance of not less than 680mm
  - for protracted use and to allow wheelchair armrests to slide underneath, an under table height clearance of 750mm

Front reach:



Side reach:

- gripping reach



This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines

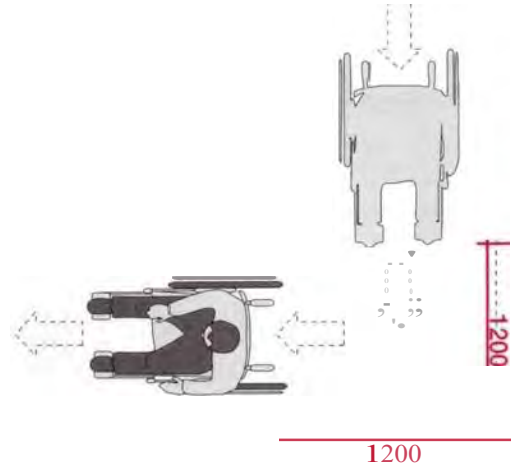
N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

# Turning Space

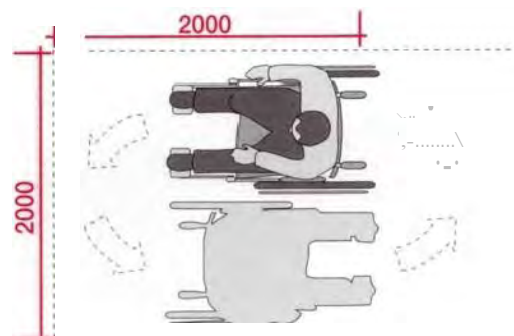
Wheelchairs and outdoor scooters are the least manoeuvrable of the mobility aids used by visitors to the countryside. In general terms, if the design of routes and path furniture is based around their space requirements you will create access for all users.

## Turning Spaces:

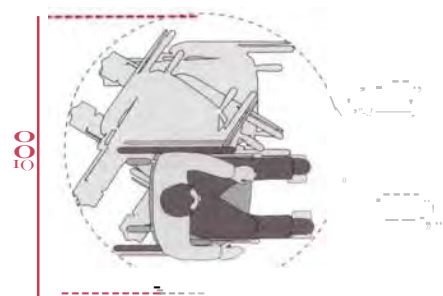
- In order to turn 90 degrees, a manual wheelchair user requires a minimum space of 1200mm x 1200mm.



- In order to turn 180 or 360 degrees, the wheelchair user requires a minimum space of 2000mm x 2000mm.

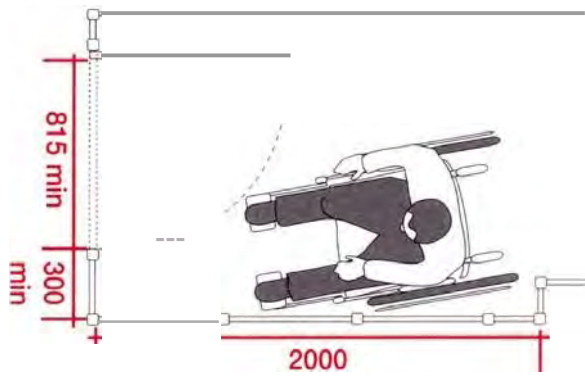


- By manoeuvring backwards and forwards around a central point a 180 degree turn can be done in a 1500mm diameter circle.



- These dimensions need to be taken into account where paths turn, or where there are barriers, for example gates and kissing gates.

N.B. All measurements are in millimetres



- Additional space must be left for gates which open towards you so that the gate can be opened and closed without you having to leave the path. A clear space of 300mm adjacent to the latch side and a length of 2000mm will allow wheelchair users and people with limited mobility to approach and open the gate.
- Outdoor scooters need more room to turn. Some scooters, for example, have a turning space of 2100mm and the largest most robust machines (which may also have a fixed hood) need further space.

N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines



# Gradients



For wheelchair users all paths must be level or ramped. Some ambulant disabled people can more comfortably and safely use steps. Where possible provide both steps and ramps but if a choice has to be made provide ramps.

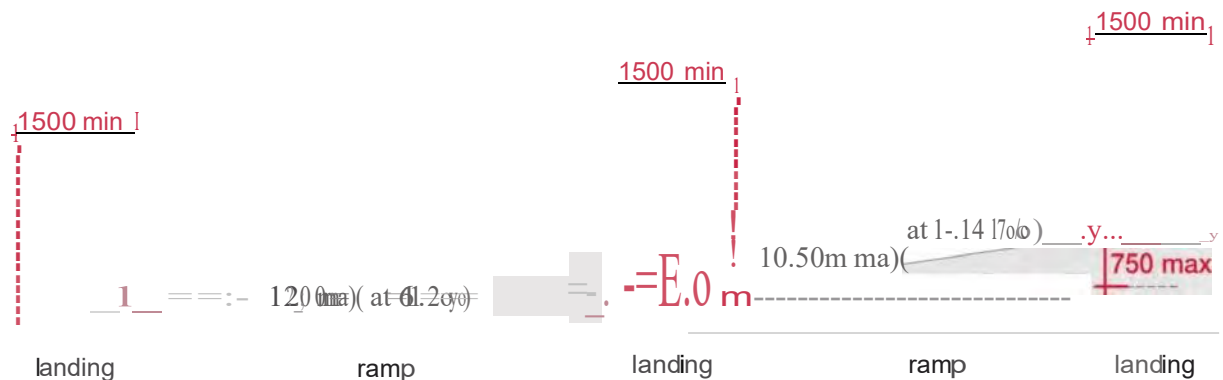
- Gradients less steep than 1:20 (5%) are not ramps.
- Gradients steeper than 1:20 (5%) are ramps and should comply with the following specifications:
- Ramps need flat landings at least 1200mm wide by 1500mm long for wheelchair users, ambulant disabled people and people with limited stamina.
- Landings should be provided for every 750mm of vertical climb on slopes with a gradient steeper than 1:20 (5%) (see table below).

Table to show maximum ramp lengths between landings in different countryside settings (see BT Countryside for All accessibility standards):

	Urban/formal landscapes	Urban fringe/managed landscapes	Rural/working landscapes
Gradient	Maximum distance between landings for 750mm vertical climb	Maximum distance between landings for 830mm vertical climb	Maximum distance between landings for 950mm vertical climb
1:20 (5%)	15.00 metres	16.60 metres	19.00 metres
1:18 (5.5%)	13.50 metres	14.94 metres	17.10 metres
1:16 (6.2%)	12.00 metres	13.28 metres	15.20 metres
1:14 (7%)	10.50 metres	11.62 metres	13.30 metres
1:12 (8.3%)	9.00 metres	9.96 metres	11.40 metres
1:10(10%)			9.50 metres



Ramped paths with rest areas:



# LJ

Gradient formula:

To work out the gradient as 1:G

$$G = \frac{\text{length of ramp } M}{\text{height rise } (Z)}$$

To work out the gradient as a percentage (P)

$$P \% = \frac{\text{height rise } (Z) \times 100}{\text{length of ramp } M}$$

To convert 1:G to a percentage (P)

$$p \% = \frac{100}{G}$$

To convert a percentage to 1:G

$$G = \frac{100}{P \%}$$

N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

- To enable more people to use ramps easily it is recommended that no ramp should be longer than 15 metres before a rest area is provided.
- All ramps should have a non-slip surface (see information sheet 2.2).
- Abrupt changes of gradient should be avoided. Smooth gradual changes are preferred.
- The maximum cross slope of any path should be no steeper than 1:50 (2%). Cross slopes in excess of this, especially when combined with a linear path slope, can present difficulties of balance for wheelchair users and some ambulant disabled people.

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

# Path Surfaces



To be accessible path surfaces must be all of the following:

- **compact/firm** ..... The surface should remain firm during use, and must be compact enough to withstand the effect of concentrated loads such as wheelchair tyres, sticks and canes.
- **stable** ..... The surface should not move unpredictably when the path is in use.
- **nonslip** ..... The surface should not be slippery in either dry or wet conditions.
- **obstacle free** ..... There should be very little or no loose material on the surface. Even very small loose particles can make a path very slippery for people with poor balance and mobility. Loose particles should not exceed 5mm in size. Standing water can be a hazard for some users.

Any path surface which meets all these specifications will be accessible.

Also bear in mind:

- Paths need regular maintenance. Make sure the path surface does not deteriorate over time, and remains free of potholes, cracks, and other obstructions.
- Making changes to the texture or colour of the path surface can be used to give cues to people who are blind or partially sighted that there is something ahead which they need to be aware of. This could be a feature of interest, a resting point, or a hazard. The change must be smooth and level, with a surface difference no greater than 5mm (see information sheet 5.6).
- Grates and manhole covers should not normally be used on paths and trails. However, if you can not avoid it, ensure that the gaps between the grills of the grate are no more than 12mm wide. The grate must also be placed so that it does not protrude above ground level, and the grills are at right angles to the direction of travel.

Suitable materials include

concrete  
bitumen macadam  
stone  
timber  
brick/paving  
mown grass



Unsuitable surfacing materials include

sand  
loose gravel  
woodchips  
cobble



General observations on commonly used countryside path surfaces:

Type of surface	Performance	Construction and maintenance	Other conditions
Concrete	Provides a firm and stable surface. A lightly textured finish can help to prevent it becoming slippery when wet or with a build up of algae.	Needs a well prepared base with sufficient depth. This will improve its weight bearing capacity and prevent cracking.  High initial cost, with low maintenance cost.	Will not always be appropriate in a countryside setting, but the visual impact may soften with time.
Bitumen Macadam	Provides a firm and stable surface.  Surface can become soft or sticky in very hot weather. Pot holes can develop and become obstacles.	A well prepared base and proper rolling provides an accessible surface.  High initial cost, with low maintenance cost.  Vegetation can encroach and break the surface.	Weathers well, and the visual impact can soften quickly. It is available in a range of colours.
Stone	Provides a firm and stable surface if properly constructed.  Loose materials on the surface can occur through weathering and visitor use, and can lead to an unstable slippery surface.  Potholes can become common obstacles.	Needs a well prepared base layer, and a well compacted surface with ample fine material.  Will need good drainage to prevent surface materials being dislodged. Regular rolling and infilling is required to prevent loose materials of more than 5mm in size.  Materials most commonly used are limestone, granite and gritstone.  Vegetation can encroach and break up the surface.	Generally acceptable in many countryside settings where appropriate stone is used.
Timber	Provides a firm and stable surface.  Surface can become slippery in the wet or when algae builds up.  Wood can warp and move in time creating obstacles and trip hazards.	High initial costs, and ongoing maintenance required-especially to control any warping and movement of boards, and to check weight bearing capacity.	May be the only realistic option in wet areas.  Can be visually intrusive and can give the appearance of formalising a route.
Brick and paving	Can provide a firm surface.  Pavers can move over time creating irregularities in the surface, obstacles and trip hazards.	Needs a well constructed base layer to make sure the pavers do not move. All pavers must be closely bonded to avoid gaps and uneven areas.  High initial costs, with medium ongoing maintenance.	Can be visually intrusive and can give the appearance of formalising a route.

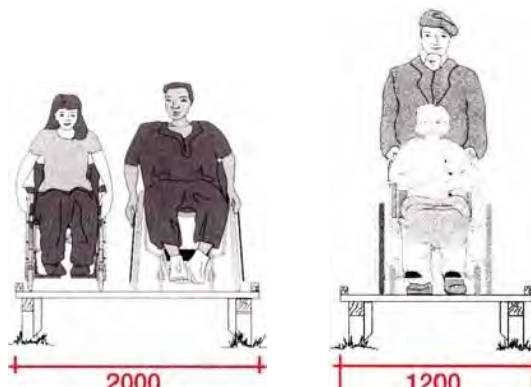
Type of surface	Performance	Construction and maintenance	Other conditions
<b>Mown grass</b>	<p>Difficult to achieve compact/firm, stable, nonslip and obstacle free surface. Only the very best grass surfaces are fully accessible.</p> <p>The surface can crack in dry conditions, and be muddy and waterlogged in wet weather. Even a little surface water can give a very slippery surface.</p> <p>Small irregularities and obstacles can remain hidden.</p>	<p>The surface can be reinforced with subsurface matting. This must remain below the surface to stop it tripping people up.</p> <p>Regular mowing and rolling is essential.</p> <p>Erosion is likely on well used paths.</p>	<p>Has a more natural appearance than constructed paths.</p> <p>Accessibility can be greatly affected by weather conditions.</p>

**This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines**

# Bridges & Boardwalks

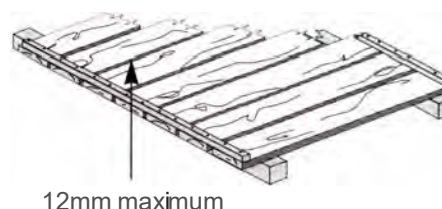
## Width:

- On bridges and boardwalks the minimum clear width between handrails or edging boards should be 1200mm for one way traffic and 2000mm for two-way traffic.



## Access:

- At the start of a boardwalk avoid creating a lip greater than 5mm high.



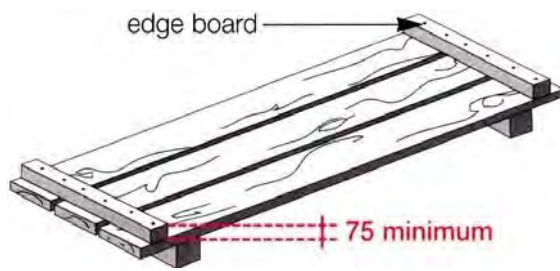
- To make drainage easier, it is good practice to lay the deck with gaps between the individual boards. This will also give some extra grip where boards are wet and slippery. The gap between boards should not be greater than 12mm.
- Boards must be laid at right angles to the direction of pedestrian flow otherwise wheelchair wheels or canes may become caught between them.



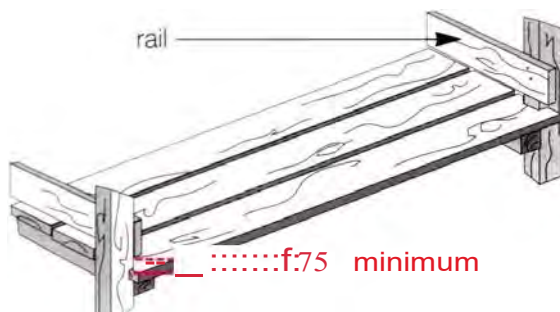
## Safety Considerations:

- You should assess the risk to users of boardwalks and bridges. Where there are gradients, sharp turns and other hazards edge boards and/or handrails should be considered.

N.B. All measurements are in millimetres



- All boardwalks and bridges should have some edge protection. The minimum is a deck level edging at least 75mm high.



- If a rail is used for edge protection it should have a bottom edge not more than 75mm from the boardwalk.

- The weight bearing capability should be sufficient so that boards are not deflected or broken by use. Boards that move can be hazardous. The whole structure should be stable and not springy.

Additional features:

- Boardwalks, like other routes, should have passing places, rest points and seating which will require extra width and space.

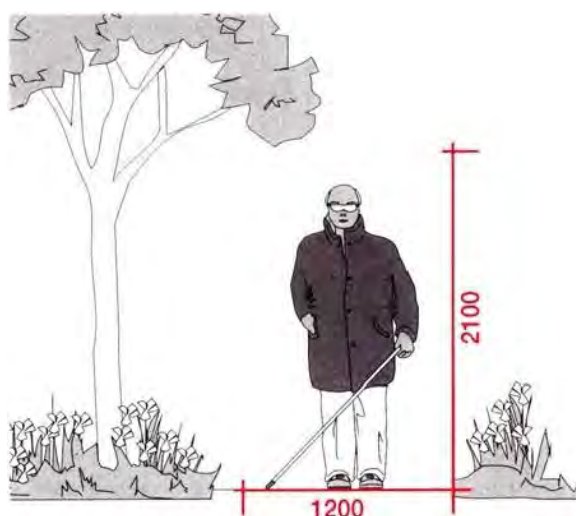
N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines

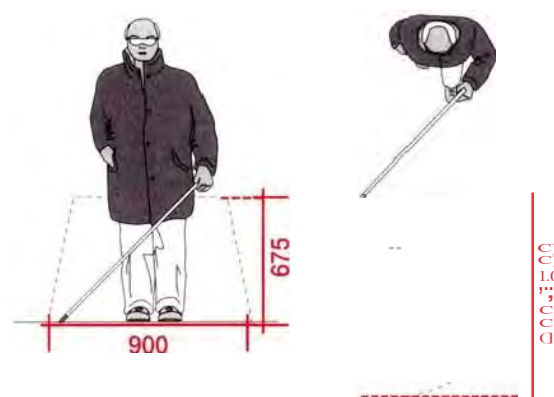


# Clear Walking Tunnel

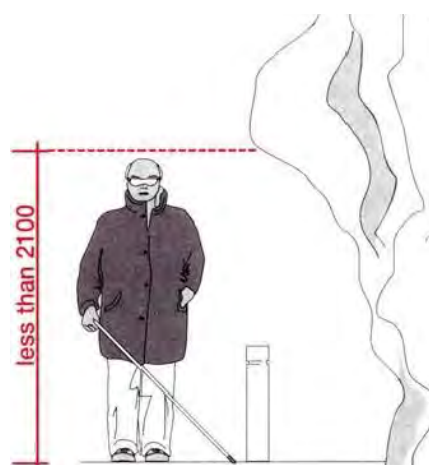
- To be accessible to visually impaired people the space directly above a path needs to extend to at least 2100mm and have a clear width of 1200mm.
- No object should be mounted so that it reduces the required clear width of an accessible route, below 1200mm x 2100mm (see table in BT Countryside For All accessibility standards).



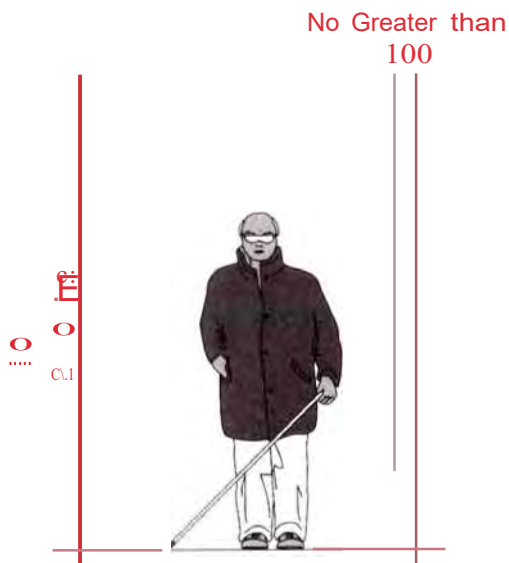
- People with visual impairments often use long canes as mobility aids. The cane is swung from side to side, touching points outside both shoulders.
- Long canes can detect objects lower than 675mm and within the swing of the cane.



- Objects which overhang a path or project from walls, such as signs, can create hazards for people with visual impairment. These hazards are noticed only if they fall within the detection range of canes. Providing a post on the ground, that can be located by a cane, but does not reduce the clear width of an accessible route, will enable visually impaired people to use the path.



N.B. All measurements are in millimetres



- Any object mounted between 675mm and 2100mm must not protrude more than 100mm into paths or trails.

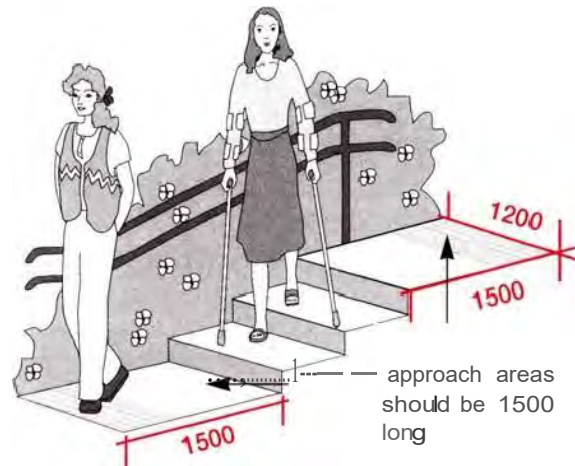
- An object mounted with the bottom of its leading edge at or below 675mm above the ground may protrude any amount as long as it does not reduce the required clear width of an accessible route.
- If paths are used in winter, the clear headroom should not be reduced by snow accumulation.

N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

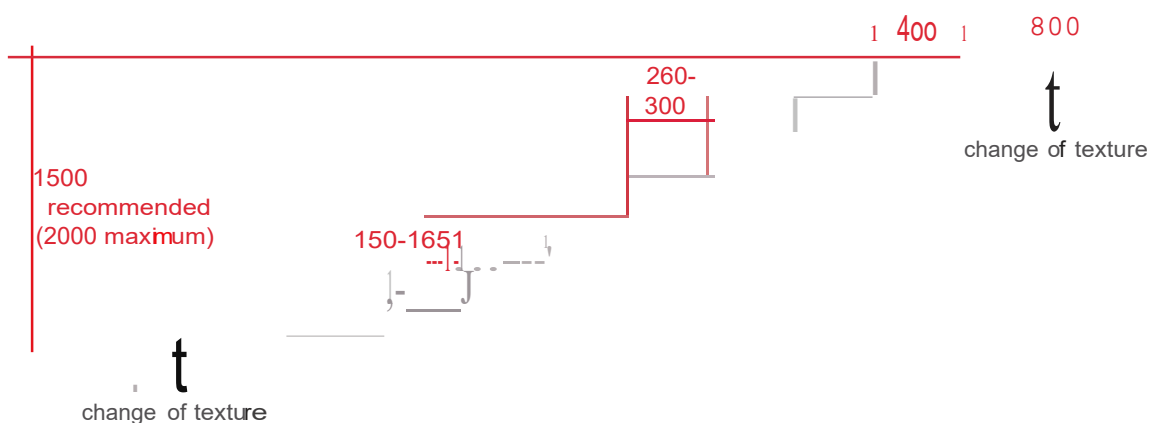
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# Steps

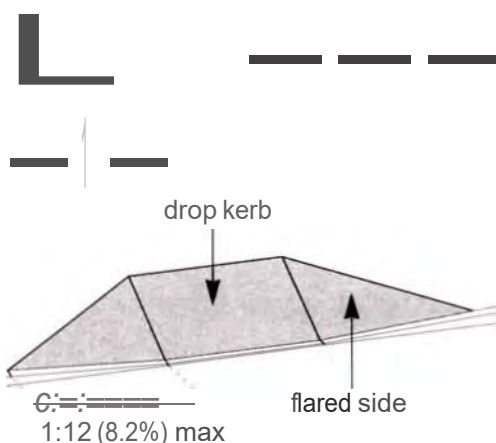
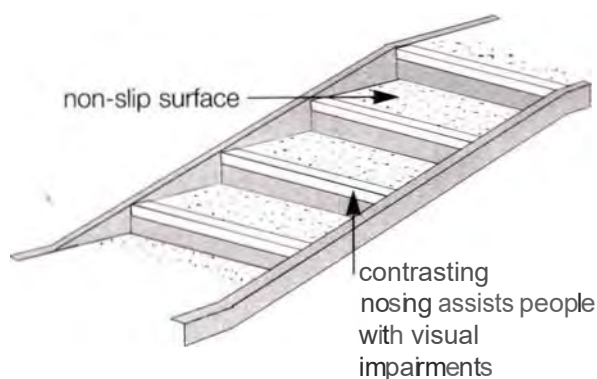
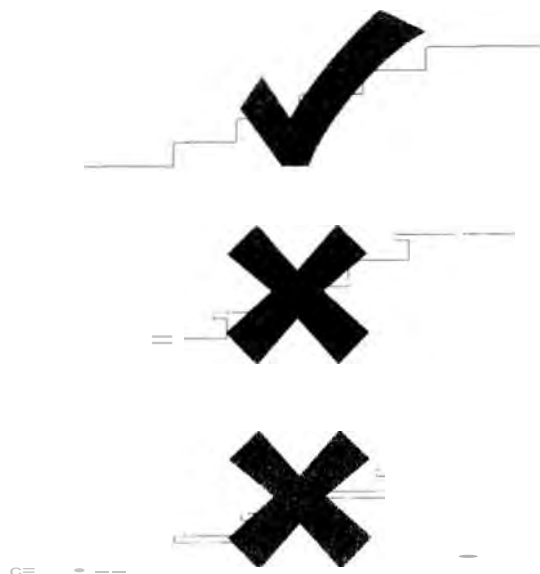
- Some ambulant people will find steps more convenient than ramps, so provide both where possible. If there is not room for both put in a ramp.
- A textural change on the path at the top and bottom of steps or ramps can provide a warning to people who are partially sighted. Make sure any texture change does not become a trip hazard (see information sheet 5.6).
- Steps should be a minimum of 1200mm wide.
- A clear, level area 1500mm long by 1200 wide should be provided at the top and the bottom approaches to steps so people can pass easily.
- The total rise of any flight of steps should not exceed 2000mm (see diagram below). Where the total rise needed exceeds 2000mm, a level rest area should be provided for at least every 2000mm rise.
- The riser height should not exceed 165mm and the tread width should not exceed 300mm (see diagram below).



t- Steps are made up of treads and risers



N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

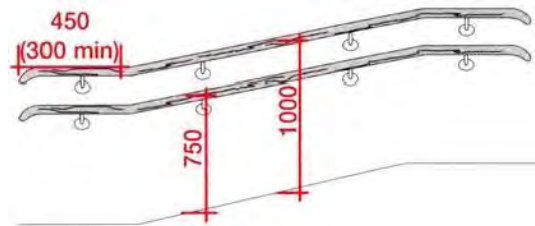


- All steps in a flight should have the same tread depth and riser height.
- Treads with a smooth, round nosing, slightly angled towards the riser are preferred.
- Treads with protruding nosing and open treads should be avoided as shoe toes and leg braces can be caught on them.
- Stair treads should be constructed with a non-slip, slightly textured surface, which remains slip resistant when wet or muddy.
- People who are partially sighted will prefer step nosings which contrast in colour with treads and risers.
- Avoid single steps and level changes less than 150mm with the exception of kerbs. Small changes are often not seen or expected. They can be dangerous and are usually not necessary.
- Small level changes of no more than 5mm are acceptable.
- Drop kerbs with a maximum gradient of 1:12 should be provided wherever paths and trails cross kerbs.
- A tactile warning, before a dropped kerb, is essential for visually impaired people (see information sheet 5.6.)

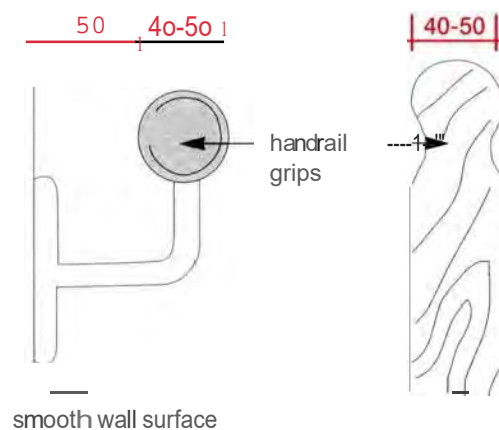
This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines

# Handrails

- Handrails can act as a safety barrier; an aid to balance, and as a means of propulsion for wheelchair users.
- Handrails should be provided at any platform or pathway which would otherwise be dangerous.
- Where handrails are provided on ramps and steps the rail should be 1000mm high. A secondary rail at 750mm can also be provided for children.



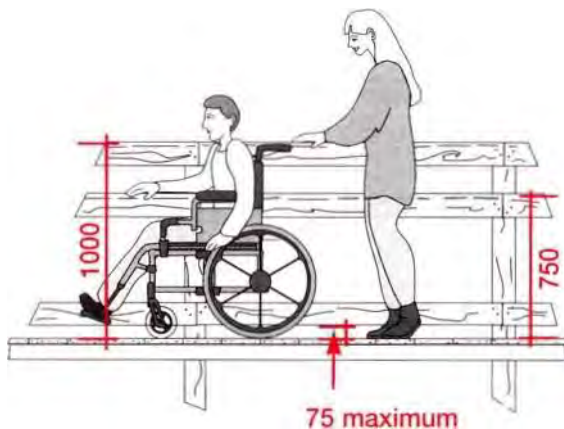
- The grip of a handrail should be between 40mm and 50mm in diameter, with 50mm clearance from an adjacent wall. Larger clearance can mean that hands or arms can get wedged between the wall and handrail. When designing specifically for children the grip should be 25-32mm in diameter.
- Wall mounted handrails should be fixed securely with no protruding screws. The wall surface behind the rail should be smooth and non-abrasive, and should not splinter or scratch.
- Handrails should be constructed of non-abrasive, non-splintering materials which do not retain heat or cold.
- The ends of handrails should be curved down or rounded off so that they do not present a hazard.
- Handrails should continue at least 300mm past the end of steps, ramps, bridges and boardwalks. This will act



N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

as a guide for visually impaired people and will provide added security for people with limited balance.

- Continue handrails through any landings provided on long flights of steps.
- On bridges and raised boardwalks handrails should be provided. Top, middle and bottom rails, at least, are required. One rail should be set at a height of 1000mm. A second rail set at a height of 750mm will be useable by wheelchair users and children. A bottom rail with a gap below no greater than 75mm will give added security to wheelchair users and may be used as a tapping rail by visually impaired people.



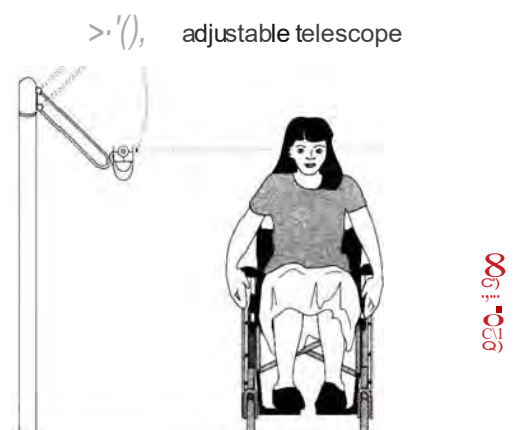
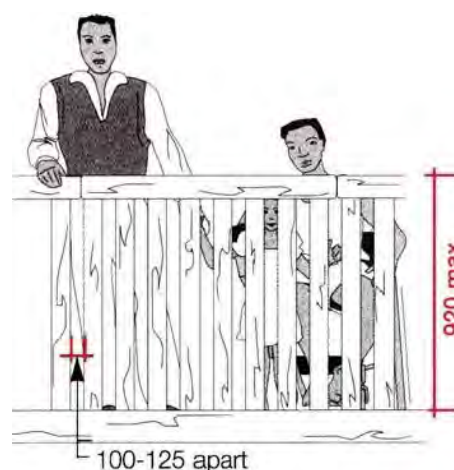
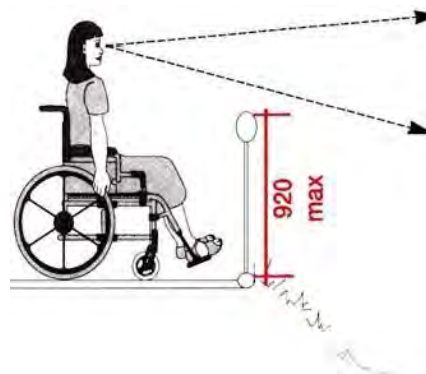
This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines

N.B. All measurements are in millimetres



# Viewing Points

- Viewing points should, wherever possible, be accessible to everyone (see information sheet 5.5).
- Ensure the trail from a parking area to a viewing point is accessible and well marked.
- The surface of the viewing point itself should be firm, level and stable.
- Provide seating or resting places at viewing points (see information sheet 4.1).
- Provide a shelf for people to lean against when using cameras or binoculars (see information sheet 6.5).
- Ensure that any information or interpretation points do not obscure the view for wheelchair users (see information sheet 5.5).
- You should assess risks and provide safety barriers where necessary. These should take account of the viewing height of wheelchair users. But safety considerations are the most important.
- Ensure that where telescopes are provided at viewing points they have a variable height control. There should be knee space between the telescope and the ground to give wheelchair users access (see information sheet 1.2).



This sheet should be read in conjunction with thBT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines

ensure there is enough knee space under the telescope for wheelchair users

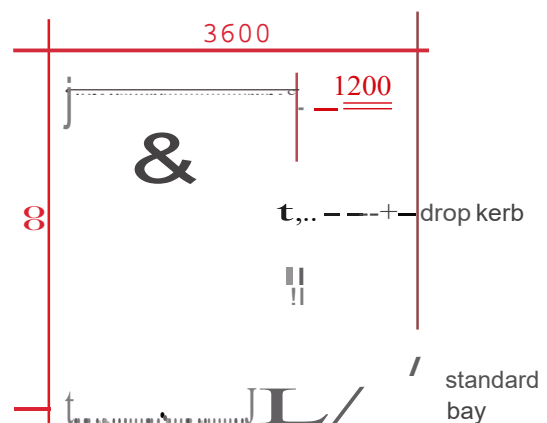
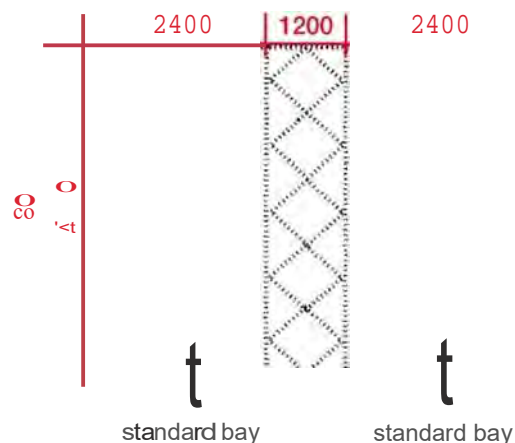
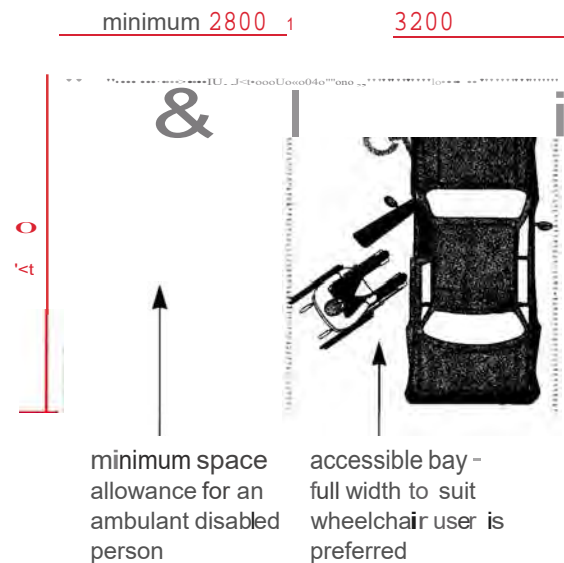
N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

# Car Parking

- Larger parking bays are needed by people with limited mobility to get in and out of their cars with the minimum of difficulty.
- The location of accessible bays should be clearly signposted from the car park entrance.
- Bays should be identified as provision for disabled drivers or passengers only.
- Bays should be as close as possible to the facilities the car park serves.
- Bays need to be wide enough for car doors to be opened fully. 3600mm wide is recommended.
- If space is limited provide shared space 1200mm wide between two standard bays.
- Kerbs between the parking area and main routes should be dropped to give access to wheelchair users. The maximum gradient should be 1:12. (see information sheet 2.5.).
- The car park surface should be level, smooth, even and free from loose stones.

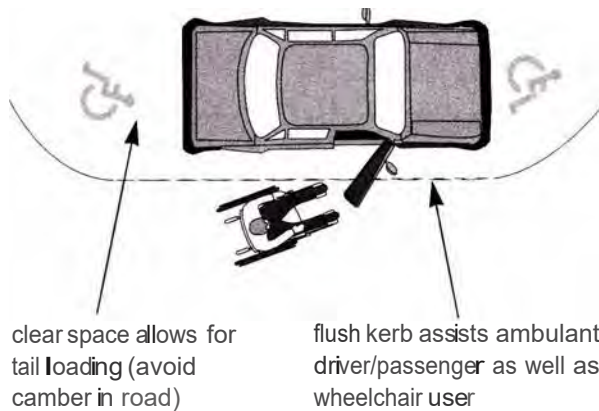
be built into the car park design.

- End bays can have a minimum of 1200mm free space next to them for



N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

'Drop off/pick up' areas:



- Where it is not possible to provide a parking area close to a facility, 'drop off/pick up' areas should be provided as close as possible.

Total spaces	Suggested accessible spaces
1-25	1
26-50	2
51-75	3
76- 100	4
101 - 150	5
151 - 200	6
201 - 300	7
301 - 400	8
401 - 500	9
501 - 1000	2% of total
1001 and over	20 +1 for each 100 spaces over 1000

- The number of accessible parking spaces that should be provided is based on the total number of parking spaces available (see table opposite).

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

# Seats & Perches

Seats and perches should be placed at regular intervals along paths in the countryside. This will enable ambulant disabled and elderly people to rest during a walk.

- The distance between resting points should be no more than 100 metres.
- Wherever possible, put seats and perches where there is something to look at, and where there is shelter.
- Place resting points at the top, bottom and at some level points along steps and ramps. Wherever possible place them in sight of each other, so people have something to aim at.
- Provide a tactile cue on the path surface before a seat, to alert visually impaired people (see information sheet 5.6.).
- Seats and perches should be set back from the main route by at least 600mm to allow the free passage of through traffic.
- Surfaced resting places at least 900mm square should be provided next to seats so that wheelchair users can sit next to their family and friends.
- Seats should be 450-520mm high, and perches should be 500-750mm high. It is best to provide both, as some people may find getting up from a seated position too difficult. The seat should be sloped slightly to allow water to run off. Children may prefer seats as low as 350mm high.
- Heel space of at least 100mm should be provided under seats. This will help people to stand up more easily because it places the feet below the body's centre of gravity.

Resting points (plan view):



N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

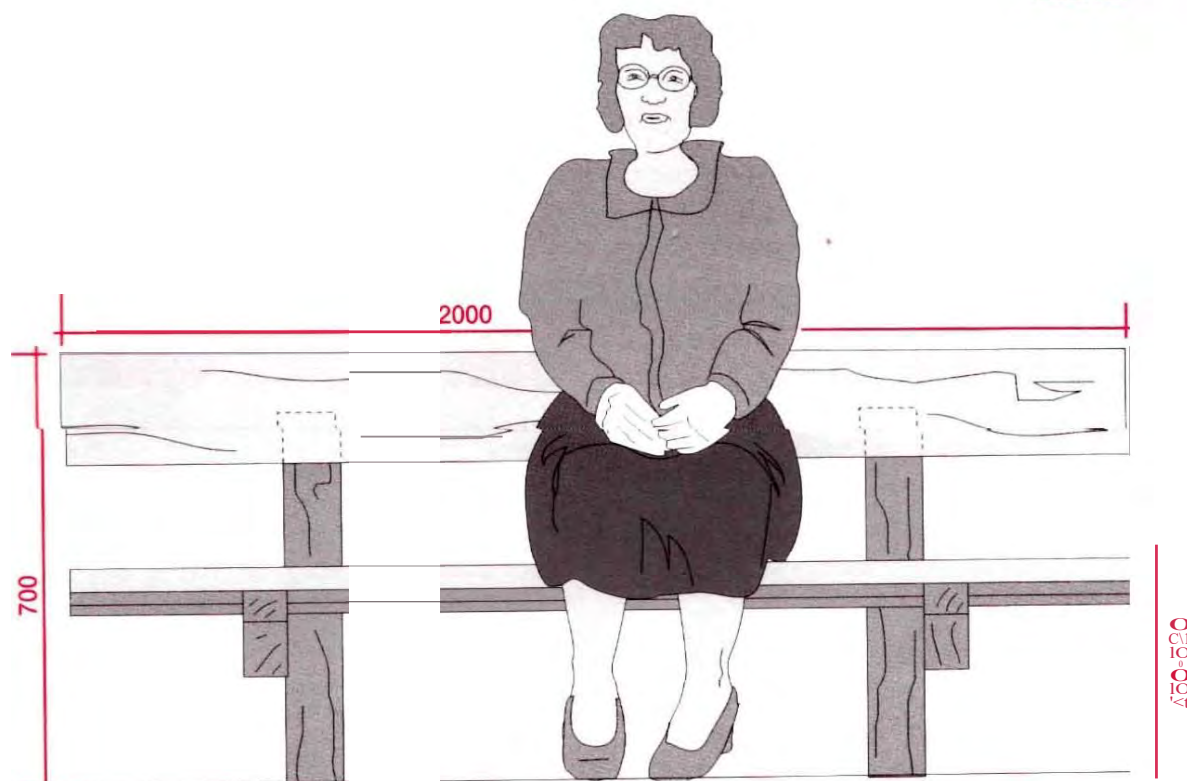
- The surface under seats should be firm, stable and flush with the pathway.
- Some seats should have backs and arms for additional support. The arms can be used as leverage when standing up, and some people may use the seat back as a perch point.
- Large logs and low walls can double up as resting points, and some seat designs might also incorporate carvings, sculpture, location and distance information, or other site interpretation.
- Arm rests on seats are helpful to lean against and will help people to lever themselves in and out of the seat.

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

# Seat with backrest

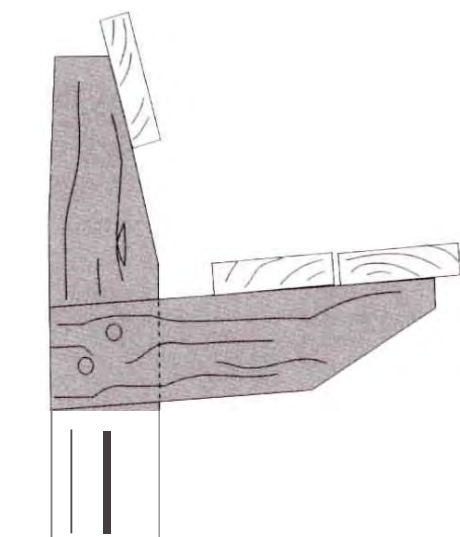


3.2



- Seats with backrests provide additional comfort and assistance to disabled and elderly people who may have difficulties standing or sitting.

Seat profile:



This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

N.B. All measurements are in millimetres



These symbols should only be used on facilities that conform to acceptable accessibility standards.

International Symbol of Accessibility:

- This symbol should be used to indicate and direct people to
  - accessible parking spaces.
  - accessible pick-up/set-down points.
  - accessible sites and facilities.
  - entrances that are not the primary entrance.
  - accessible toilets and restrooms.

The symbol should be used to highlight specific facilities aimed at, or adapted for, people with disabilities.



- The International Symbol of Accessibility should not be used
  - where a facility can be used equally by everyone. For example, a flat level path walked by all visitors should not be labelled with the International Symbol of Access.
  - where accessibility can not be confirmed as complying with acceptable standards.

International Symbol of Access for Hearing Loss:

- This symbol should be displayed where permanent facilities or services are available for people with hearing loss. If one or more of the following facilities and services are available **at all times** the International Symbol of Access for Hearing Loss should be displayed:
  - Sympathetic Hearing Scheme in operation.
  - induction loop installed.
  - sign language interpreters available.
  - lipspeak services provided.





#### International Symbol of Access for Visual Impairment:

This symbol should be displayed where permanent facilities or services are available for people with visual impairments. If one or more of the following facilities and services are available at all times the International Symbol of Access for Visual Impairment should be displayed:

- braille information.
- taped information.
- guide dogs allowed.
- sighted guides available to help.

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

# Print Sizes on Leaflets



The use of large print improves access for people with visual impairments and an increasing number of older people.

Written material:

- 14-20 point minimum should be used for all text. Make sure that the letters are at least 2.5mm in height. Larger point size will be necessary for titles and headings.
- Choose standard fonts. Examples include Helvetica Regular, Times New Roman, Univers 55. Indistinctive or unusual fonts should be avoided.
- Use a normal mixture of both upper and lower case lettering. Avoid use of capitals in continuous text.
- Average lines of text should be a maximum of 40-65 characters.
- Layout on the paper should be clear and simple:
  - ensure that both words and lines are evenly spaced.
  - do not cram words.
  - do not stretch words, keep them all the same.
  - use justified left hand margins.
  - do not hyphenate words at the end of lines.
  - **leave** a clear space between paragraphs.

14 point - 20 point for body text

Helvetica Regular ✓  
 Times New Roman ✓  
 Indistinctive fonts ✗  
 Unusual fonts ✗

AVOID USE OF CAPITALS IN CONTINUOUS TEXT

Cam wait ma eit ejren It to reaa

Do not stretch words



Justified left



centred text



justified text



## Strong Contrast

- Use text colour which will provide a strong contrast with the background colour.
- Do not print text over illustrations, photographs or patterns.
- Ensure the paper chosen for leaflets is:
  - opaque to prevent the print from showing through
  - not glossy or reflective to avoid glare and handling difficulties
  - of medium weight, to make pages easier to turn for people with limited dexterity

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

# Print Sizes on Signs



- The print sizes used on information boards need to be big enough for people to be able to read the text easily. The following minimum print sizes are recommended:

-titles	60-72 point
-subtitles	40-48 point
-body text	24 point
-captions	18 point

- Use a normal mixture of upper and lower case print and if possible include some information in tactile format so that people who are blind and partially sighted can read it.
- The bigger the size of print the further away people can read it (see table opposite).
- Remember that people who are blind or partially sighted will need to get close to the board to read it, so ensure it is placed in an accessible location.

20 point print can be read from 1.2 metres away
48 point print can be read from 1.5 metres away
60 point print can be read from 1.8 metres away
200 point print can be read from 9 metres away
320 point print can be read from 18 metres away

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

- The colour, and colour contrast, of printed material is a significant factor in making signs and leaflets legible and visible:
  - consider colour contrast when choosing paper or board colour, type, text, graphics and background
  - the effectiveness of the colours chosen will be affected by paper, inks and type size

## Good Contrast



- When using colours it is better to have a dark text on a light background.

### External Signs:

- The colour of a sign should contrast with the landscape behind. The text should contrast with the board.
- White as a background colour of outdoor signs may cause dazzle in bright light. A matt finish to a board can help to eliminate this problem.

### Good colour combinations:





black on white  
dark blue on white  
black on yellow  
dark green on white



### Poor colour combinations:

pastel on pastel  
yellow on orange  
yellow on grey  
yellow on white  
blue on green  
red on green  
black on violet



Background	Sign board	Text	Example
green vegetation	white	black/dark green/blue	
red brick/dark stone	white	black/dark green/blue	
light brick or stone	black/dark green	white	
white walls	black	white	



Word size, spacing and colour determines the legibility of signs.

- The size of the sign and the lettering will affect legibility. Where colours are not highly contrasting, the larger the letters and spacing of the words the better.
- Text which runs over a background containing several different colours/tones will be difficult to read. In the same way, printing illustrations or photographs over a variety of coloured backgrounds will make it difficult for many visually impaired people to read.
- If colour coding is used on trails to guide visitors all colours should contrast strongly with each other to help those who are colour blind.
- Combinations of primary and secondary, or full-intensity colours, generally fail to reach a good contrast and will be difficult to read.
- The most common colours that people with colour blindness can confuse are red/yellow/green, red/black and blue/green/purple.

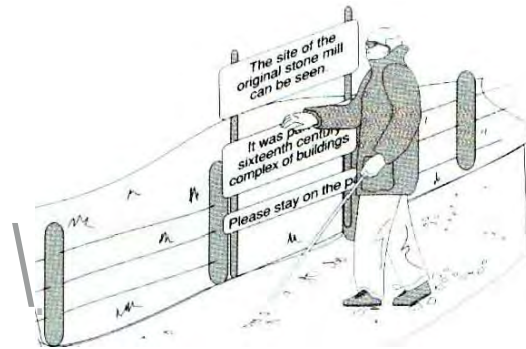
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# Location of Signs

Signs are essential to orientate visitors, direct them along trails and paths, interpret features of interest or give warnings about hazards ahead. All signs should be fully accessible. Consider the following:

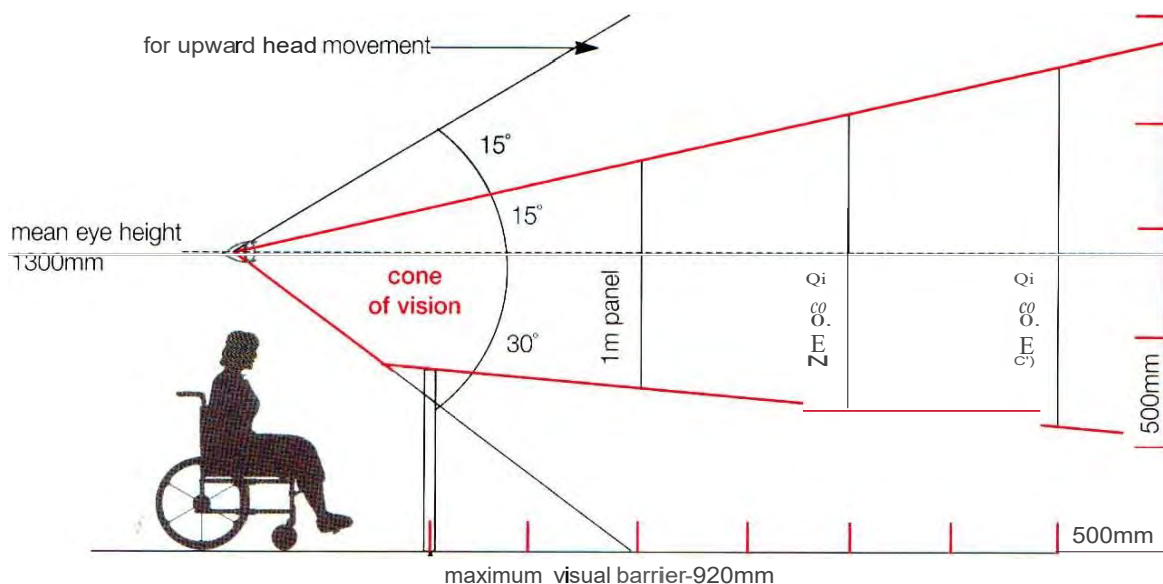
## Position:

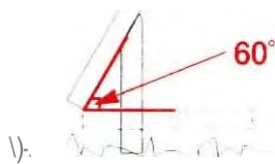
- Where possible ensure all people can reach the sign:
  - physical accessibility is essential, especially for people with visual impairments who may need to get very close in order to read or touch the sign
  - the surface around the sign should be level and well maintained for wheelchair access
  - if possible incorporate signs with resting points at the side of main tracks
  - put signs and display panels where they can be seen and read by people standing and wheelchair users
  - place signs and display panels within the accessible cone of vision



Position of panels/signs within the cone of vision:

Viewing Distance	Lowest point not below	Highest point not above
1m	800mm	1850mm
2m	700mm	2150mm
3m	650mm	2400mm





- signs placed on the ground should be tilted to 60 degrees to enable people standing and wheelchair users to read them with ease

- Badly positioned signs can be a hazard to visitors:
  - signs that people have to walk under should be a minimum of 2100mm above ground level to allow a clear walking area for visually impaired people
  - ensure there is no overhanging vegetation obstructing the signs

#### Lighting:

- Signs should be well lit, and board surface materials should be non-reflective.

#### Colour:

- Signs should contrast with their background so that they are highly visible:
  - consider seasonal changes to the background vegetation

#### Other Considerations:

- Avoid placing signs where they will obscure features of interest.
- Keep the number of signs used to a minimum. Only use signs where necessary, to give information. For example in car parks, at the beginning and at junctions of trails, and where there may be hazards.
- Signs must be clear and concise to avoid confusion on the part of visitors.
- Signs along trails should be consistent in placement, contrast and colour so that visitors recognise them in different situations.

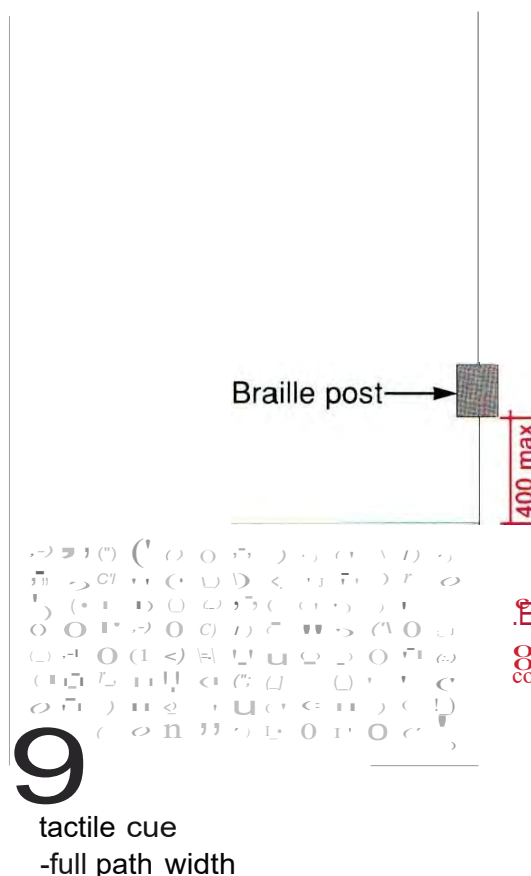


This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

# Tactile Signs

- At road crossings a blister pattern tactile cue is often used to alert visually impaired pedestrians of a safe crossing. On paths and trails, other than roads, different cues can be used.
- Tactile cues are a good way of warning people who are blind or partially sighted that there is a feature ahead. This could be a path junction, a flight of steps, a seat or an information board.
- Tactile cues involve making changes to the path surface. A contrasting surface underfoot alerts visually impaired people to something ahead. People need to be told in advance what tactile cues mean and they should only be used where visitors can be informed about what to expect. Any material used must mean the path is still accessible to everyone, including wheelchair users. It must also be securely bonded into the existing surface so that it does not become a trip hazard (maximum lip 5mm).
- The cue must be full path width and 800mm long. It should end no more than 400mm before the feature it is warning people about.
- If strips are used they must be placed at right angles to the direction of travel and should be 19-50mm apart.
- Any gaps between planks of wood or brick setts must be no more than 12mm.

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines

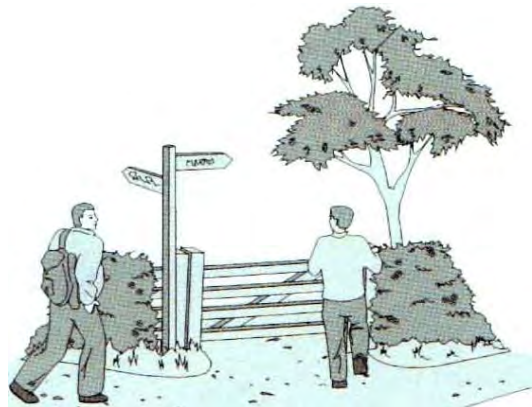
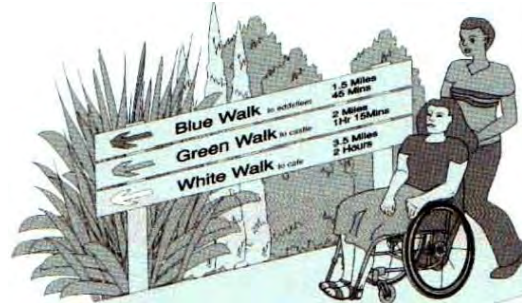


For further information contact:  
Royal National Institute for the Blind  
Phone: 0171 388 1266

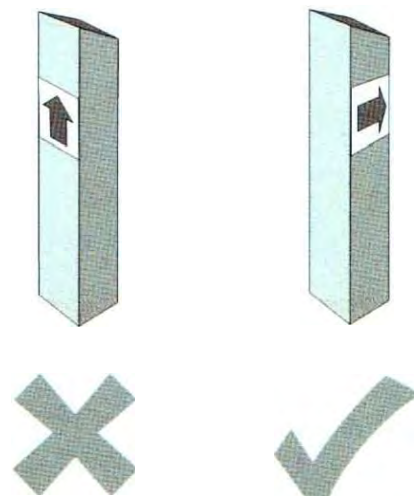
# Way Marking

Waymarking encourages and gives confidence to people walking paths and trails. It can also help prevent inadvertent trespass.

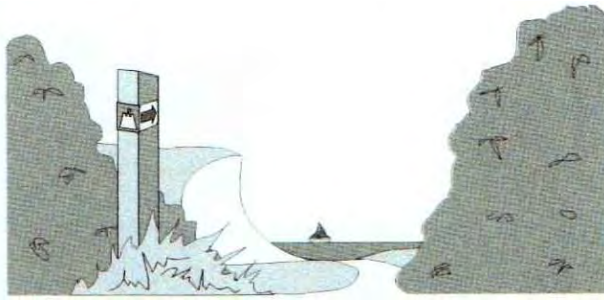
- Keep waymarking as simple as possible.
- At the start of a route include the destination, distance and likely walk time on a post or sign.
- Include any information about the route, for example gradients, rest points and view points to help disabled people decide if the trail is right for them.
- Avoid using a lot of waymarking arrows on a single post. This can be confusing to the visitor.
- All junctions should be waymarked.
- Routes should be waymarked both ways so that people can retrace their steps if necessary.



- Make sure that waymarking arrows point in the direction you want people to go. Arrows directing people to go straight ahead should be placed horizontally on the side of the post, not pointing to the sky.

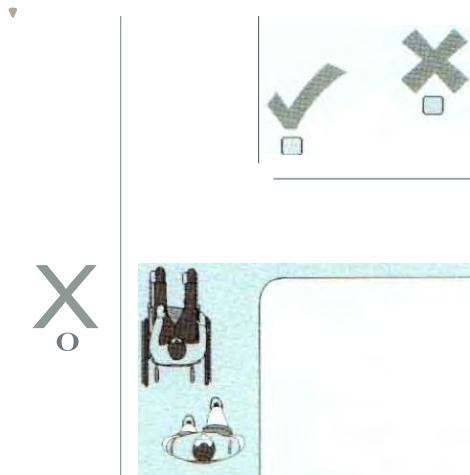






- Symbols as well as waymarker arrows help people to follow routes. (For example a picture of a sand castle for a walk that takes visitors to a beach).

- It is recommended that waymarkers are at least 100mm in diameter.
- Make sure that the background colour used for the waymarking disc gives a clear colour contrast to the symbol in the foreground.
- Make sure that the post can be clearly seen against any background vegetation.
- Wording and numbering must be big enough to be able to be seen from a distance.
- Put waymarker posts next to junctions so people are clear which route to take.



- Good maintenance is essential so that information remains legible over time.

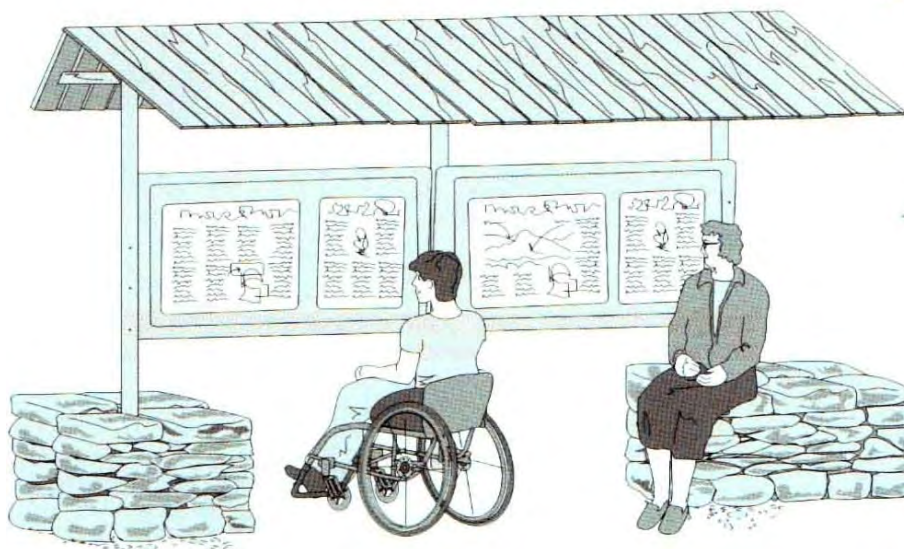
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# Information Shelter



4.8

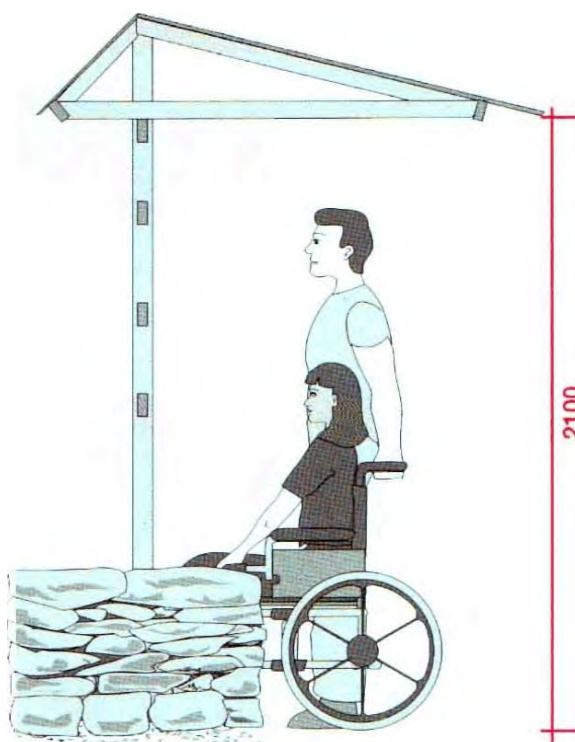


Sheltered information and interpretation boards are a point of interest for visitors, and can double up as shelter from the weather if the need arises.

Side elevation:

- Ensure path surfaces on the approach to, and surrounding, the shelter are accessible to all visitors.
- Where possible incorporate seating or perches under the shelter.
- Ensure that the roof of the shelter does not just cover the information board but will comfortably cover people reading it as well.
- The roof should be a minimum of 2100mm from the ground so that it is not a hazard for visually impaired people.
- Try to divert water draining from the roof away from the front of, or the entrance to, the shelter. It may also be prudent to ensure it does not drain directly onto the surrounding path surfaces (see information sheet 5.5).

This sheet should be read in conjunction with the BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines



N.B. All measurements are in millimetres

# Transport Guidelines



Providing accessible transport in the countryside



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Transport Guidelines

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### Contents of Good Practice Guide

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# Introduction

These guidelines look at the issues about how disabled people use transport to get out into the countryside. They recommend ways in which disabled people, people who provide countryside services, and those who provide transport can improve access for everybody.

- Part 1** looks at the issues facing disabled people when they want to use transport to get to the countryside.
- Part 2** recommends ways in which disabled people and people who provide services for disabled people can get better access to transport.
- Part 3** recommends ways in which transport providers and local authorities can improve countryside transport services for everyone.
- Part 4** recommends ways in which people who provide countryside services can take account of the transport needs of their visitors.



# 1 How disabled people get to the countryside

Evidence has shown that lack of access to transport is a big problem which prevents disabled people from visiting the countryside. In this section we look at the process which people go through in deciding where, when and how to visit the countryside. We also look at factors that can affect the decisions which disabled people take.

## Knowing about all the options

Before people visit the countryside they need to know what options they have about how to get there and what they can do once they have arrived. The role of people who provide transport and countryside services is important in providing accurate good-quality information so people can make up their own minds about where to go and what to do. ([See Information Guidelines](#))

Consider the following

Some disabled people may need to do a lot of planning before they make a visit to the countryside. The more information they have to start with, the better.

People may not feel confident about going to new or unfamiliar places. In general, people are usually more willing to try new things if they feel that the people providing the service have made an effort to take their needs into account.

When people are making up their minds about where to go, they may ask the following questions

What's important, exciting or interesting about the site or area?

Why would people want to go there?

Where is the site? Is it on the edge of a town, or is it out in the countryside and the only way to get there is by car?

How accessible are any paths and trails?

How do you get there? For example, is it on a bus or train route?



What about when you get there?

Is there a bus or train stop near the entrance?

Is there a car park at the site?

Are some extra-wide parking bays reserved for disabled badge holders arriving by car?

Has the site got staff?

Is there an entrance fee?

Is there shelter in case of bad weather?

Is there a wheelchair-accessible unisex toilet which both sexes can use, so that a personal assistant of the opposite sex can provide help if necessary?

Most people visit the countryside with their family and friends. Having a good time as part of a group is an important part of the whole experience. Most of us have at one time or another visited a site because friends recommended it to us.



However, not all disabled people have access to this type of social network. Some may rely on a care support system. This can make it more difficult for people to make personal decisions about where to go and what to do. This is especially the case if they need their personal assistant to provide the transport. People in this situation need information about the opportunities available in the countryside. They also need to be able to use community transport services. Many will benefit from organised countryside visits to introduce them to what's on offer.



## Transport to get to the countryside

Transport is a way of getting to places, and a form of leisure in itself. For many people the Sunday-afternoon drive in the country is traditional. For some this may be the only way they can enjoy the countryside, either through choice or because they can't cover the ground on foot.

For these countryside users, their visit can be improved by some or all of the following facilities.

Roadside picnic sites.

Car parks with good views of the surrounding countryside.

Bus and train routes taking in areas with good scenery.

Byways where people can get off the main roads and be closer to wild country.

For people using transport just to get to their chosen site, decisions about how to get there are likely to be based on:

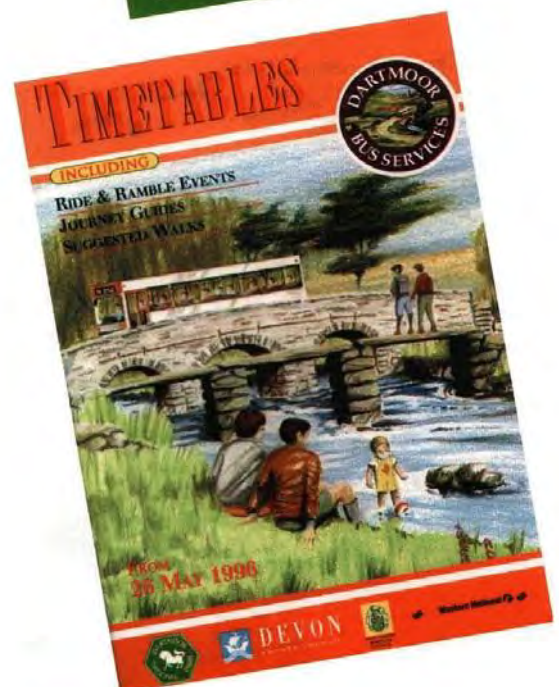
how accessible the transport is;

the length and timing of the journey;

how much it will cost; and

how convenient the service is.

If the nearest bus stop is two miles from the place you want to visit, or there are no buses on a particular day, or the buses aren't easy to use, you are more likely to want to travel by car. If that happens, there is likely to be a bigger demand for accessible car parking close to the main features of interest.



## Looking after the environment and the transport needs of disabled people

In general people are becoming more aware of environmental issues, and of the role which public transport can play in cutting down the level of damage caused by using cars. However, public transport services do not always go where and when you want to go.

For some disabled people public transport may be the only way of getting to the countryside. These disabled people will benefit from low-floor buses and other vehicles which meet the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DiPTAC) recommendations. You will find the address for the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee in the appendix at the end of these guidelines.

Everyone will benefit from improvements to the transport 'infrastructure' (this means bus and train stations, bus stops and so on).

For other disabled people using private or community transport will always be the most realistic way of getting to the countryside.

## Cost

Disabled people tend to have less money to spend than some other visitors. The cost of a countryside outing can be important when they are deciding where to go and what to do. Discounted travel tickets and packages such as Devon County Council's Sunday Rover ticket, which give passengers the chance to travel on all public transport for a flat rate, can make public transport a more attractive and affordable option for everybody.

## Support from personal assistants

Some disabled people rely on support from personal assistants. They may only get to go to the countryside if their personal assistant shares their interest, and feels comfortable and confident in the countryside. It can also cost more if the disabled person has to pay for their time and for petrol costs, travel fares, and site entrance fees. Discounted tickets or free travel for the assistant may mean the disabled person can visit the countryside more often.



## Access to transport: the decision making process

Throughout the rest of these guidelines, we will look at how disabled people use transport under the following general categories

'Pedestrian' transport - travel on foot, by bicycle, by horse, and by wheelchair or scooter.

Own or independent transport - using cars, taxis, Dial-a-Ride, and one-to-one volunteer support systems.

Public transport - including buses and trains.

Organised group visits - using coaches and community transport.

If people want to visit a countryside site as pedestrians, they may base their decision on some or all of the following

How far the site is from home.

How easy it is to find, and whether any routes and trails onto and around the site are clearly marked.

Whether or not staff are on site for some or all of the time, to provide help and information.

If there are places where visitors can sit down, or get a cup of tea, or get shelter if it rains.

If there are any trails for both pedestrians and cyclists, and in some cases for horse riders as well.

If there are any barriers, such as gates, and surfaces with loose gravel or cobbles. These barriers may also prevent wheelchair users, disabled cyclists with machines larger than the more usual two-wheelers, and people with scooters from using the site.

Many of the previous points will also apply to people using other methods of transport to get to the site, once they've arrived.

For people using their own transport, the following may be important

How easy it is to find the site entrance, and how well it is signposted from the road.

Whether there is a car park.

If there is a car park, if there are any spaces for disabled badge holders (for example extra-wide accessible parking bays reserved for their use).

If there is a parking fee.

If you have to pay to park, how you do this. Some disabled people find slot machines difficult to use. They will find it easier to hand the money over to a person, like the car park attendant, or staff at the information centre.

If there are safe accessible routes from the car park to the rest of the site, so that people don't have to cross busy entrances and exits, or walk behind parked cars.

How far the car park is from the main features of the site. Some sites have 'dropping-off points' so car passengers who are disabled can be taken close to where the action is.

Whether or not there are any accessible public phones on the site, so that if you want to come home early you can ring for a taxi.



Public transport users will need to know the following:

How easy it is to get from home to the bus stop or train station.

If the site is on or near a public transport route.

How regularly the buses or trains run.

How far it is from the bus stop or train station to the site entrance.

Whether or not this route is well lit, and what seating and shelter is available in case they have to wait for a connection.

How any events programmes tie in with public transport timetables ([see the Events Management Guidelines](#)).

Organisers of group visits will need to know the following:

How wide the roads onto the site are, and whether minibuses and coaches can use them.

Whether or not there are any large parking bays for coaches, and for minibuses which need to work tail lifts to allow passengers on and off.

If there isn't suitable long-term parking, whether there is a dropping-off point for passengers close to the main features of the site.

What other accessible facilities there are, such as toilets and a café. If there are no facilities, but site staff can say where the nearest ones are, the group organiser will then be able to allow extra time during the journey for breaks.

How flexible event times are, and whether the site will allow for visitors arriving late or leaving early to link up with other transport services like school buses.

## Making the Journey

For many disabled people, the final decision about which means of transport to use will probably depend on the following.

How easy it is to use the public transport services

What information there is about accessible public transport services.

How easy it is to get from home to the bus stop, or to the bus or train station.

What shelter and seating is available, in case there's a long wait between services.

How accessible the bus station or train station is.

How much it costs to travel.

How accessible the bus or train is.

How aware the staff are of the needs of disabled passengers, including those with mobility and speech impairments.

How easy it is to get answers to all these questions before you set out.





## Safety

If people decide to use the bus, they need to be sure that when they get on the driver will wait until they've sat down before driving off. This means there's less danger of them losing their balance and falling over.

If bus stops and train stations are lit well at night, people are more likely to feel safe waiting there.

People may also feel safer if they know that the bus or train driver is carrying a radio or a mobile phone to use in an emergency in out-of-the-way places.

Pedestrian routes to sites which are lit well, and have no traffic on them, are also more likely to attract users.

Staff at the site to help and support visitors can also give extra reassurance.

If people know that the car park will be checked in the evenings to make sure that nobody is in difficulty, or stranded by transport problems, they will feel more confident about visiting the site on their own.

## Reliability and timing

If countryside public transport services are generally reliable and on time, passengers are less likely to worry about being stranded in poor weather or at night.

The length of the day can also be important. The more regular the bus or train service is, the better. This gives people more choices about when they go out and when they return home.

Many people will not risk waiting for the very last bus of the day in case they miss it and are stranded. Running a late service, even if it isn't well used, will make people more confident about using the other services.

If disabled people feel that their needs will not be met by public transport services, or that they need to make too much extra effort to use the bus or the train, they are more likely to decide to use other transport or not go to the countryside at all.



## 2 Improving access to transport - The role of disabled people and those who provide services for them

### Pedestrians

Plan ahead. Write down the questions you want to ask, and then talk to staff at the site to find out about the facilities and opportunities on offer. The staff will be able to tell you how to get there, and how far the main features of the site are from the entrance, so you can decide if you want to visit.

If you have experience of carrying out access audits, offer to work with staff to see how accessible the site is now. Look at barriers like stiles and gates, and uneven surfaces like loose gravel and cobbles. These might cause problems for people using wheelchairs, electric scooters or adapted bicycles, and people with poor balance.

Share the knowledge you have of cycle and scooter designs, and what disabled users may need, with site staff. This will increase their understanding of your needs, and help them to plan and develop transport so everyone can get around the site.

### People who use their own transport

Decide whether you are going to travel by yourself, or with family, friends or a personal assistant. Sharing transport, or joining a buddy scheme where you can get one-to-one support if you need it, can help. It also means there's somebody else there to share the day with.

Your local council for voluntary services may have information about transport support systems in your area. If you belong to a group like the Ramblers or the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, you may be able to organise lifts or car shares with other people taking part in the activity.

If you provide one-to-one transport services for somebody, give them the choice of visiting the countryside.

If you belong to a local Dial-a-Ride scheme, you may be able to use this service to visit the countryside. If there are limits to how far you are allowed to travel under this scheme, you could still use Dial-a-Ride, Taxi card or a similar local system to get you to the bus or train station. If these services are accessible, you could then use public transport for the main part of your journey.

Bear in mind that not all taxis are suitable to take wheelchairs. Some suitable taxis will be used for contracts for school and hospital visits. This means they will not be able to take other bookings for these times. You may need to check beforehand that a suitable taxi will be available in your area when you want to travel.

If you are travelling by private car or taxi, it may be worth ringing ahead to check directions to the site. You can also find out about car parking arrangements. Sometimes if you tell the site staff you are coming, they can arrange for you to park close to the main features of interest.

### Access by public transport

Plan ahead, and look at what transport options you have. Decide if the only way of getting there is by car, or if you could take a taxi to the bus or train station, and use public transport from there. Tripscope is a nationwide travel and transport information and advice service for disabled and elderly people. Their staff can help you plan your journey and help you decide the best way of getting there and back. You will find their address in the [Appendix](#).

Call your local public transport executive or the county council travelline to find out about accessible public transport services which go to the countryside. Ask about any reduced fares for disabled people. Some councils have help lines so you can plan your journey using public transport.

A number of local authorities also produce transport access guides. These give you details of all the transport options in the area, including public and community transport, and information on access at bus and train stations. Contact your local authority planning and transportation department for details of transport guides for your area.

You might also find it useful to have a look at a copy of 'Door to Door: A guide to transport for disabled people', which has been produced by the Department of Transport. This guide gives you information and advice on transport issues for disabled people and those who provide transport. It also contains many useful local and national contact points which can help you with your transport needs. Your local library may have a copy of this guide.



Contact the sites you want to visit to find out whether there's a bus stop or train station near the entrance.

If you want to go to an event, like a guided walk or a country fair, check that the start and finish times tie in with the bus or train timetable. If they don't, suggest this as an improvement for future events!

## Group visits

If you're looking for a vehicle, a number of local authorities will hire out their adapted minibuses to some members of the public at times of the day and at weekends when the minibuses would not normally be used.

If the local authority cannot provide suitable transport, or if they do not see a visit to the countryside as a high priority, the Community Transport Association will be able to put you in touch with your local community transport scheme. You can ring the Community Transport Association on 0161 367 8780. If you can provide your own suitably-qualified driver, your local community transport scheme may be able to hire you an accessible minibus. Some will also provide a driver, usually at an extra cost.

Ask for or arrange visits to the countryside using community transport. If you need to get a number of people interested before a countryside visit is worthwhile, ask your local countryside service to talk at your next group meeting. This will mean everyone gets a chance to see what's on offer before making a decision.

Plan ahead. Talk to the site staff to check that coaches and minibuses can get onto the site. Make sure that parking is available for large vehicles either on the site or nearby. Also check if there are accessible toilets at or near the site so that you can allow for stops before you get there, if necessary.

Explain beforehand any time limits to your visit. For example, tell the staff if you need to get the bus back in time for another group or service. That way they can timetable any activities to fit in with this.

If there are no services in your area, get together with other disabled people and make things happen!

### 3 Improving access to transport - The role of the transport provider and local authorities

#### People who use their own transport

Disabled people tend to have less money to spend than other people. The cost may stop disabled people using taxis to visit the countryside if they have to pay the full fare. Some local authorities have introduced cheap taxi fare schemes for disabled and elderly people. Discount fares make taxis a more affordable option. Travel by taxi can also be a practical way of overcoming the barriers which some disabled people face in getting from their home to the bus stop or train station.

Promote the countryside as a place for Dial-a-Ride users to visit. Be prepared to be flexible if people have to cancel on the day, or change where they want to go, because of bad weather.



#### Public transport

A number of bus and train operators already produce leaflets about countryside walks. Similar leaflets on accessible routes will help reassure disabled people that they can also use a range of public transport to enjoy the countryside.

Make sure that all new buses at least meet the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DiPTAC) recommendations for local service buses.

There are low-floor buses which provide even greater access. Use these buses on countryside routes whenever possible.

Design countryside routes and timetables to take account of disabled peoples needs. Think about people using the bus for a ride out in the countryside, and those using it as a way of getting to countryside sites and activities. Involve local disabled people in planning routes and in service testing.

Don't make the gap between bus services too great, because the weather might change, or people may need to return home earlier than planned. If possible, design timetables to allow for refreshment and toilet breaks. Make sure the routes take in sites and places where people want to go, and tell passengers which places are most accessible.

Consider the needs of people who are blind or partially sighted, and allow guides to give a commentary during the journey.

Make sure that the design and content of timetables, books and leaflets takes account of the recommendations made in the Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee Code of Good Practice called 'Legibility of Timetables, Books and Leaflets'.

Publicise accessible vehicles and services which everyone can use, and think about how you show people which services are accessible in your timetables. For example, you could include the international disability symbol on these timetables.

Send information about accessible services direct to disability groups, social services departments, talking newspapers, and other groups supporting disabled people. Also send information to doctors' surgeries, libraries, tourist information centres, and local accessible hotels and guest houses.

If you produce a leaflet for some or all of your accessible services, give details of all the access features. Include examples of how people might use these services. For example, you could say 'Catch the 1000 bus from Plymouth to Tavistock. Stop there for a coffee and a bite to eat, then catch the 1430 bus to Gunnislake. From there you can catch the train back to Plymouth.' If you give people information in a friendly way, they may feel more confident about giving the service a try.

If you have a pre-booking system, particularly for spaces suitable for wheelchairs, and you're not sure if you can carry a particular chair safely, invite the user to come along and try it out. You should be able to load and transport most chairs safely.

Phase out the use of old-style coaches on countryside bus routes. Many of these vehicles were designed before transport operators thought about the needs of disabled people. Some local authorities, such as Derbyshire County Council, have set up grants schemes to help transport operators with the costs of upgrading their vehicles to meet new standards.

Give disability awareness training to all drivers, and offer refresher courses at least every five years. The training should cover advice on securing wheelchairs for safe travel, and general information on the needs of disabled passengers. This may include explaining why drivers need to wait until people are sitting down before they drive away. It should also help them to understand the needs of people with hearing or speech impairments. For example, people who used the low-floor Dartmoor Rambler bus service in Devon said the helpfulness and general awareness of the drivers made all the difference to how much they enjoyed the journey.

Consider providing services like the Touchcard symbol-based communication board. Anyone who finds spoken English difficult can use this to communicate with the bus driver. You can get more information on this service from the Special Needs Research Unit at the University of Northumbria. You can find the address in the appendix at the back.



Local authorities can help to make public transport services more accessible by looking at their pricing policies. If disabled people can only use public transport with the help of a personal assistant, give the assistant free or cut-price travel. If not, the disabled person may be prevented from using the service because of having to pay two fares. Giving free travel to personal assistants meant that many more disabled people were able to use the BT Countryside for All and Devon County Council Dartmoor Rambler bus service.

Increase people's confidence in public transport by inviting them along to try out the vehicles. For example, Suffolk County Council has a policy to make all train services and stations in Suffolk accessible in near future. As part of this programme they held an open day for disabled people to come along and test out their trains. They wanted to prove to them how many facilities in the region had improved, and to give them back their confidence in using the trains.

Another service which aims to increase the confidence of all train users runs on the Devon-Cornwall border. On Sundays, trains on the Tamar Valley line are staffed by information assistants. These assistants give passengers advice on what there is to see and do at each stop along the journey. They also encourage them to get out and explore. At Plymouth the service links up with the Shopmobility scheme, which allows disabled passengers to get round the city centre. The aim is to give people lots of support the first time they use the service, so that in future they will feel more confident about using countryside public transport services on their own.

Trains on the Robin Hood line in Nottinghamshire carry ramps, so that wheelchair users can now get on any train at stations on the line without having to book beforehand.

Even if public transport services are accessible, disabled people may be prevented from using them by the transport infrastructure. This includes bus and train station buildings, most of which were built before disabled peoples' needs were thought about. Plan ahead now, and in the county council Transport Policy and Programme (TPP) include work to improve access to buildings, and to provide more shelters and seating at countryside bus stops. Promote accessible connection routes between bus stops and train stations.





Provide bus stops as close to the entrance of countryside sites as possible.

Put in bus shelters and seating at these stops, in case people have to wait for services and connections.

Buses with lifts will need a firm surface at the bus stop so that people can get on and off. You may need a ramp to give level access on and off low-floor buses.

Telephones at country stations, and real-time information systems at train and bus stops (which tell people the real time when the bus or train will arrive), can also make people more confident about using public transport.

Use accessible shuttle bus services on large countryside sites, and for services which cover several sites within a particular area. That way everyone can see more of the countryside than if they have to walk the whole way. Low-floor vehicles, and vehicles which meet the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee recommendations, will be more accessible to disabled and elderly people.

### Group visits

Consider making countryside outings an option for community transport users. Age Concern East Cheshire set up a project to find local countryside sites which were accessible. They then organised a series of supported group visits to some of these sites over the summer.

Talk to the staff on the site to find out what vehicle access to the site is like, and what parking and unloading arrangements there are for minibuses.

Remember that the weather can be unpredictable, and that some disabled people will not want to go to the countryside in very cold weather, or in the pouring rain. If a group has booked one of your vehicles and a driver, it is best if you and the driver can be flexible and allow for a last minute change of destination on the day. The new place to visit should be no further away than the original one. That way, if the worst happens and the weather is bad, people can still enjoy a day out.

If people use community transport, they sometimes find that group outings where they are picked up from home means they have a very long day. This can put people off if they get tired easily or if they need regular refreshment and toilet stops. Try and plan for this when you put the timetable for the day together.

If you have an accessible minibus and it's not being used all the time, think about offering it for hire or loan to other groups. At present some groups don't allow loan schemes. But, organisations like Harrogate District Community Transport have set up vehicle pools of all minibuses owned by community organisations, which they manage centrally. This has increased the number of vehicles which disabled people can use, and has cut down on vehicle maintenance costs for the organisations which own them.

Some voluntary organisations find it difficult to get suitably-trained drivers, and to keep vehicles serviced and on the road. The Harrogate community transport scheme is looking at setting up a central pool of trained drivers to serve voluntary groups in the area. They also want to set up a team which can go out to help other community transport operators check and maintain their vehicles. They would be able to help these operators work their way through all the rules and regulations which cover community transport schemes. You can get more details from the Community Transport Association (CTA UK). You can find their main addresses in the [appendix](#) at the end of these guidelines.

If you manage a community transport vehicle pool, think about the image of the vehicles and how to promote them when you hire them out to groups. For example, a group of young people might feel more comfortable in a bus painted for a youth club or general use than in one marked for use by elderly people.

Devon County Council found that their local authority vehicles were not being fully used. They decided that all their accessible Ring and Ride services had to run a social services or school run as part of their service contract. This cuts down on the availability of these buses for other users, but it does make sure that the vehicles are used more evenly throughout the day.

If you're thinking about buying a new accessible vehicle, bear in mind that if you want National Lottery funding you must be able to show that any vehicle funded with money from the Lottery will be well used.

## 4 Improving access to transport - The role of people who provide countryside services

### Pedestrians

Carry out a site access audit with local disabled people to find out how accessible your site is, and how easy it is for people to get there. Remember that the access points onto the site must be accessible as well as the site itself. For example, it will not be fully accessible if the entrance is not wide enough to take a wheelchair or a cycle used by disabled people.

Look at any on-site barriers such as stiles and squeeze gates. Replace stiles with gates, and check that scooter users and disabled cyclists using large bicycles or tandems can get through.

Provide seating along popular routes. Seats placed at intervals along paths can allow people who can walk but with some difficulty to see much more of the site, if they know they can stop for a rest when they need to.



Work with the appropriate organisations to make sure that pedestrian routes onto sites are well maintained, so that people feel safe using them.

Most visitors to the countryside feel more confident about visiting sites if there are staff about who can provide information and reassurance. Disabled people, who may move more slowly and feel more vulnerable in the countryside than other visitors, find this reassurance can be very valuable in encouraging them to visit a site.

Include staffing information in your publicity material, so that people know what support they can expect before they arrive.

If paths and trails are going to be used by more than one sort of visitor, for example, by pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders, it is best to let everyone know this. You could put a sign at the start of the trail, so that people know they need to watch out for other users who may be travelling more quickly or slowly than they are.

When you loan out equipment, provide a brief training session in how to use it. Make sure that the equipment is insured, and that you are covered for third party liability. This will provide cover if the person who hires it causes an accident involving other visitors.

On larger sites which are popular with the public, provide wheelchairs, scooters and accessible cycles for hire or loan. The most suitable type of manual wheelchair for countryside use is the self-propelling sort with large back wheels. This allows disabled people to use them independently, and is also easier for personal assistants to push over uneven ground. You can only use the small-wheel type of manual chair with the support of an assistant, and the wheels snag easily on any uneven ground.



Electric scooters are becoming increasingly popular with disabled and elderly people as a means of getting around in the countryside. These can cope with far rougher ground than manual wheelchairs. Scooters with four wheels are more stable over rough ground than those with three wheels.

Visitors are also likely to enjoy their day more if there are accessible toilets, refreshments and shelter either at or very near the site. All site staff, including receptionists, should be able to provide phone callers and visitors with access information, so that people can make informed choices about coming to the site.

Most of these factors will also improve the quality of visit for disabled people who travel to the site using other transport.

## People who use their own transport

Make sure that the site is well signposted from the main road, and that any parking spaces for disabled people are also well signposted from the site entrance. If disabled people cannot easily find accessible parking bays when they arrive, they may turn round and go straight home again. They may be worried about not being able to get in or out of their cars if other vehicles are parked too close.



Place accessible parking bays for disabled badge holders as close as possible to the main features of interest at the site.

If there is no parking on the site, or if it is some distance away from the main features of interest, allow disabled passengers in cars and minibuses to be dropped off near to where the action is if this is possible.

Parking bays should be individually marked. You should say if they are there for disabled people only. You will find extra information about car parking facilities in [Information Sheet 2.8](#), and in the Department of Transport Traffic Advisory Leaflet 5/95.

Minibuses will need bigger spaces. These should be at least 3500 millimetres wide and 8000 millimetres deep to allow for passenger lifts which load at the back.

The car park needs to be level with a firm well-draining surface. This will mean that people are less likely to slip and lose their footing when getting in and out of their cars. A level surface will also make it easier to work vehicle tail lifts on cars and minibuses. Reserve some accessible bays, especially at places with a good view, for disabled people who need to stay in their cars. This approach has been very successful at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Thrybergh Country Park, where they have set aside part of the disabled parking area as a short-stay viewing area only. The staff say it has worked very well to give people who can't get out of their cars a clear view down to the lake.

If parking for disabled badge holders is not free, you should have notices explaining this at the accessible parking bays. Place car parking ticket machines at a suitable height for wheelchair users. These machines may be difficult for people who don't have much hand control and short people to use. If possible there should be other methods of payment, such as paying the car park attendant or paying at an information centre. You can get extra information about ticket machine design from the Department of Transport Traffic Advisory Leaflet 5/95, and [Information Sheet 1 .2](#).

Look at your pricing policy, and consider allowing free or cut-price entry to the site for personal assistants. Disabled people who rely on an assistant so that they can get out into the countryside may be put off visiting the site if they have to pay for two full-price tickets.

Tell visitors if you have a payphone suitable for people using wheelchairs on the site. This may be useful if people need to call a taxi, or their family or friends, to pick them up at the end of their visit.

## Public transport

Work with the local authority to develop public transport services in the countryside. For example, Devon County Council and Dartmoor National Park Authority worked together to develop the National Park's Traffic Management Strategy. This includes policies to help people visit the National Park using public transport. One outcome of this policy was to set up the Dartmoor Rambler service. This low-floor bus ran between Plymouth, Dartmoor and the Tamar Valley on Sundays and Bank Holidays. During the 11 days it ran, over 200 passenger journeys were recorded. Many of the passengers were disabled people.

When you are planning events and activities, link in the start and finish times with local public transport timetables, so that you increase the number of people who can get there. Display publicity material for these events and activities at bus and train stations, at tourist information centres, and in the local free newspapers. Include information in your publicity material on how to get to the site using public transport.

If you expect a large number of people to use public transport to get to your event, arrange for a member of staff to meet them off the bus or train and bring them onto the site. This may be particularly appropriate if you are meeting and greeting first-time visitors, who may not feel very confident in the countryside. At the end of the event, check that people get away safely and that nobody is left stranded.

## Group visits

Promote your site as an accessible visitor attraction to:

- day centres;

- the highways and transportation section of local authorities (community transport section, if there is one);

- social services departments of local authorities; and

- community transport groups.

These groups will all be able to pass on site information to group organisers, and to people who use community transport services.

Give information to group organisers about facilities at the site. Include details of any accessible toilets and refreshments, so that they can build in stops during the journey if they need to.



Check that the vehicle access routes onto the site are well maintained, and that they can take large vehicles such as minibuses and low-floor buses without causing damage. Speed bumps need to be small or flat topped, to avoid damage to underfloor lifts.

Make sure that parking areas are level and well drained, with enough level ground to allow vehicle tail lifts to work.

If getting hold of transport is likely to be a problem for a group wanting to visit your site, offer to go and pick them up using site vehicles, or help them to find suitable vehicles for hire. For example, for one of their countryside events, Northamptonshire County Council Countryside Service laid on a bus shuttle service to the site from nearby towns. They also offered accessible transport to special needs groups. Next time the event is held they are going to offer these groups a grant so they can organise their own transport to the site.

Talk to group organisers before the visit to check on any problems with time. For example, some groups may need to leave the site by early afternoon in order to get back to schools or centres to tie in with other transport. It may be equally important not to start events too early in the day. If people are being picked up one at a time from home, this can mean that it takes longer for them to get to the site than other visitors.

We hope that these guidelines will give disabled people, transport providers and people who provide countryside services the chance to work together to improve access for all to transport in the countryside.



## Appendix

Groups listed in these guidelines

### Age Concern East Cheshire

Chester House  
122 Chestergate  
Macclesfield  
Cheshire SK11 6DU  
Phone: 01625 612958

### Community Transport Association

Highbank  
Halton Street  
Hyde  
Cheshire SK14 2NY  
Phone and Fax: 0161 367 8780

### Community Transport Association Scotland

129B Willowbrae Road  
Edinburgh EH8 7HL  
Phone and Fax: 0131 652 2989

### Community Transport Association Northern Ireland

Graham House  
Knockbracken Healthcare Park  
Saintfield Road  
Belfast  
BT8 8BH  
Phone and Fax: 01232 241556

### Department of Transport Mobility Unit

Zone 1/8  
Great Minster House  
76 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DR  
Phone: 020 7271 5281  
Minicom: 020 7271 5252

### Derbyshire County Council Transport Unit

County Hall  
Matlock  
Derbyshire  
DE4 3AG  
Phone: 01629 580000

### Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership

Faculty of Science  
University of Plymouth  
Drake Circus  
Plymouth  
Devon PL4 8AA  
Phone: 01752 233094

### Devon County Council Transport Co-ordination Centre

Engineering and Planning Department  
Devon County Council  
County Hall  
Topsham Road  
Exeter  
Devon EX2 4QW  
Phone: 01392 382123

### Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DIPTAC)

c/o Mobility Unit Zone 1/11  
Department of Transport  
Great Minster House  
76 Marsham Street  
London SW1 P 4DR  
Phone: 020 7271 5258  
Minicom: 020 7271 5252

### Harrogate District Community Transport Ltd

2 Mornington Terrace  
Harrogate  
North Yorkshire HG1 5DH  
Phone: 01423 526655 or 562606  
Fax: 01423 526655

### Northamptonshire County Council Countryside Services

P0 Box 221  
John Dryden House  
8-10 The Lakes  
Northampton NN4 7DE  
Phone: 01604 237227

### Nottinghamshire County Council, Public Transport Operations Group

Department of Planning and Economic Development  
Trent House  
Fox Road  
West Bridgford  
Nottingham NG2 6BJ  
Phone: 0115 982 3823

### Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Countryside Service

Thrybergh Country Park  
Doncaster Road  
Rotherham  
South Yorkshire  
S65 4NU

Phone: 01709 850353 or 852119

### Special Needs Research Unit University of Northumbria

Coach Lane Campus  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
NE7 7TW

Phone: 0191 227 4211

Fax: 0191 266 4061 or 0191 227 4215

### Suffolk County Council Rail Liaison Officer

Environment and Transport Team  
Suffolk County Council  
St Edmunds House  
County Hall  
Ipswich, Suffolk  
IP4 1LZ

Phone: 01473 265679

### Transport for Leisure Ltd

67 Grove Road  
Ilkley  
West Yorkshire  
L529 9PQ

Phone: 01943 607868

Fax: 01943 816745

### Tripscope

The Courtyard  
Chiswick  
London W4 5JL

Phone: 0181 994 9294

Fax: 020 8994 3618

Minicom: 020 8994 9294

### The South West and South Wales Tripscope office is at:

Pamwell House,  
160 Pennywell Road,  
Bristol BS5 OTX

Phone: 0117 941 4094

Fax: 0117 941 4024



Countryside for All  
The Fieldfare Trust  
7 Volunteer House  
69 Crossgate  
Cupar  
Fife  
KY15 5AS Telephone:  
01334 657708 email:  
[info@fieldfare.org.uk](mailto:info@fieldfare.org.uk)



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# Interpretation Guidelines



Providing accessible countryside interpretation



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Interpretation Guidelines

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## Contents of Good Practice Guide



# Introduction

Countryside interpretation helps visitors understand and enjoy the countryside around them. Interpretation makes sense of new places to people who are not familiar with, or confident about, visiting the countryside.

Many disabled people find countryside interpretation difficult to understand. People often cannot understand the message if you use complicated written and spoken language, or small print or confusing colour contrasts.

These guidelines look at planning, designing and putting into practice good countryside interpretation. They focus on the needs of disabled people, and will help you produce interpretation which everyone can use.



## General principles

### Set your goals

Be clear about what you want to achieve and the message you want to put across. Plan your interpretation thoroughly. Time you spend on planning can save problems later on.

### Find out who your audience is

Don't think of disabled people as a special and separate audience. Providing interpretation for all may simply be a case of making small technical changes, such as increasing the print size on a leaflet the next time you print it.

### Don't try to interpret everything

Too much information can be confusing. You should leave some things unsaid. Give visitors the chance to explore the countryside on their own and find out some things for themselves.

### Talking about things or experiences most people will already know about

Simple interpretation will make your message easier to understand. For example, describe the height of a tree by saying it's the height of two double-decker buses!

### Have linking themes running through all your interpretation

Provide the same, or similar, messages in more than one way. Visitors can choose how to use the interpretation.

### Avoid technical terms

'Coppicing\*', 'pollarding\*', Latin plant names and so on will mean absolutely nothing to many visitors. If you do use them, explain them simply.

### Use interpretation sparingly

The less said the better as long as it's clear.

### Appeal to all the senses using techniques which will get the message across

Allow visitors to explore the countryside in different ways, and get them to use all their senses. It tends to make a visit to the countryside more fun too!



# The Planning Process

1

## Setting your objectives

Be clear as to why you want to use interpretation



2

## Gathering information

Find out about the site and your customers, including disabled people



3

## Analysing your findings and producing a plan

Decide what interpretation you want to use and where you want to use it. Choose the method which will work best for your audience, including disabled people.



4

## Checking the results of the interpretation

Check how effective your plan has been, and whether it works for everyone visiting your site



5

## Working with your designer

Give your designer all the information he or she needs. Involve the designer at every stage. Test out the design with disabled people before you produce the final product. You need to be sure it works for all visitors

# 1 Setting your objectives

Objectives may cover the following.

Enjoyment:

for example, to help people have fun getting close to nature.

Education:

for example, to make people more aware of conservation.

Management:

for example, to attract people away from sensitive areas.

Setting clear objectives will help you through the following planning stages.



## 2 Gathering information

Looking at your site

Each countryside site has its own special qualities. Decide which special areas you want to look at. Use interpretation to make sure more disabled people enjoy their visit.

Consider the following points

Concentrate on features which everyone can get to.

Improve the physical access to that area (for example, the paths and slopes).

Take account of conservation interests.

Find other features that you could interpret with the same effect.

Interpret a different feature if it benefits more visitors.



## Looking at your customers

Research will help you find out:

- why people visit the site;

- how long they stay;

- where they come from;

- how often they visit; and

- whether they prefer certain sorts of interpretation to others.

This will help you form a clearer picture of what they would like.

## Working with disabled people

You should involve disabled people in your planning. Invite local disabled people to your site so you can talk to them. ([See Networking Guidelines](#))

- Look at examples of site interpretation you already have and encourage people to criticise and make suggestions on possible improvements which you could make.

- Get people to experience the different areas, views or other features the site has to offer. Walk around the site and point out features of interest which they may otherwise miss.

- Try to put your own enthusiasm for your site or subject on hold. Make sure you give people the time they need to explore the site at their own pace. and comment about the things they notice.

- Get people involved by inviting them to smell, touch, listen and look. Encourage them to ask questions.

- Listen carefully and record people's comments. For example, you may hear someone say 'I bet those trees could tell a tale or two...'. This is the sort of comment which may be worth exploring at the time. You can find out how they would like the tales to be told.



- Keep people on the track of looking at interpretation, rather than worrying about physical access. If necessary, arrange a separate visit to look at ways to improve physical access.

- Remember that the idea is to find the best way of interpreting your site. Try not to have fixed ideas about how you want to do it.

For people with mobility impairments you will need to consider the following

Accessible routes ([see Accessibility Standards](#)) for guided walks or trails.

Rest stops on the route which include seating and shelter should be set where there are features of interest, ([see Information Sheet 3.1](#) and [4.8](#)).

The time people take to get around a trail.

Where you place interpretation boards. Put them at a height and angle next to a path where they can be read easily, and do not block views or features of interest, ([see information Sheet 4.5](#)).

How you design display materials to make sure people with poor hand control can take an active role, ([see information Sheet 1 .2](#)).

For blind or partially sighted people you will need to consider the following

Usually people who are blind or partially sighted will visit the countryside with people who can see. But they will still prefer to be able to find out about the place they are visiting by themselves.

Techniques which use several senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste) are best.

Use clear and wide-ranging descriptions.

Use a mixture of methods. For example, think about producing an audio tape guide, and also a large-print leaflet with good colour contrast covering the same subject.

For some people who are blind or partially sighted, Braille is essential.

For people who are deaf or hard of hearing you will need to consider the following

Some visitors will consider English to be their second language after signing. Consider using sign language.

Some people who are born deaf or hard of hearing may have less developed language and written communication skills than other visitors. It is important you use simple language to get your message across.

Use 'sympathetic hearing techniques', ([see page 20](#)).

Produce written texts to back up anything you talk about.

Some people who are hard of hearing will find audio or video tapes difficult to use because they may not have a hearing aid that works with them.



For people with learning disabilities you will need to consider the following

Adults with learning disabilities are not children so you should not speak to them as if they are.

If you use written materials, make them as clear as possible, or use pictures and symbols rather than words.

As with any visitor, some people with learning disabilities will prefer to explore the countryside on their own.

Self-guided trails and written materials may be the most difficult methods for some people with learning disabilities to use. Person-to-person interpretation is easier for all people.

### 3 Analysing your findings and producing a plan

You will not be able to interpret everything on the site, so choose which themes or messages you want to put across. Your budget may also affect the facilities you can provide. A good plan and clear objectives will increase the chances of you getting funding.

Choose the right interpretation methods for the site and audience. For example, if the site has no visitor centre, it may be difficult to put in a taped trail as you will need people there to give out the tapes. The methods you choose will depend on what you want interpreted. Assess each technique carefully to see how well each one could work on site.

Choosing the most effective method means:

being aware of some of the advantages or disadvantages of each method;

knowing who might benefit from the use of one method instead of another;  
and

understanding how to get the most out of the particular approach you choose.

## Personal interpretation

'Personal interpretation\*' means something presented to people by other people. It includes the following.

Guided walks

Theatre

Storytelling

Music and dance

Art



### Advantages of using personal interpretation with disabled people

You can adapt the interpretation and the message to the specific needs or interests of the audience.

People can ask questions so you can repeat the information, perhaps using different or simpler terms and expressions.

People can take part, and have a hands-on approach. This will help reinforce your message.

Personal interpretation often uses all, or more than one, of the five senses and so is effective with everyone.

Visitors don't need any previous knowledge of the countryside to take part.



## Always consider the following

Work out how much staff time and resources you need to prepare and carry out the interpretation.

It is best to meet groups beforehand, though not always possible.

Bring in paid professionals who have experience of working in the countryside, and with disabled people, if you don't have these skills.

Use 'sympathetic hearing techniques', and keep your language clear and simple.

Provide sign language interpreters to support visitors who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Provide written texts of the interpretation for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Give more time for introductions to the group, and explanations about the task.

The number of people in the group is very important. Some people need more time to be able to take part equally. If you are working with a mixed group some people will need more of your time and support than others.

You should encourage personal assistants who come with groups or individuals to join in rather than watch.

Make sure that you give any personal assistants the chance to understand the interpretation.

Think about how accessible your site is before a walk. Choose a route everyone can use.

Make sure that you include stopping points with seats to allow elderly people and people with mobility disabilities the chance to rest.



## Earth education activities

Earth education activities encourage visitors to explore their surroundings through different experiences which use sight, hearing, touch and smell.

You could use:

earth walks;  
‘discovery parties\*’;  
‘immersing experiences,’  
‘natural awareness\* exercises; and  
‘solitude enhancing\* activities.

If you need information about any of the above, contact The Institute for Earth Education.

You will need bigger props for people with poor hand control and for some people with learning disabilities. If you are working with a mixed group, keep everyone\*s props large to avoid drawing attention to some people.

You can get training to gain the skills to lead effective earthwalks and programmes. You can get more details about earth walks, programmes or training direct from The Institute for Earth Education.

For more information contact:

The Institute for Earth Education,  
PO Box 91,  
Tring,  
Hertfordshire,  
HP23 4RS

## Environmental art

Visual arts, including drawing, painting, photography, ceramics, textiles and sculpture, make the countryside appeal to people's hearts.

People with little or no speech can take part.

If you need a spoken explanation, also provide practical demonstrations.

Many techniques you can use are simple. There will usually be different tasks so everyone can take part.

Check on safety needs if the group will be using tools.



## Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful technique used to conjure up the spirit of place for visitors. You can use storytelling on its own, or build it into a conservation day or other event.

The story teller should consult with groups to find out the best ways to communicate with everyone. Adapt the style of presentation, length and detail of the story to meet the needs of the group.



People who are blind or partially sighted may need more use of tone of voice, music and touch in order for the story to have an effect on them.

Stories should be directly related to the site. Link the story to what people are likely to know already.

Encourage people to take part as characters in the story.



## Guided walks

Guided walks are very popular. They can give visitors the chance to meet people associated with the site or area, and to watch and have a go at traditional countryside practices.

Many guided walks only need small adaptations to include disabled people.

Guided walks give everyone the chance to ask questions, and to get to know the people and places better than they might if they visited the site on their own.

You should publicise adapted walks as accessible, so you encourage disabled people to come along.

## Music and dance

You can use music and dance to encourage people to explore the world around them and give them the chance to express their feelings about the countryside.

Dance and music can include stillness, or draw on the idea of movement from within rather than moving the body or limbs. People with physical disabilities can play a full part.

Music and dance is about rhythm, and does not have to depend on sight or sound. People who are blind or deaf can equally be involved.

## Theatre

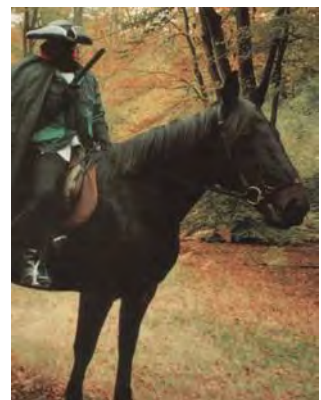
Professionals can run workshops or theatrical productions set in the countryside. Or the audience can help to develop a theme which they have chosen.

Make sure that if different parts of the acts are set in different areas of a site, physically disabled people can move around easily to take part in the production.

Provide resting points and seating for performances.

Sign language will be valuable for people who are deaf or are hard of hearing.

Spoken descriptions will be valuable for people who are blind.





## Non-personal interpretation

'Non-personal interpretation' means visitors do not have to rely on someone else to present it. It includes some of the most common forms of interpretation such as:

leaflets;  
self-guided trails; taped  
audio trails; interpretive  
boards; and information  
centre exhibits

### Advantages of using non-personal interpretation with disabled people

Visitors can use this kind of interpretation on their own.

Some people prefer, or find it easier, to find out for themselves what a site's about at their own pace.

Some people with hearing or visual impairments will find written texts of a guided walk or a taped trail very valuable.

It is usually cheaper to produce.

You can reach more people. For example, interpretive boards can be used by most visitors, and you can produce as many leaflets as you want.

### Always consider the following

Provide the information in different ways. This could be in Braille, on cassette or, if there is a visitor centre, adding sub-titles or a narrative to a video or film.

You need to strike a balance between providing interpretation and information. Let the interpretation concentrate on features of interest to look out for and enjoy during the trail, rather than being a guide which covers everything about the site.

Plan and design carefully. Use basic language and as little text as possible.

## Taped trails

Taped trails are a popular way to introduce visitors to walks and trails which are new to them.

Taped trails will not appeal to, or be practical for, all visitors. But audio tape is an important way of providing information to blind and partially sighted people.

Provide clear instructions on how to use the tape so that visitors get the most out of the visit.

Permanent markers on the ground, which link to listening points on the tape, tell people they are at a stopping point.



Improve stopping points with sight and sound experiences. Try to encourage people to touch and listen, as well as look.

Produce tapes to a high standard. It is important to make sure that all sound effects are consistent and do not fade or change.

A poorly-produced tape is as difficult to understand as bad handwriting.

Use a low-frequency tone on the tape to say when the tape should be switched off.

Design the tape so that there is no overlap between listening to the tape and walking the trail. It could be dangerous to expect a visitor to do both at the same time.

Buy personal stereos which have a rewind button on the machine to give people a chance to repeat things if they missed it first time round. This will be especially useful for people who are hard of hearing.

Provide portable induction loops. This will make sure people who are hard of hearing, and who have the 'T\*' switch on their hearing aids, can hear the tape clearly.

Some personal stereos have two earphone sockets which will allow a blind or partially sighted person and a sighted guide to listen to the tape together.

If possible, offer to loan tapes out to people who are blind or deaf before they visit the site so they can get a feel for the site before their visit.

Make sure that the design includes the need for steady, paced speech. Do not overdub sounds, It will result in sounds being lost to people who are hard of hearing. Be careful how you use female voices (these are sometimes too high pitched to be heard clearly). Changes in tone of voice or sound effect are hard for some people who are hard of hearing to adjust to quickly.

## Leaflets and written material

Leaflets are the most common tool currently used by countryside managers to tell people about their site.

Leaflets let people take in details at their own pace, and can be taken home and passed on to others.

Leaflets should not try to cover everything about the site.

You can easily and cheaply translate the text into Braille or other languages. You can send Braille items for blind people in the post free of charge.



Use print sizes and colours which people who are partially sighted can use, ([see Information Sheets 4.2](#) and [4.4](#)).

Provide written texts for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, who may otherwise miss out on the message you are putting over.

Using large print makes leaflets easier for everyone to read.

Use a heavy paper when you design leaflets so people with poor hand control, or people who need one hand free, can turn the pages easily.

Using written materials will be no use for some people with learning disabilities. Make sure that what you write is clear and concise. Do not use technical and complicated language.

## Interpretive boards

Interpretative boards are a common and important resource for many countryside sites.

Design the boards so visitors can feel them or even listen to them.

Tactile boards (boards which you can feel) are especially effective for people who are blind or partially sighted. They are often also the best way of describing new or difficult concepts to all visitors.

All new boards should be accessible to wheelchair users, ([see Information Sheets 2.2 and 4.5](#)).

Make sure that visitors can reach the board. For a person who is partially sighted this may be particularly important so they can get close enough to read the text, ([see Information Sheet 4.5](#)).



## Visitor Centre exhibits

In visitor centres, the exhibits and visitors are sheltered if there is bad weather.

Make sure that displays and exhibits are easy for wheelchair users to reach. This is especially important if visitors are encouraged to take part by using levers, pushing buttons or other controls, ([see Information Sheet 1.2](#)).

Plan where to put your exhibits. Consider your visitors, their viewing distances and angles of view, ([see Information Sheet 4.5](#)).

Any controls should be easy to work with one hand, without the need for tight twisting or grasping. The controls should not need finger control or strength.



Make sure that your exhibits can be touched. Do not put them behind reflective surfaces, or in lighting which may create glare.

Put barriers around free-standing or wall-mounted exhibits so that people who are blind or partially sighted can feel them with their canes.

Have rounded rather than sharp edges on all possible obstructions.

Hanging signs or exhibits should be at least 1200mm from the floor.

Exhibits can show people, who are blind or partially sighted, the size and proportions of animals, birds or objects which they might not otherwise get close to.



Make sure that any text, photographs and colour you use are appropriate for people who are partially sighted. ([See Information Sheets 4.2 and 4.4.](#))

Place Braille text flat, not at an angle.

Audio induction loops fitted to exhibits will help people who have the 'T\*' switch on their hearing aids. Display the appropriate symbol in your visitor centre. ([See Information Sheet 4.1.](#))

You can use mirrors to show people places and things they cannot get to.





## Other methods

Other methods for people who are blind or partially sighted include Braille, large print and cassette. For people who are deaf or hard of hearing consider captioning on films and videos, 'Sympathetic Hearing\*' and signing. If you can supply other methods, remember to tell your visitors.

### Braille

Braille is reading through touch. Not everyone who is blind can read Braille, but Braille readers often prefer Braille to taped cassettes. For some people who are deaf and blind, Braille is essential for communication.

Proof-read Braille materials before giving them to the public.

Describe any significant illustrations, views or maps with Braille.

Grade 1 Braille is used by children and those who are learning Braille. It is also useful if the Braille reader does not have English as their first language. Grade 2 Braille needs less space than Grade 1 braille and can be quicker to read. Contact the Royal National institute for the Blind for advice on which to use.

There are professional Braille producers throughout the UK.

For more information contact:

The United Kingdom Association of Braille Producers  
[RNIB](#)  
P0 Box 173  
Peterborough PE2 6W5 Phone: 01733 370777

### Sympathetic Hearing Scheme

The 'Sympathetic Hearing Scheme is run by the British Association of the Hard of Hearing. It trains organisations to communicate more effectively with people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The scheme gives people who are deaf or hard of hearing a card which they show when they need help.

If you have contact with the public, you should ask for training through the scheme.

You can get more information from: The Sympathetic Hearing Scheme,  
7-11 Armstrong Road, London W3 7JL,  
Phone: 0208 742 9043





## Sign language interpretation

It can be difficult for sign language interpreters to translate slang, local terms and technical words. Avoid using these if possible.

It is good practice to have a member of staff trained as a sign language interpreter to help visitors in visitor centres, or on guided walks and at events.

For more information about signing contact:

**RNID**  
105 Gower Street  
London WC1E 6AH  
Phone: 0207 387 8033

## Technical Interpretation

If it is not possible to make part of a site easy to get at, or if you need to keep all visitors at a distance from a particular area, use technical interpretation. Video, film, audio narrations, programmes, or a combination of these, can provide exciting and different experiences. Technical interpretation includes 'closed-circuit TV\*', 'interactive videos\*', 'CD ROM\*' and 'virtual reality\*.

### Advantages of using technical Interpretation with disabled people

Technical methods can provide views of places, animals, birds and seasons which many people would not be able to enjoy otherwise.

It can provide visual and sound effects for people who are deaf or blind.

Many visitors will find scenes and actions very exciting. Many disabled people may find this more accessible.

If the programme is interactive, it allows the visitor to decide on the direction to follow.

### You should consider the following:

You should not use technical methods instead of the real experience of being in the countryside.

Narration should be clear, and must be louder than any background music or sound effects. Use trained commentators for all audio recordings if possible.

Make sure all controls for audio-visual displays are easy to get at for wheelchair users and people with poor hand control. ([See Information Sheet 1 .2.](#))

When video facilities are designed for a large audience. Make sure that the seating plan includes areas for wheelchair users among the general audience, not apart from everyone else.

Avoid reflections on screens, which may cause difficulties for people who are partially sighted. ([See Information Sheet 4.5.](#))

Subtitles and text (captioning) mean people who are deaf or hard of hearing will be able to benefit from films and videos.

Use large print and colour contrast on the screen. ([See Information Sheet 4.3](#) or [contact RNIB.](#))

Programmes with sign language will help people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

If there are no subtitles, provide large-print scripts of all productions for people who are blind or partially sighted. These are best done as summaries, as it is difficult to follow a programme and read at the same time.

You must produce technical methods to a high standard.

Audio productions should have a clear sound quality. In particular make sure that recordings are free from echos or other noises.

### Slide shows

If you are presenting a slide show, make sure you describe each slide in detail for any people who are blind or partially sighted.

### Closed-circuit television

You can use this for live broadcasts of events. For example, the RSPB have used close-circuit TV displays to give visitors information about nesting birds, as well as keeping people at a distance from nests which could otherwise be disturbed.

### Handsets

These are hand-held tour guide sound systems about the size of a mobile phone. Some systems have built-in induction loops for people with hearing aids. They allow you to stop whenever you want and receive information indoors and out.

### Video

People are used to seeing videos and you can use them to bring features of a site to visitors in a lively way. You can set them up to run all the time, or they can be switched on by a visitor entering the area where it is set up.

## Audio description

This is extra description for videos or TV that fits into the gaps between other speech. It describes body language, scenery, action, facial expressions, - anything that helps people follow what they cannot see.

Personal headsets give people the chance to get information which meets their needs. For example, this could be in a foreign language or audio description.

## Captioning

This provides subtitles or text on, or next to, the screen all the time so people don't have to ask.

## Closed captioning

This is hidden subtitles which only specific users can see. It is useful if there is a large audience or where the main image would be spoiled by captions on top of it. People who are deaf or hard of hearing need to know to ask for this facility.



## 4 Working with your designer

### Preparing the design brief

Produce a brief for any new design, from leaflets to audio-visual materials. This will help you avoid the misunderstandings, disappointment or frustration when something doesn't come out as you wanted. Provide a written brief for your designer, explain why they need to meet particular technical specifications.

Use a designer who has a flexible approach, is willing to learn from disabled people, and to let people test out draft designs.

Make sure that you see samples of their work before you commit yourself to working with them.

Get the designer to meet you on site to give them a feel for the place.

Give the designer examples of what you want, or definitely don't want, as a final outcome.



Give your designer a copy of comments taken from people involved in site visits.

The design brief should include the following.

The objective and theme of the project  
The message you want to put across.

Description of the project

For example, producing with help from disabled people, a 3D interpretive board which everyone can use, including people who are blind or partially sighted.

The intended market

Any target group will include disabled people who will want to take part. Your designer may not know about the needs of certain disability groups. Give your designer as much supporting information as possible.



How often and for what they will be used

This may affect the type of materials you use and the place you choose to put the interpretation. For example, it will be used every day by people visiting a site on their own, or it is for an organised event or performance which visitors will watch.

Life expectancy

Take into account whether the information may change. With written materials information may change between print runs.

Test examples

Say that you need a draft copy to try out with the disabled people who worked with you during the earlier planning stages.

Meeting deadlines

Don't forget to refer back to the user groups before you agree the final proof with the designer. That way you make sure you end up with a high-quality product. You must build in time for evaluation or changes.

Recognising people's involvement

Include the logo of any disability group who helped with the design. This can go a long way to reassuring other disabled people that your site really is accessible.





## 5 Review and evaluate

### Testing out the draft design

Try out your new facilities with different groups while they are still at the draft stages, as well as when they are finished. To keep your costs down you can photocopy a leaflet or make a cardboard cut out of an interpretive board. For personal techniques, such as a guided walk, get a group along for a 'dry run\*'. This will give you a chance to get comments and make final changes before the real thing. Testing out facilities with users can avoid expensive mistakes being made.

### Why review and evaluate?

You want to avoid expensive mistakes in the design stage.

You want the final product to meet your original objectives. Continue to check what you are doing to make sure you are still on track.

You want your facility to be accessible to everyone.

### Final Evaluation

You can evaluate your design by:

watching visitors using a facility;

asking people to fill in a questionnaire after a countryside visit

carrying out a structured interview; and

asking for feedback at a later date.

### You need to consider the following:

Not everyone will be willing to respond immediately. In group situations, quieter people may not be confident about making comments or criticisms.

Questionnaires may not be appropriate for people who are blind or partially sighted and people with learning disabilities who find writing difficult. Make it as easy as possible for people to fill in your questionnaire. Questions should be short and easy to understand.

Although it takes quite a lot of time, one-on-one interviewing may be more appropriate.

If you are working with a group, it may be easier to get feedback through the group leader or personal assistant. You could do this at a later date, once people have had a chance to think about their visit and what they enjoyed.

Be careful not to ask leading questions. Putting words into people's mouths will not give you a true picture of how you could improve what's on offer.

Now all you have to do is get on with it.....**Good luck!**



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# Events Management Guidelines



Staging accessible countryside events



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Events Management Guidelines

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### Contents of Good Practice Guide

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## Introduction

These guidelines are designed to help you put on countryside events which are accessible to disabled people. If you are new to managing countryside events we recommend that you read this with the Countryside Commission's guide "Organising countryside events - Advice for countryside staff".

## What is a 'countryside event'?

An event is any organised activity designed by people who provide countryside services to attract visitors to the countryside. For example:

'taster days' to introduce people to countryside activities, experiences or skills;

guided walks;

country fairs;

countryside play schemes; and

off-road driving.



## Countryside events and disabled people

Events are a good way for people who provide countryside services to:

provide a fun day out;

attract new visitors to the countryside;

introduce people to new activities, experiences and skills;

get more people committed to the countryside and its conservation;  
and

make money.

Making events more accessible to disabled people will improve services for all customers. Disabled people represent a large pool of people who may want to go to an event, but many are likely to assume that what's on offer will not be accessible to them. So, it is up to the provider to:



think about the needs of disabled people well before the event;

invite them to become involved in planning and putting into practice the event; and

publicise accessible events through both mainstream and specialist media.

[See the Networking Guidelines](#) for ideas on how to contact disabled people.

### Barriers to people taking part

Some disabled people see the countryside as an unwelcoming place. Organising suitable countryside events can be an exciting way of overcoming these negative feelings.

Other barriers may include the following.

Lack of positive images in publicity material.

Planning which does not take account of the needs of disabled people.

Not promoting the event to disabled people.

Not considering the transport needs of disabled people.

Cost

The event may not be accessible to all members of the group or family.



### Mainstream and disabled-only events

Most disabled people visit the countryside along with able-bodied family and friends. It is best to make mainstream countryside events accessible so that they can all take part together.

Events run primarily for disabled people also have an important role to play. They can introduce disabled people to new activities in a 'safe' environment where they do not feel they are being judged. This can play a valuable role in developing skills and confidence. These events can also give people the chance to make positive choices about what they want to do, knowing that there is the necessary back-up support and disability awareness from the organisers.



Some people will always feel most comfortable around other disabled people, while for others these events can act as a stepping-stone to taking part in mainstream activities.

As a provider, your choice will depend on your project objectives and the customer demand for a particular event. You need to be able to present your event in such a way that customers can make informed choices about giving it a try.

We have not split these guidelines into two sections on 'running mainstream events' and 'running events just for disabled people'. A lot of the processes you will go through in setting up and running an event are the same whether the event is for a mainstream or a disabled-only audience. However, if certain stages of the process may be tackled in a slightly different way for a disabled-only audience, we have included that extra information.



# How to adapt an event to include disabled people

## The process

Set your objectives

Adapt an event you have managed before, or set up a new event

Put together a clear plan

Research current good practice

### Adapting an event you have managed before

Identify and involve appropriate representatives of the disabled community

Work out how accessible the event already is

Plan improvements

### Setting up a new event

Identify and involve appropriate representatives of the disabled community

Decide what event will work best

Decide whether it should be mainstream or just for disabled people

Involve experts to make sure you deliver high-quality services

Take on and train volunteers

Get any specialist equipment you need

Use mainstream and targeted publicity

Choose appropriate evaluation techniques

Run it

Evaluate it

## Market research

Your event is only going to be successful if it meets your customers' needs. Carry out market research into the needs of disabled people to:

- decide what type of event to run;

- find out the level of interest for any event you want to run.

Also:

- find out about possible barriers to access;

- get advice on ways to make the event accessible;

- reassure people who want to take part that you are considering their needs:  
and

- create goodwill within the disabled community.

## Contacting possible customers

Lets look briefly at a couple of example objectives, and at how you might tackle the decision-making process.

**A** I want to encourage more disabled people to visit this year's County Agricultural Show

**B** I want to run a Discovery Day at my site for 9-10 year olds

In **A** you are obviously going to be looking at making the County Agricultural Show, which is a mainstream event, more accessible to disabled people. **B** on the other hand presents you with immediate choices - should the Discovery Day be open to all children, or to disabled children only?

No single event can cater for all interests and tastes. Design your event around the needs of your chosen target audience.

In **A** planning to take account of disabled people's needs should be part of planning the whole event. Last-minute bolt-on extras to mainstream events usually come across as such. They can reinforce negative stereotypes about how disabled visitors are viewed by the event organisers.

Get together a cross-section of disabled people to find out what they want and to help you plan the event.

Consider these points.

In choosing who to work with it is important to get people with a variety of disabilities on board. Include:

- a wheelchair user;
- an ambulant mobility impaired person (someone who can walk but with difficulty);
- someone who is blind or partially sighted;
- someone who is deaf or hard of hearing; and
- someone with a learning disability or their advocate (someone who can speak on their behalf).

Work with the group to assess what you need to provide. Decide on a list of improvements.

Put the improvements into practice.

Test the improvements with disabled people.

Use disability networks to promote the event.

Run it.

Evaluate it.

In **B** find out the size of your target audience. Talk to teachers and children about what activities they think will work best. If there are lots of disabled 9 and 10 year-olds in local mainstream schools, maybe a mainstream activity which includes disabled children is most appropriate. If most disabled children are in segregated education, or are isolated in the mainstream, then maybe they'll get more out of an event for disabled children only. Your event might be a good way of bringing together children from mainstream and special schools.

Outline your event ideas.

Contact local schools to see if there is a demand for it.

Consult teachers about the way it needs to be put together to involve all the children. Remember that your expectations of the childrens' abilities and interests may be different from the people with whom they have regular contact.

Review plans and invite a teachers' representative to comment.

Run it.

Evaluate it.



## Planning accessible events

Whatever kind of event you are planning, much the same considerations apply when you want to make it accessible.

Preparation:

Set your objectives.

Have a clear plan of action. Decide what budget, people and equipment you need to achieve your objectives.

Your plan should:

cover who the target audience is and what resources you have in terms of people, equipment and money;

set out the important tasks to be carried out; and

outline the activities needed to achieve these tasks.

You should agree who the overall project leader is, and who has which responsibilities. For mainstream events it is better to share knowledge and expertise across the organising team than to choose one person to be the 'disability' officer.

Set up a contact point with local disabled people.

Set your overall timetable, and schedule the tasks and activities within it. Include regular review dates and monitoring controls.

Keep control of your event plan. A 'control loop' will help you to do this. It will help you to recognise any shortfalls and take the necessary action to put it right at an early stage.



Use your networks to find out whether anyone else has run a similar event before. Get their help and advice on how to get started.

Set up links with local disabled people. Find out what they think about your idea and what expertise they can bring to planning and developing the event.

Be realistic about your planning timescale, and the scale of the event you have planned. If you haven't worked with disabled people before, and need to develop links with local groups, you will need to allow enough time to achieve this.

Assess whether or not you know enough to be able to handle the event. For larger events, find other partners to run particular activities. This is also a good way of sharing your events good practice with other agencies.

Make your event bigger and better by getting funding from other agencies. Your event may be eligible for grant aid, but you might need to apply well before the event date.

Once you know who is going to be involved, draw up an action plan of who needs to do what by when.

Include contingency' planning in your preparation. Look at the things that can go wrong - think about what you'll do if it rains, or if there's an accident. Do all you can to avoid a drama becoming a crisis.

If you are planning adaptations to a large-scale mainstream event like a county show, consider setting up a disability sub-committee to deal with the kind of issues raised in the Northumberland example, [see below](#). You also need to choose one committee member to sit on the main event committee, to make sure that disability issues are included in the wider policies and plans for the event.

If you're planning to run practical hands-on workshops as part of your event, bear in mind that some people, including some disabled people, may need more time than other people to finish the activity. This may mean that you decide to offer fewer activities within a more generous timescale and with more volunteer support. When you decide what to offer it is best to ask likely users and their personal assistants what's realistic and achievable within the time and budget available.



## Case study 1: Northumberland County Show

The objectives of this BT Countryside for All project were to:

- improve services for disabled people at the Northumberland County Show; and

- increase the number of disabled people going to the show.

Disability groups came together with the Tynedale Agricultural Society to form a disability working group. Their role was to identify and evaluate services for disabled people at the show. From the start they realised they needed to give a realistic picture, so that disabled people could decide whether or not to visit the show.

The group reviewed access, to make sure that everyone could enjoy the whole range of experiences on offer at the event. They looked at services on offer at the show as a whole, including the availability of volunteer support, car parking, and toilet facilities. They then identified ways of making these services accessible. They provided:

- easy access from the car parks to the showground;

- shelter, in case of poor weather;

- accessible viewing areas around the main show arena;

- a wheelchair loan service;

- more accessible toilets;

- some improved path surfacing;

- a clear site plan showing accessible facilities;

- an edited version of the show programme on tape;

- free entry for some personal assistants;

- a tactile map of the site, which blind and partially sighted people could use;

- interpretation for deaf visitors;

- an opportunity to touch some of the animals; and

- trained volunteers.

They also planned an in-depth marketing campaign for disabled people.

All these points were included from an early stage in the Event Management Plan.

## Case study 2: Eastleigh Countryside Service

When Eastleigh Countryside Service opened their accessible Forest Trail, they worked with an arts group and people from a local day centre to produce sculptures to celebrate the event. The arts group talked to the activity leader at the centre. She had a detailed knowledge of people's skills and abilities. The group visited the trail for inspiration, then made the sculptures back at the centre. They then took them back to the site on the day of the event to form the centrepiece.

On the day everyone who took part had the chance to make something. The rangers knew they had to be flexible about timing activities. They also highlighted the extra preparation time needed to attract extra volunteers to support the people taking part.

### Event timing

Plan your events for when people can get there.

Events you hold during the week may attract school parties and people who use day centres, especially if they receive publicity targeted at them well before the event. This will allow time for parents to give permission, and to book support staff and transport. Weekday events will also attract retired people, who may be able to go to the event using their own transport.

Bear in mind that many disabled people will be at work during the week, so may prefer mainstream weekend events. Seasonal changes may have an effect on how many people come to an event. Some disabled people may avoid events held in the winter, or on cold or rainy days. When organising winter events consider whether you can hold the activity, or part of it, under cover. For any event it is a good idea to have a contingency plan to provide some kind of shelter in case the British weather runs true to form!

It is also a good idea not to start daytime events too early or finish them too late. Some people's disabilities will mean it takes them a long time to get ready to go out. If a group is travelling to the event using adapted transport, bear in mind that it may take longer for them to get in and out of the vehicle. School groups may also need to leave the event in the early afternoon to get back to school in time to catch their transport home.

### Providing transport

Think about how people are going to get to the event, and if they can get there using public transport. The event start and finish times should tie in with public transport timetables. Consider laying on extra shuttle services from nearby towns for events. Work with your local Community Transport organiser so that you can also offer adapted transport for groups of disabled people who can't use mainstream services. Provide some reserved parking for orange badge holders as close as possible to the event.

## Promotion

Promotion is an important part of managing events successfully. The size of the event will help you decide how many people you want to attract to it. This will then show you what sort, and how much, promotion you need.

Research has shown that most disabled people will assume that countryside events are not accessible to them unless they are told otherwise. You must publicise the accessible features of your event widely, and well before it takes place, so that people can choose whether or not to come along.

**North West Water** starts its publicity campaign in March for the Rivington Discovery Days which take place in August. This means the Press can plan its coverage. It also gives visitors plenty of advance warning that the event is coming up.

Consider the following points:

Promoting events by using positive images of disabled people will reassure visitors that you have considered their needs, and that if they give it a go they will have a fun day out.

Researching your target market, and developing useful contacts to use in mailshots, is time consuming in the short term, but very valuable in helping you decide the size and content of your event. It will also help you market the event to the right people. You will need to start this research well before your planned event date.

How you promote the event will depend on whether you are planning a mainstream event or one just for disabled people. If it is for organised groups of disabled people, you will probably put more resources into developing specialist mailing lists of local disability groups and day centres.

Not everyone who would benefit from good access will necessarily consider themselves to be disabled, or belong to a disability group. For both mainstream and disabled-only events, make sure you use both your normal mainstream outlets and specialist disability ones to promote the event ([see the Information Guidelines](#)).

When you put your publicity package together, highlight the positive. Avoid making your references disability-specific. For example, in marketing a guided walk you might say: 'Come for a walk on the wild side. Discover what lives along the easy going trail to X'. Describe the access along the route, and promote any special services (for example sign language interpreters). This kind of walk might well attract families with small children and elderly people as well as disabled people. Calling the event 'A guided walk along the disabled trail to X' may give the impression that it is open to disabled people only, and so may attract fewer takers amongst both able-bodied and disabled people.

When you produce publicity material bear in mind the needs of people who are partially sighted. Use clear bold type, large print, and give a good colour contrast with the background ([see Information Sheets 4.2 and 4.4](#)). Put the main text in a normal mixture of upper and lower case writing. Tell people that the event is accessible, and where possible include a contact point or phone number from which people can get more information. If you have a minicom number, include that as well.

Consider publicising the event through press releases, posters, leaflets, roadside signs, shop window displays, entries in local 'What's On' guides, and sponsored or paid advertising.

Marketing outlets include libraries, doctor's surgeries, sports centres, parish and church halls, and tourist information centres. Free newspapers reach a large part of the local population, and can be especially effective in targeting people who don't or can't go out and buy papers.

Marketing through the disability press will reach more disabled people. Most areas of the country are now covered by 'Talking Newspapers' which put news and other information on tape. People with a variety of disabilities use this service. For details of your local distributor, contact the RNIB. Talking Newspapers will need a longer lead-in time for stories than the mainstream press. There may also be local disability groups which produce regular newsletters for their members, and which may be willing to advertise your event.

Positive publicity on the 'disability grapevine' is worth any amount of paid advertising. If you get approval from local disabled people that your event really is designed to be accessible, it will go a long way towards persuading others to give it a try.

### Case study 3: Northumberland County Show

The BT Countryside for All working group wanted to improve access to Northumberland County Show for disabled people. They found through research that few disabled people thought the show would have anything to offer them. It was clear that mainstream publicity was not reaching disabled people, or that they just thought going to the show was not an option because it seemed inaccessible. It was essential to promote the event to disabled people in a positive way.

Details of the support available to disabled visitors were included on the main Northumberland County Show poster. It carried the internationally recognised ear, eye and wheelchair symbols, together with a brief note about the services on offer to disabled people. This was a significant step in recognising that the show organisers should include the information needs of disabled people in campaigns aimed at the whole community.

They sent the mainstream press information. The press were also invited to early planning meetings. They put photographs in the local paper of disabled people working to improve access at the show. Local contacts made sure that the wider local community, including those disabled people who are not members of groups or clubs, knew about the services on offer.

It was also necessary to target publicity directly to people with a wide range of disabilities. This meant setting up a large database of contacts. It was essential to involve disabled people directly in providing information on the network of individuals and organisations who might be interested in coming to the show. Once they had set up these network links, the promotion was much easier.

They also produced a second poster which was targeted directly at disabled people and their advocates. The poster included a phone number for people to book help or just to find out more about what was on offer at the show. The network of local disability organisations like the General Access Northumberland Group, Northumberland Association for the Visually Handicapped, RNIB and Age Concern helped spread information quickly and efficiently to disabled people. The 'Talking Newspapers' publicised material across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

They also received help from Tynedale Council and Northumberland Tourist Information Service, who spread information to schools, libraries, sports centres, parish and church halls, and tourist information centres.



## Case study 4: Rotherham MBC Countryside Service

Rotherham M BC Countryside Service has found that placing regular adverts for its guided walks programme in the local free paper is an effective way of attracting a wider audience to these events. They have now stopped producing an events programme booklet in favour of these adverts.

For the annual accessible 'Dare Devils Day' at Thrybergh Country Park they do a lot of marketing. They discovered that the event circulars they sent to headteachers or heads of centres were not hitting the people who were best placed to respond. Rangers now produce eye-catching event posters which they target at named people within social services and disability organisations. This approach has led to more people taking part in the events on offer.

A two-page write up of one year's event in a local paper was so effective, people were ringing up to book ahead for the following year. Word-of-mouth publicity on the disability grapevine has led to visitors being drawn from a bigger area. The event is now a yearly fixture in the calendar for many groups.

## Staffing

The success of your event will depend on the staff running it, and their imagination in adapting the activities planned to make them accessible.

### Take advice

If you and your team are new to managing accessible events, take advice from people who've done it before.

### Organisation

Most events will have one person, the Event Organiser, in charge. For large events that person may report to an Event Committee.

The Event Organiser may be responsible for staff, volunteers and contractors. Don't assume these people have much experience of working with disabled people. Make sure that you give them detailed instructions as to what you want them to do, and how you want them to do it. Include details of the target audience (for example adults, children, disabled only, mainstream) as well as information on access.

Involve everyone in setting the objectives, and in the planning process. That way everyone knows what they have to do, and they know what support you are providing to help things go smoothly. For example, if you are arranging wheelchair hire or sign language interpretation, everyone else needs to know this so that they can plan for this support in their activity. They can then point people who might want to use such services in the right direction.

People may also need training to help them deliver accessible services on the day. The disabled people advising you may be able to offer disability-awareness training to the team, or recommend a consultant to do it.



### Staffing levels

To make the event run smoothly you may need a higher number of staff and volunteers than with events not designed to be accessible to disabled people. You can use staff to provide one-to-one support in activities where visitors take part. For example, on an earth walk, helpers might push wheelchairs, or give somebody an arm to hang on to when walking on rough ground. Obviously it's up to staff on the day to check with people that they do want help!

It's helpful to have some 'floating' volunteers who can give directions, provide brief respite support, and generally pitch in to help with any hitches which arise on the day.

You need to have one organiser whose specific job is to iron out any problems that may arise. Everyone must know who this person is and how to contact them.

All staff should wear informal name badges so that visitors know who to approach for help and information.

### Training and forward briefing

All staff and volunteers helping with accessible events need to feel confident about working with disabled people. Provide everyone involved with awareness training in disability and the countryside. Offering training like this is one way of recognising the value you place on the role of staff and volunteers in making the event a success.

Include talking and listening to disabled people, 'sympathetic hearing' training, and guidance on leading visually-impaired people and pushing wheelchairs. The volunteer must be trained to listen to and meet the needs of the disabled person. This allows the disabled person to keep control over where they want to go and what they want to do.

#### Case study 5: Northumberland County Show

When they were planning support for disabled people at the show it became clear at an early stage that they needed volunteers with a range of experience. They took on some people experienced in working with disabled people, and extra volunteers who were given basic awareness training. The training stressed the need to ask disabled people what they needed, and not to make assumptions about what people wanted to say or do. During the event, the volunteers were on hand to provide help, including wheelchair pushing and guiding visually impaired people.

#### Case study 6: Northamptonshire County Council

Countryside Service All Northamptonshire County Council Countryside Service staff now receive disability awareness training. This means they consider disability issues whenever they plan and develop events. They still need extra planning time to make sure the event is accessible, but at least they know they have to allow for this!

# Adapting large events to make them accessible

The event will be more successful if you involve disabled people throughout. Use their knowledge of disability as well as your knowledge of running activities.

## Multi-activity days

For multi-activity days ask all activity leaders to give you details beforehand of how they are going to make their activity accessible. You'll also need to know what extra support and materials they'll need to do it. That way you can make sure you've got the necessary support in place beforehand to make it work.

There are no hard and fast rules on adapting activities. Here are some examples of how simple changes can increase accessibility for everyone:



### Physical accessibility

Make sure that the event and as many of its activities as possible are held in an accessible place. Start with a basic site access audit, to see what you've got. Draw up a realistic list of improvements, in order of priority. Your disability advisors should be able to help you with this, and will provide other ideas on what's needed.

For example, for their discovery day, staff at Dunham Massey improved access to a fishing area by taking down part of a fence so that people could get to the lakeside more easily.

If your event site is very large, think about how people are going to get around between activities. For its Taster Day at Rivington, which is spread over two sites, North West Water hired an accessible bus and operated a free shuttle service between activities.

### What to offer

It's best to offer a range of 'doing' and 'watching' activities, so that people can choose how they want to take part. People who can't 'do' very much can still enjoy themselves and feel part of the event.

At Bollin Valley's Discovery Day the activities aim to offer something for everyone. They include making things, displays which are just there for people to look at, abseiling and fortune telling. Although fortune telling might sound a bit frivolous, last time it was one of the most successful activities, perhaps because it provided people with one-to-one personal contact.

Think too about where you place the activities within the overall event. At Rivington, for example, they grouped noisy' and 'quiet' activities in separate areas. This meant people could make a definite choice of the environment in which they felt most comfortable.

### Uniforms

Staff uniforms can be useful in helping visitors see who the event organisers are, but they can also be off putting for less confident people. A compromise is to provide all staff with name badges, sweatshirts or hats to reassure visitors that it is safe to approach them!

### Timing

If people are expected to move from one activity to another at specified times, give them enough time to reach the next activity without having to rush.

Provide some 'background' activities, such as music which can keep people occupied between scheduled events.

### Get a feel for the visitors

If people turn up for an activity and you haven't met them before, spend a few minutes at the start going round quietly asking them if they need any support.

If people bring personal assistants with them, you may need to take your lead from them in deciding what, if any, support to offer.

### Giving instructions

Most people will be new to the activity, so the leader will need to keep the instructions simple. Keep a supply of simple written instructions to hand, which you can give to anyone who cannot hear, or who has difficulty in following verbal instructions. If you know a number of people taking part are deaf, then the Royal National Institution for Deaf People will be able to give you advice on getting hold of sign language interpreters ([see the Interpretation Guidelines](#)).

### Activities where people make things

Provide a range of props and equipment that everyone can use. For example, light spades, large and small hand scissors, and chunky and small crayons. You may need to make further changes to meet people's needs on the day.

Have a range of tasks to allow people with and without good hand control and co-ordination to play a part. Use a high number of volunteers who can support people. It's important to let the visitor take the lead in the activity, and for the assistants not to take over to produce a better end product. Remember, it's their day!

### Animal displays

Some people rarely get the chance to meet animals close up, so having an animal display where they can do this can be very rewarding. These displays also work for people who can't, or don't want to, get involved with more active events. They are also a good way for people who are blind or partially sighted to get a realistic idea of the shape, size and feel of animals. For other people, relating to animals may be easier than relating to people.



### Length of activity

Take account of your audience's attention span when you plan the length of the activity. Make sure everyone is involved in the activity, so they keep warm. Be prepared to make changes on the day if people find parts of the activity too difficult, start getting cold, or lose concentration partway through. Remember your 'wet-weather plan' and be prepared to move or shorten the activities if necessary.

### Be relaxed

Don't worry if some people don't want to take an active part in the activity, or lose interest within a short time. They may well be getting something out of being around other people and being part of the general activity. You can use volunteers to support free spirits so that the main activity can continue for other people.

## Case study 7: Dunham Massey Discovery Days

BT Countryside for All worked with the National Trust to run a two-day taster event for disabled people at its Dunham Massey site. Activities at the event were run by people from a range of organisations from the North of England. They came together to share their knowledge and skills, and to provide quality experiences for the visitors. Many of these visitors were new to countryside recreation and environmental education.

Examples of the accessible activities included the following.

### Oaks and Limes

Open Country and Cheshire Wildlife Trust led an activity which involved exploring an easy access trail along oak and lime avenues. People were encouraged to use all their senses while learning about the natural environment.

### Sight and Sound Trail

This activity was designed for people with limited body control. It encouraged them to become involved with the environment. They could feel the atmosphere, and copy the noises and vibrations to show how they felt. Some people banged sticks together and others rustled piles of leaves.

### Long Horn Cattle

This display used quiet friendly animals to provide a sensory experience for visitors. Some of the people had never touched large animals before. A low-level fence gave easy visual access for wheelchair users, and there was a ramped information stand, bold signing, and tactile displays which they could feel.



## Adapting other activities in your site calendar

We discuss a number of the techniques mentioned in this section in more detail in [the Interpretation Guidelines](#).

### Earth walks

These work well because there's the opportunity to use different senses. The experiences gained through taking part are more important than whether or not people learn the names of all the trees along the route. You can change the walk to suit the needs of the audience. For example, for people who are blind or partially sighted you could build in more opportunities to touch and listen. Contact the Association of Earth Education for more information.

### Conservation activities

These can be a good practical way of getting people involved in the countryside. Nowadays conservation activities can also be linked to NVQs, which gives people the opportunity to get some qualifications at the same time. Organisations like BTCV and the Groundwork Trust can provide advice on adapted equipment which everyone can use.

### Practical demonstrations of countryside skills

These provide the chance to show the process from raw material through to finished product. People can touch, hold or feel the product as it goes through the various stages. Demonstrations can be popular with people who want to have a go at skilled activities like basket making and pole-lathe turning, and those who want to watch the professionals at work.

### Special interest walks

Including bat walks, dawn chorus walks, and identifying birds and plants. These walks are often held at unusual times of day. Evening and early morning walks may involve hearing and other senses, and use audio equipment like bat detectors which blind and partially-sighted people can use.

### Guided walks

At the start of the walk, check whether any visitors have special needs. For example, some people who are deaf or hard of hearing may need to stand close to you so they can lipread what you're saying. Others may find a portable hearing induction loop useful. On walks with large groups, you can use an induction loop to link the walk leaders at the front and the back. They can pass information to each other during the walk and then pass this on to the visitors. The RNID can give you more information on loops.

Plan the walk to include some stopping points, where there is seating. The pace should be set by the slowest members of the group. At stopping points, wait for everyone to catch up before you start talking. Give people a minute or two to rest before you set off again.



Guided walks led by a person in historical costume are a good way of explaining the history of a site. This can make the walk more interesting and enjoyable. People are more likely to take in information offered in this way than if you give it in a straight talk.

#### Case study 8: Castor Hanglands National Nature Reserve walk for hearing impaired visitors

English Nature staff led a walk for hearing-impaired people at Castor Hanglands National Nature Reserve. Before the event, staff received a half day's 'sympathetic hearing' training from the British Association of the Hard of Hearing. They had their new skills tested out by the local branch of the Campaign for Tackling Acquired Deafness, who acted as guinea pigs and gave valuable feedback to make sure that they got it right on the day.

Staff also walked the proposed route beforehand. Some people with hearing impairments also have balance problems. So, it was important to make sure that there were no difficult obstacles such as stiles.

This small amount of extra preparation made sure that the event was a success.

#### Slide shows and talks

These are a great way of introducing people to what the countryside has to offer. Giving talks in a familiar environment, for example at a club or a day centre, is likely to make disabled people (and in some cases their personal assistants) feel more comfortable and more confident about going on to try something new. Make sure that you hold the talk in an accessible venue. Provide a hearing induction loop for people who are hard of hearing. Remember to describe the content of any slides or overheads so that people who are blind and partially sighted are included. Hands-on exhibits and displays will interest everybody.

Seeing a familiar face also makes a big difference, and it helps to maintain and increase people's confidence. So, if you've gone out and given a talk to a group, make sure you are on site to welcome them when they come to the site for the first time.

#### Combination activities

If possible try to offer a combination of activities to add to the interest. For example, if you're doing an evening bat walk with a group of children you could finish up with a barbeque, or even an overnight camp. Obviously you will need more organisation and will need to talk to more people - schools, parents and so on. But, the benefits can be enormous in giving the group access to new experiences. Remember that some disabled people won't normally get out to the countryside except under fairly controlled conditions. They may welcome the chance to be out in the rain or to sleep out of doors!

## Sightseeing trips

When organising sightseeing trips check that the activity and the transport used are accessible. For example, if you're running a boat trip for a group from a local day centre to look for seals, you'll need to:

- give them plenty of notice so that they can book their transport;

- check any special needs so you can plan for them; and

- make sure the boat is accessible and that you have enough support on hand to make sure that you all have an enjoyable day out.



## Pricing policy

How you price events is a factor in how accessible they are to a wide range of people. In disability terms:

- disabled people are likely to have less income than some other visitors;

- they may have extra living costs associated with being disabled; and

- they may in some cases only be able to go to events with support from a personal assistant. Too high a charge, or having to pay for the personal assistant to come too, may put some people off.

Possible solutions include:

- offering low-priced or free events as a way of attracting more visitors from a wider range in the community to the countryside;

- allowing all disabled people entry at the same rate as for unwaged or elderly people; and

- charging the disabled person at the full rate, and a personal assistant at half rate or no charge.

## Advance booking

Setting up a pre-booking system has advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side it can be valuable in giving you some warning of the skills and interest of visitors who might come along. It can also mean you don't get more people turning up than you can cater for. Knowing what to expect allows you to:

- tailor the activity more closely to their abilities;

- take account of any particular communication issues involved. For example, you may need to provide sign language interpretation, or respond to questions from visitors using a pictorial communication board; and

- plan other event services such as transport and catering.

If you expect a lot of people to come to the event, make it clear that you will take bookings on a first come, first served basis. Include a deadline by which people need to book.

On the negative side, booking may be a problem for people whose condition may change and who may not be able to plan their time with certainty before the day. You need to be clear in your own mind that a pre-booking system is essential before you go ahead with it.

## Finance

Set your budget, looking at how much money you need to run the event. Set up regular budget reviews to make sure you're still on target. As with the overall event plan, build in an amount to deal with emergencies.

Making an event accessible may initially involve some extra spending on things like sign language interpretation and wheelchair or scooter hire. However this is likely to be more than offset by the number of extra visitors who come to the event as a result. If you include discounted tickets in your pricing policy, remember that this too will have an effect on your revenue. You may need to find extra money to make the event work.

If finance is a problem, consider asking for sponsorship from local businesses. After all, being able to promote your organisation or service as being disability friendly can have positive long-term effects. You may also be able to get grants from a variety of sources, including District and County Councils, the Countryside Commission, Arts Council, the National Lottery, BT Countryside for All and local charitable trusts. Don't forget that after the event you may need to account to your sponsors for how the money was spent. Keep a record of what went where.

# On-site planning and facilities

## Site identification

Signpost the site. You may need to put up temporary direction signs. Your promotional literature should also include a map and clear directions. A basic and uncluttered map will be easier for everyone, including people with visual impairments, to read. Include details of public transport to or near the site, and details of any special buses being laid on. If you expect groups to arrive in coaches or minibuses, you should check that the vehicles can get to the site easily without risking damage to them or to the surrounding hedgerows.

## Car parking

Research has shown that having accessible car park spaces is crucial for disabled people to be able to take part in countryside activities. Some people will actually turn around and go home again if they cannot find a suitable parking space. This is understandable if the alternative is not being able to get out of the car, or returning to it to find that somebody's parked so close that you can't get back in.

Within your car parking plan you should include a parking area for orange badge holders close to where the activities are to take place. Make sure the person on the gate knows about it so that they can direct vehicles to the right place. Each accessible parking space should be wide enough to allow people to transfer in and out of wheelchairs ([see Information Sheet 2.8](#)). Allow for generous space to the back of minibuses, which may be carrying passengers needing access to a tail lift. Make sure your car park attendants are aware of these needs so that they can deal with casual or thoughtless parking if necessary.

If you cannot provide parking close to the activity area, provide a dropping-off point at the entrance for minibuses and disabled car passengers.





## Reception point and site information

Prepare and staff your reception point well before the event is due to start. Put it close to the entrance most likely to be used by disabled people, and on level ground, with say wheelchair access. It needs to be well signed from all entrances, and from other areas of the site.

Reception staff play an important role in presenting services to disabled people. They will benefit from disability awareness and sympathetic hearing training before the event.

The reception point is an important information centre for visitors, and should be well lit to help visually impaired people read any notices, maps or leaflets. Good lighting will also make lip reading easier for people with hearing impairments.



Provide a hearing induction loop so that hearing-impaired visitors can hear any instructions or directions they're being given. Your local RNID office will be able to give you details of contractors who can provide or install loop systems for you.

Some people with hearing impairments may prefer written rather than spoken instructions. Remember to keep the language fairly basic so it is easy to understand.

Make sure you have enough turning space for wheelchair users. Any displays should be at a height suitable for wheelchair users to see, and should use large print against a good colour contrast (see [Information Sheets 1.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5](#)).



Provide a large uncluttered map of the site, marked with the place of each major activity. Make sure that you put it up the right way round. The map should be placed where wheelchair users can stop and read it without causing an obstruction to other people. If this isn't possible, produce photocopies of the site plan which visitors can use around the site. Contact a local blind and partially-sighted group or school to get some hand-held tactile site plans produced. These can be very valuable in helping people have confident independent access around the site, and to be able to make their own choices about where to go and what to do.

If you are using volunteers or equipment to support disabled people during the event, the logical pick-up point is the reception area, or somewhere very close at hand.

## Case Study 9: Rotherham MBC Thrybergh Country - Park 'Dare Devils' Day

For its targeted 'Dare Devils Day', staff made sure that they met all visitors and took them to the reception area, where they were booked in and received an information pack. The information in the pack meant they could get around the site activities on their own. The activities were also clearly signposted.

Some activities offered at the event were 'one offs' not normally on offer at the country park. People taking part who wanted to follow an interest in the future were given appropriate local contacts so they could follow it up back home.

### Interpretation

Interpretation is an important way of explaining to visitors about the event and its countryside surroundings. The most effective way of doing this is through direct personal contact - you as the event organiser, walk leader or activity helper talking to the customer. For all visitors remember that you're trying to get a message across and give them something memorable to take home. Don't use unnecessary technical jargon or get carried away and talk for too long. Be prepared to repeat information, or to phrase it in a different way, to allow people to understand it more easily.

If you are demonstrating a skill or a process, encourage visitors to have a go at the same time. If necessary they can mirror your actions. Again, be prepared to repeat the process until people have got the hang of what they have to do.

If you are producing a leaflet to go with the event, bear in mind that the visitor will often keep it and read it later on. Don't try to use it to explain absolutely everything that's going on. Concentrate on important points, and use basic language. It can be helpful to include a simple site map on the back of the leaflet ([see Information Sheets 4.2 and 4.4](#)).



### Signs

On-site signposts need to be clear, and use good colour contrasts against the background. Fluorescent colours work best for people with visual impairments. Some people will need to get really close to signs before they can read them, so don't put them too high. Signs are also essential for people with hearing impairments, who may find it difficult to ask for directions and to hear the answer against what may be a noisy background with lots going on. Include distance information on signposts. This is particularly helpful to people who get tired easily, and for those with small children ([see Information Sheets 4.5 and 4.7](#)).



## Equipment

Events which offer special activities such as angling, pond dipping or practical conservation tasks will need specialist equipment, often in large quantities. It may also be necessary to provide some adapted equipment to give disabled people the chance to take part. Refer back to the section on page 14 for some ideas on how to do this. At the planning stage remember to talk to specialist activity leaders, or a teacher at a local special school, to get their advice on practical adaptations and help for the event.

Providing wheelchairs for hire can make a big difference to the people who come to the event. If people need to pre-book wheelchairs, remember to include this information in your advance publicity material. It's harder to push on grass and over what is likely to be uneven ground than it is on a hard even surface. Power chairs or electric scooters may be more effective, and less energy sapping for the user, than manual chairs. Scooters with four wheels are more stable than those with three wheels. If you do go for manual chairs, avoid the small-wheeled transit type, which rely on a pusher and which are prone to snag on any uneven ground.



When you offer equipment for hire, you should give the user instructions on how to use it. Make sure that this hire service is included under your insurance cover. See the section on ['Insurance'](#) for more details.

If any on-site buildings have steps at the entrance, provide a portable ramp so that wheelchair users can get in and out. You can hire or buy portable ramps from shops which sell equipment for disabled people.

## Support services

The larger the event, the more need there is to provide support services. Some or all of the following may be appropriate.

### Toilets

Providing accessible toilet facilities for your event will make all the difference to people's ability to stay at the event longer. There should be at least one unisex toilet which both sexes can use, so that a personal assistant of the opposite sex can provide help if necessary. If your site doesn't have toilet facilities, or if the loos are not accessible, hire some accessible Portaloos. You can get these from a number of suppliers. Place the toilets close to main activities, so that people don't have to go a long way from the action to use them.

If you're planning a guided walk or other off-site activity, make sure your loo stops are accessible. Check beforehand, taking advice from your local access group.

## Marquees and tents

These provide weather protection to displays, demonstrations and people. If you put small, emergency shelter marquees at intervals around large sites, it will add to visitors' comfort and confidence, knowing that if the skies open they don't have far to go to get dry.

It is also worth considering providing a 'respite tent', which your visitors can use if they need to rest quietly for a short while.



## Catering

If you are providing catering for the event, ask the caterers or your site volunteers to offer help to customers if necessary with carrying trays or cutting up food. Some people will find it easier to eat sitting down, so provide some tables and chairs. The tables will need to be big enough for wheelchair users to get in close. Large plates, strong cutlery, and plastic drinking straws can also make the difference between eating and going hungry.

If you are using an off-site catering venue, for example stopping for a pub lunch as part of a guided walk, check the access beforehand, preferably with a disabled person, so that you're not caught out on the day.

## First aid

All events need first-aid cover. The bigger the event the more cover you need. Agree with the first aiders how much cover you need, including:

- accommodation needs;
- fees or donation needed;
- a register of the cases treated; and
- the availability of phones for emergencies.

Make sure that emergency vehicles will be able to get on and off site easily.

## Communications

If you're going to use radios or mobile phones, check beforehand that they work on that site, and think about other options in case they fail on the day. Make sure visitors know where your payphones are.

## Insurance

Confirm your insurance cover before the event, and be aware of specific exclusions, such as any upper or lower age limits on volunteers or visitors. If you're working on somebody else's site then it is likely that you will be covered by their insurance. But you must check this out, and be prepared to take out extra cover if necessary. If you are in any doubt, consult a specialist insurance broker.

If you are going to use any extra specialist equipment to give disabled people the chance to take part, it is worth taking a few precautions to avoid possible problems.

Take out extra insurance on equipment like outdoor scooters and wheelchairs, and for hired gear like generators. Some specialist activities, such as hang-gliding, will need extra specialist cover.

If you're offering equipment like scooters and wheelchairs for hire by members of the public, you should take out third party liability in case they run into other people, and so on.

Provide hirers with safety information and basic training in how to use the equipment.

Depending on what your insurance company asks for, get people hiring your equipment to leave their name and address in case of problems. You may also want to include a statement, which the hirer signs, to say that you have explained all the equipment controls to them.

## Health, safety and welfare

Do all you can to plan for possible dangers or other factors which might affect the health, safety or welfare of the event organisers, helpers or visitors. Start by reading local authority or voluntary organisation health and safety guidelines. You should also read any relevant codes of conduct relating to managing particular activities, and information on choosing staff to work with particular groups such as children. Involve the local access officer or access group in any site safety audit, to make sure that you pick up on any disability requirements.

On the day give one of the organisers the job of dealing with any problems that may arise. Have some 'floating' volunteers around the place to provide extra support where needed.

## Evaluating the event

Evaluation is an important part of providing services. You can use it to highlight the good and bad points of how you managed the event, to provide raw material for your events report, and to help you plan the next one.

Ask your activity leaders and helpers what worked and what didn't, and what if any adaptations they made to their activities to make them accessible. Include the following questions.

Was their activity staged in an accessible place?

Did the equipment work?

Did they have enough volunteer support?

How many people took part?

Would they run the activity again?

What would they do differently another time?

Remember to keep notes on this feedback.

You can get feedback from visitors both verbally through their comments to staff on the day, and by means of questionnaires either filled in on the day or given to people to return later. Note down all verbal feedback before you forget it!

Some disabled people may lack the confidence to make negative comments to rangers, often because they feel that any services for disabled people are better than none. As a result it's always best to give a postal address to which comments can be sent to on how the event was managed. This option also allows people more time to reflect on the day and come up with wider-ranging feedback, or to respond using a typewriter, computer or on audio tape.

If you do want feedback on the day, provide some volunteers to help people fill the forms in. These should be different people from those who have worked with the customers at the event, so that they can say what they really think.

### Case Study 10: Northumberland County Show

On the day of the show disabled people were asked to fill in questionnaires to say what they thought about the services which were provided for them. The working group also got feedback by phone from local access groups. All this feedback was given to the main show committee so that they could provide even better services in the future.

Producing a written report is useful for larger or unusual events, and allows you to formally acknowledge the support given to you by organisers, helpers and sponsors, and to plan future events. You can use the report to raise the profile of the event amongst important people in the community, support future funding applications, and as a valuable tool to share your good practice amongst other event managers.

Once all the excitement's over, remember to thank everyone who's been involved in the event. Write to people, so that they've got a permanent record, which they may want to use as feedback for their own employer or sponsoring organisation. Also, if people feel you appreciated their efforts, they're more likely to be willing to help you again next time round.





# Appendix

## Making the event environment accessible: a checklist

### Placing the activities around the site

When putting your plan together think about the following:

How far from the car park the entrance or activity is. Make sure orange badge holders can park or be dropped off close to where the action is.

Put your activities in accessible parts of the site.

Place accessible toilets close to the activities.

Group 'noisy' and 'quiet' activities in different areas.

On guided walks, tie in some stopping points with rest or seating areas, and give people time to recover before setting off again.

### Site information and interpretation

Be prepared to put across site information using a range of different methods. Some people will find one-to-one chats with staff best. Others prefer written information which they can take away and use to get themselves around the site independently.

Provide tactile maps for blind and partially-sighted people to use.

Make any written information and interpretation accessible.

If you are using leaflets and self-guided trails, provide standard-text, large-print, audio-tape and Braille versions.

Put together an information pack which all visitors can collect from the reception point when they arrive. They can use this to find their way around.

Make sure that activities are well signposted. Use consistent colour-coded signs throughout the site so that people know what to look out for. Place these signs at a low level so that people can get up close to read them.

### Support services

Make sure that you have enough staff and volunteers on site to provide information, advice and directions to visitors. They should be able to offer direct support to individuals in particular activities.

Give all staff name badges so visitors know who they can approach.

Give your staff disability awareness training.



Fit hearing induction loops in important places, including the reception point.

Provide accessible toilets on site. You can hire these for the event. At least one accessible toilet must be able to be used by both sexes.

Provide portable ramps where there are steps. You can hire ramps for the event if you need to.

Make bigger stable props for people to use during activities.

Provide accessible shuttle transport services around large sites.

Provide wheelchairs and scooters for hire so that people can get around the site on their own.

Place tents around the site to cater for emergency shelter and respite care.

If you are providing catering, make a few tables and chairs available, and also have some strong cutlery, drinking straws and large plates.

Provide first aiders, and make sure you've got access to a phone in case of emergencies.

Remember to have a plan in case of bad weather.



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# Least Restrictive Access Guidelines



Improving access for disabled people on  
all countryside paths and trails



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Least Restrictive Access Guidelines

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# Introduction

The two most useful tools you can use when improving countryside access for disabled people on countryside paths are the [BT Countryside for All Standards](#) and the concept of least restrictive access. The standards help you see the levels of accessibility that are acceptable for most disabled people. You can use the least restrictive access approach in all your countryside access work so that where levels of access are not as good as the standard, they are as good as they can be for as many disabled people as possible.

Most disabled people accept that not all areas of the countryside can be made fully accessible. On the other hand they have a reasonable expectation that 'man-made' features in the countryside (such as gates, paths and seats) have taken into account their needs. The natural character and topography of the countryside exists without reference to the needs of visitors. Hills may be steep or shallow, ground conditions may be firm and easy to traverse or rugged and crossed only with difficulty. Paths, gates and other 'man-made' features have been put there by someone.

In carrying out access work countryside managers make decisions as to how what they provide can be used by different visitors. The standards and the least restrictive access process are tools to help them make choices that provide better accessibility for all. To develop and manage paths and other features which are not as accessible as they could be is to discriminate against disabled people. [Figure 1](#) illustrates a viable process that will guide you in providing greater accessibility to countryside paths. Each stage in the process is discussed more fully later in these guidelines.

Achieving the least restrictive access results from the effective balancing of three factors:

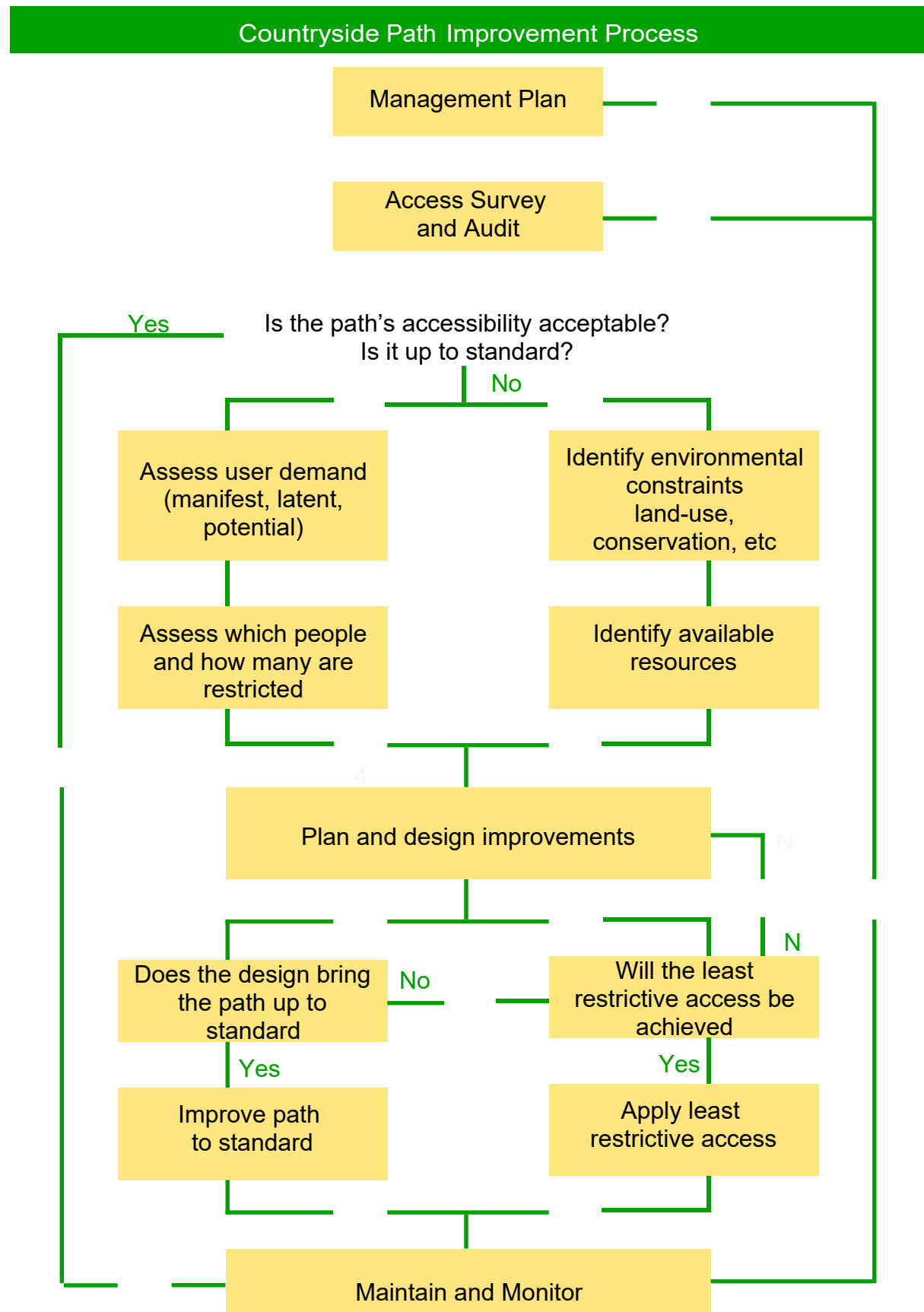
who will be restricted:- which people with and without disabilities are unable or restricted in using the path; ([See Appendix 1 - The Access Needs of Disabled People in the countryside](#))

how will they be restricted:- the degree to which people with and without disabilities may not be able to use the path at all or only with unreasonable effort, discomfort or inconvenience; ([See Appendix 2 - Access Restrictions](#) and [Appendix 3 - Gaps, Gates and Stiles and their Use by Disabled People](#))

remedial cost:- the costs both economic and environmental of getting rid of features of the path that restrict any users with or without disabilities.



Figure 1 - Achieving the Least Restrictive Access



The following sections take you through each step of the process shown in Figure 1 by which you can achieve the least restrictive access.

## Access Audit

You need to know how accessible your paths are before you make any changes to them. You should carry out a simple survey or audit to measure the things that count with respect to disabled people's ability to use your paths. Through a survey or audit you will find out which paths meet the BT Countryside for All standard. It can also help you to plan a programme of work so that path improvements can achieve the least restrictive access. Surveys and audits differ in the level of detail in the information collected. ([see Accessibility Surveys and Audit Audits Guidelines](#))

A whole section of this good practice guide has been devoted to guidelines on accessibility surveys and access audits because they are fundamental to a sound approach to access for disabled people. You need to have an understanding of the factors that are likely to influence how easily disabled people can use your countryside paths, and you need to know when there are problems on your paths how these factors will affect disabled people's ability to use them.

## User Demand

It is important to consider who uses your paths. To be cost effective any expenditure of time, effort or money on a path must take into account who uses it, how many people use it and for what purpose.

Undertaking access improvement work on a countryside path specifically to improve accessibility for disabled people will often be a reasonable course of action to take. At other times you may wish to upgrade the service offered by a path to the general public, or you may need to control environmental damage on a particular route. In each case the demand from users should influence the planning, design and construction of path improvements. There is more than one aspect to user demand:

Manifest demand is the actual use of the path now. You need to have some estimate of the number of people actually using the path at present and their reasons for choosing the route. Such factors are obviously going to be relevant to planning for use in the future. People using a path now are a good source of information about existing problems and difficulties and the sort of improvements that might be appropriate.

Latent demand relates to those people who would like to use the path but do not currently do so. Latent demand may be quite high among disabled people if there are physical restrictions along a path that prevent them from using it now.

Potential demand is the additional use that could materialise if improvements make it a more attractive option for a wider range of people.



You are not likely to find many disabled people using a path which at present has poor accessibility. If you just consider manifest demand you may find existing users do not feel there is too much wrong. However, there may be people in the catchment of the path who are not using it because they find it too difficult. You could consider whether there are any residential of day centres for elderly or disabled people in the area and find out if the path could have higher value to them if it were to be improved.

## Who and how many people are restricted

At this point you need to refer to [Appendices 1, 2 and 3](#) which will help you see how disabled people may be affected by the twelve criteria in the BT Countryside for All standards. The appendices will guide you in estimating how many people will be restricted by the factors you identified in your access audit. You will also gain an idea of the degree to which various limitations will apply to different people and their ability to use the path.

Be wary of making general assumptions about accessibility. If allowed to go at their own pace someone with limited mobility or impaired balance may cope with rough terrain though they may find a stile an absolute barrier. Even along quite difficult routes some improvements could make things a lot better for some people even if other minor problems remain.

Similarly you may not feel improvements are worth making because of the general condition of a route and the fact that you cannot afford to do it all or bring it all up to standard. Only after you have looked at who and how many disabled people will be restricted by the various problems along the path will you be able to evaluate the benefits that can be gained by a range of accessibility improvements. This evaluation allows you to balance costs and benefits. Remember that benefits are not only based on the numbers of users but on the quality of experiences that they can derive from using the route.



## Environmental Constraints

The environmental quality or landscape value area should not be considered as a factor that will limit the scope for accessibility improvements to a path. The opposite should be the case on the basis that the better or more attractive a landscape is, the more disabled people should have the right to enjoy it along with everyone else.



If you work on the basis that accessible paths are intrusive in high quality landscapes you will tend to provide good access for disabled people only in poorer quality environments. That is discrimination. ([see Guidelines on the Implications of the DDA for Countryside Managers](#))

You will also discriminate against disabled people if your access work is to a poor level of accessibility to deliberately restrict the numbers or type of users on a path. If poor access conditions are used to control visitor numbers the effect will be more marked on disabled people than other visitors and this is again discriminatory. If visitor numbers need to be controlled other access management methods that are equitable in their impact should be used.

The development or improvement of accessibility along countryside paths may conflict with environmental concerns in relation to conservation, land use or aesthetics. Most access managers will have to make judgements when such conflicts arise. Having a policy context is important so that such judgements take account of the different issues impacting on the situation.

For instance, in an area where stone walls form the majority of field boundaries, traditional stiles may be historically important in the landscape. Gates are typically reasonable replacements or adjuncts to stiles as a way of improving access for disabled people. Over a whole network of paths there might be several dozen stiles. Because of their historical importance it may not be reasonable for all the stiles to be replaced by gates with the consequent loss to the local heritage. At the same time it is unlikely to be acceptable to refuse to replace any stiles as this may be the only way of providing reasonable access for disabled people. Policies that take account of both the historic value of the stiles and the legitimate needs and rights of disabled visitors will help you to deal with each situation as it arises. You could consider prioritising stiles that can be replaced or those that must be retained according to their historical significance and the extent to which they block the development of an accessible network. Such a policy will allow you to tell visitors who cannot gain access why the position is as it is.

## Conservation

If you have any concerns that access for disabled people will conflict with conservation interests you might be better considering if access for the public in general conflicts with conservation. The aim is to manage all access equitably including access to conservation areas. Disabled people do not want access at the expense of conservation any more than does any one else. After all disabled people enjoy and benefit from our high value environments as much as everyone else.

Such issues as disturbance to wildlife or physical change to the environment are not specifically related to access for disabled people. That is not to say occasional conflicts will not need to be addressed. For instance, where path widening will encroach onto a special habitat or where the materials necessary to achieve an accessible path would adversely effect the local ecology. As mentioned above you should have a policies which anticipate conflicts and provide the means of resolving them as each case arises.

Good countryside access management benefits both accessibility and conservation in many situations:

All visitors tend to follow the better paths. They are easy to follow and people use them more often, so that where you have made access improvements public pressure can be channelled along the managed, maintained routes.

The easiest route is often the one most people will follow. Where you want to direct visitors away from sensitive areas a path with good accessibility restrictive access can have a useful management role.

Accessibility improvements often have a positive environmental impact. Constructing paths over difficult ground to reduce erosion or disturbance may often and coincidentally improve accessibility for some disabled people.



For example, the proliferation of braided paths where people have worn through the thin turf can be a problem in sand dune areas. Board walks are a means of protecting the environment and, if appropriately designed, can provide better access for disabled people who would never otherwise have reached that environment.

Poor paths may be uncomfortable for all users not just disabled people. For example, a poorly drained section of a track around an upland lake was filled with large 'ankle-cracking' stones . Many visitors walked around this repair in the same way as they had walked around the wet area. A better solution for everyone would have been to repair the area to a more accessible surface. This would have prevented the additional erosion created by visitors and been more accessible for disabled people.

## Aesthetics

The appearance of an area matters to countryside visitors. The attractiveness of an area is often the most important reason people seek access to it.

However, because an area is of high landscape value that does not mean levels of accessibility within it should be lowered.

Disabled people want and have the right to enjoy the best landscapes alongside everyone else. Subjective judgements about the attractiveness of an area and the level of intrusion that good accessibility will create should be avoided. At the same time everyone, including disabled people would want to avoid disturbing the fundamental nature of an area through inappropriate interventions. If access is to be provided in an area then that access should be equitable.



These guidelines only apply the accessibility standards and the least restrictive access approach where interventions such as construction, repair or maintenance work are to be made. Here you must deal with the way the works will fit into the landscape. There will rarely be much difference between an accessible path and an inaccessible one in terms of their landscape impact. In assessing the impact of path improvement proposals consider the following:

The use of intrusive materials (e.g. tarmac or concrete) may be inappropriate but more sympathetic materials may well be available to help you achieve desirable accessibility performance specifications.

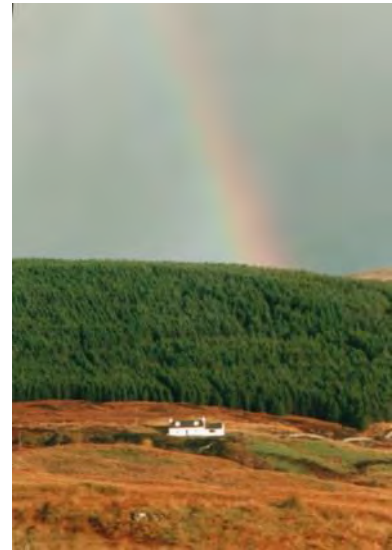
Creative design should always be used to minimise the impact of construction in 'natural' landscapes. Find out about good practice in other areas. Make demands of and challenge landscape architects, engineers and designers to find solutions which fit into the landscape without sacrificing accessibility.

In assessing if an accessible path is appropriate because of how it looks in the landscape, decisions should not be made by comparison to the raw, 'natural' appearance of the area. This is because you are usually going to be considering an accessible path where there is already an existing route or where you have already accepted the development of a route for general visitors. The comparison in terms of intrusion should be between an accessible route and an inaccessible route. This difference is likely to be small if good design practices are followed.



## Land Use

You should again take care not to confuse the general conflicts between land use (e.g. farming or forestry) and access with issues concerning access for disabled people. For instance, many land owners are rightly concerned about the liabilities they may face as a result of public access to their land. There should be no additional liabilities arising because disabled people have access. Similarly there should be no additional loss of utility or limitation to land use activities arising from disabled people sharing access with other members of the public. Disabled people are as responsible for themselves as any other visitors to the countryside and must accept the same terms of access.



Nuisance factors can arise for land owners as a result of public access. Disabled people are certainly no more likely to cause problems than anyone else. However, there are occasionally times where improved accessibility can allow other people to create a nuisance, for instance, where gates are left open and stock wander or where illicit use of motor bikes is possible through accessible areas. You should not blame disabled people for this situation and these sorts of problem should not be an excuse to limit accessibility. Where a restricted gate is the only solution to ensure stock proofing or to keep out motor bikes you should be able to justify the restriction that will result for disabled people.

Where land use activities cause temporary disruption to access routes you may have the opportunity to make improvements to accessibility on reinstatement. For instance, where a forest track is to be renovated following logging operations, it may be possible to achieve a higher level of accessibility by focussing on surface condition and gradients without any additional expenditure or effort.

## Available Resources

Although anything is possible, if sufficient money is available, realistically you have to relate the level of accessibility you can provide to the availability of your resources.

In the past provision for disabled people was often seen as a resources issue. “Of course we would provide good access we just can’t afford it.” You should not see the provision of access for disabled people as an additional cost that can be accepted or rejected at will. The [Disability Discrimination Act](#) makes this approach inappropriate and potentially illegal. Certainly resources are an issue in so far as countryside access generally needs resources for maintenance as well as improvements. However, it is no longer appropriate to say that you can only provide accessibility if additional resources are available. The DDA requirement is to apply whatever resources are available without discrimination against disabled people. Typically this will mean that across a path network there will be some fully accessible routes, even though you cannot afford to provide accessibility everywhere ([See Countryside Path Networks](#)).

To identify the least restrictive access for a path you will need to know the resources you have available (money, materials, staff time, volunteers, etc). This information should be used alongside your assessments of user demand and current access restrictions to enable you to decide what can be achieved.

The following points will help you evaluate how your available resources can be applied to improving accessibility.

Not all accessibility improvements have a net cost. For instance the removal of unnecessary gates or stiles can save money.



The cost of path construction and maintenance can not all be attributed to accessibility for disabled people. Where you are building new paths, attention to the details of surface finish, linear and cross gradients to meet the needs of disabled people may make little if any difference to the overall cost.

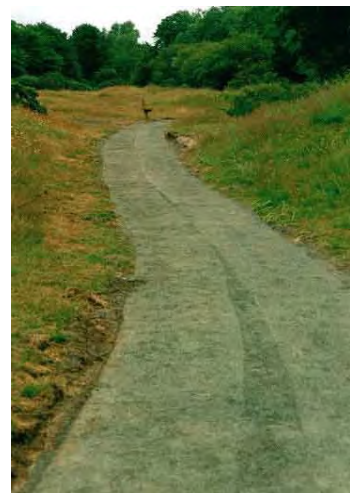
Well constructed paths that provide good accessibility may incur lower maintenance costs over the long term and be a good investment for limited budgets.

There may be additional benefits from improving accessibility that you can offset against costs, for instance where access for children or other users is improved.



Poor accessibility has a cost where disabled visitors and those accompanying them cannot utilise facilities. Loss of income at car parks or other facilities may need to be taken into account.

Maintenance programmes can provide the opportunity to make accessibility improvements, for instance, where minor regrading is necessary and the surface of a path can be improved.



You should consider the practicality of using your resources. It is important to ensure that your expenditure produces the desired results with respect to accessibility. If your planning shows that you will not achieve satisfactory accessibility you should review your priorities for this spending. Would it be better to wait for more resources to become available or could the resources be used more effectively elsewhere?



## Planning & Design

On entering the detailed planning and design process you should have collected information and made evaluations of the following:

- the current condition of the access
- the scope and extent of current restrictions
- user demand
- environmental considerations
- available resources



This information will enable you to include accessibility as one of the factors you consider in planning and designing countryside access. In the past the needs of disabled people were often left as an after thought. You may wish to think about accessibility being at the forefront of your planning until a higher level of service provision for disabled people has been achieved. In any event accessibility should be part of the planning process from the outset and you should give it as much weight as any of the other factors you have to consider. That does not mean accessibility takes priority over everything else, but you should ensure that where other factors are given a greater priority it has been a conscious decision that you can justify and not an oversight.

On all paths the twelve parameters that affect disabled people's access to the countryside remain the key to setting design objectives and formulating improvement proposals. [Table 1](#) illustrates how you should react if any of these parameters do not currently meet the desired standard but have the potential to be improved.

The impact of making path improvements that do not meet all the required specification for all the parameters will vary according to which ones have been changed. Clearly if surface and gradients have been improved along a path but a stile or a set of steps remain, there will be many people for whom the path remains an impossibility. If the width of a path has been increased but the surface remains unstable and uneven, there may be little accessibility improvement for people who are unsteady on their feet but do not require the support of a companion.

In some cases the parameters interact to influence accessibility. For instance, it is often the combination of surface conditions and gradients that determine the overall level of accessibility of a path. In general terms the steeper the gradients (both linear gradients and cross gradients) the better the surface needs to be to afford the same level of accessibility.

For example you may be able to bring the steepness of a gradient down from 1:6 to 1:8 without significantly increasing the cost but to create a 1:10 might treble the cost. It might therefore be reasonable to settle for a 1:8 but to provide the best surface possible at this point with good resting points to enable the maximum level of accessibility.

Table 1 - Actions to be taken to achieve the least restrictive access

Parameter	Action	Comments
Width	keep the path as wide as possible	people who need the support of a companion don't have to walk in single file wheelchair users can manoeuvre comfortably
Surface	reduce amount and depth of loose material ensure good compaction	less trip risk for people who are unsteady on their feet less effort needed by wheelchair users more comfort for most users
Barriers	remove or redesign stiles, restrictive gate and vehicle barriers	stiles are an absolute barrier to many disabled people and inconvenient for most people
Passing places	provide more space	wheelchair users and people with visual or mobility impairments need space to manoeuvre
Resting places	provide seats or perches	people with stamina, strength or balance impairments need to rest
Linear gradient	reduce gradient as much as possible	wheelchair users and people with stamina difficulties cannot climb steep gradients
Landings	provide frequent landings along slopes and ramps	wheelchair users and people with stamina difficulties need to rest when climbing gradients
Cross gradient	reduce cross gradients as much as possible	wheelchair users and people with balance impairments may struggle on sloping paths
Surface breaks	reduce all gaps in board walks, grills as much as possible	people using sticks or canes may trip or snag in wide gaps the front wheels of wheelchairs can get caught in wide gaps
Level changes	remove all steps wherever possible	even small 'steps' can be a barrier or discomfort to wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments trip risks are reduced for all
Clearance	remove all obstacles intruding from above and beside the path	people with visual impairments will face difficulties

Once proposals for access improvements have been prepared it is worth checking the expected extent of restrictions that will still apply. By re-examining your reasoning for not being able to remove these restrictions you should be able to prepare a justification to disabled people and others who might question the eventual level of accessibility.

## Conclusions

The issue of access to the wider countryside for disabled people is not just a question of improving a few paths and removing a few barriers. The countryside is a dynamic and complicated environment that is not always receptive to standardised solutions. However, there are processes which can be followed to assist the effective integration of accessibility and access:

- the establishment of policies which address equality, the application of resources, consultation, staff training and evaluation;

- the development of strategies and SMART objectives which are based on the establishment of priorities on which stakeholders have been fully consulted;

- the planned accessibility across countryside networks using surveys, consultation, prioritisation, programming and the setting of targets;

- the pursuit of the least restrictive access achievable in all situations by balancing the scope and extent of the restrictions that are or will be imposed on disabled people, against economic and environmental costs.

The following appendices will give you a great deal of information on the countryside access restrictions that disabled people face. You may find it difficult at first to grasp the diversity that exists among disabled people. Equally you may find it very difficult to make the judgement as to how much is an acceptable cost for overcoming one or a few of these restrictions.

The best advice we can give you is don't try to do this on your own, at least to begin with and until you have some experience of the issues. Talk to disabled people. Talk to colleagues. Talk to other countryside users. Contact us at the Fieldfare Trust. The DDA asks for reasonable action to provide reasonable access. If you involve other stakeholders you will generally find that you can usually reach a consensus on an appropriate course of action.

## Appendix 1

### The Access Needs of Disabled People in the Countryside

Disability	Description	Assistive Devices Used	User Requirements in the Countryside
<b>Physical Disabilities</b>			
Mobility	A person with mobility impairment will either be unable to walk or only be able to walk with some degree of difficulty.	Wheelchair (manual or electric), buggy, walking aid, walking stick or sticks or none	A person with a mobility impairment can be enabled to use the countryside by ensuring that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; there are no physical barriers across the path</li> <li>&gt; that the path surface is suitable and not uneven</li> <li>&gt; that the gradient and cross-fall of the path are acceptable</li> <li>&gt; that there are suitable seats or resting places</li> <li>&gt; and that the path is wide enough.</li> </ul>
Dexterity	A person with dexterity impairment will find it difficult to do complicated or intricate tasks with their hands.	None suitable for use in the countryside	A person with dexterity impairment can be assisted to use the ensuing countryside by ensuring that they do not have to do any complicated or intricate tasks. Ensuring that any gate latches, ticket machines, leaflet dispensers or similar are easy and straightforward to achieve this.
Reach	A person with a reduced reach will find it difficult to do any tasks where they can not be positioned immediately adjacent to the task.	None suitable for use in the countryside	A person with a reduced reach can be assisted to use the countryside by ensuring that any objects that the person has to manipulate such as locks, gate latches or ticket machines are situated at a suitable height directly adjacent to the path.
Balance	A difficulty with balance may be experienced by a person as a side effect of a sensory disability or cognitive disability. A person with a problem with balance will find it difficult to walk on uneven surfaces and may require support as they walk	Support stick or sticks.	A person with a balance problem will be assisted if the path surface is not uneven and if handrails are provided at suitable points on the path. Suitable resting places or seats may also be of use.

Disability	Description	Assistive Devices Used	User Requirements in the Countryside
<b>Physical Disabilities</b>			
Strength and Stamina	A person with reduced strength will have problems carrying out any task which requires power This could include climbing a steep slope or manipulating a difficult lock. A person with reduced stamina will have problems carrying out long and continuous tasks.	In some cases a wheelchair or stick may be used	A person with reduced strength or stamina will be assisted to use the countryside by ensuring that tasks such as opening gates or climbing slopes are as easy to do as possible. Suitable resting places or seats will enable the person to rest and make best use of their strength.
Height	A person with dwarfism will be short with a reduced reach. They may also have some degree of mobility problems	None	To enable a person with dwarfism to use and enjoy the countryside it is necessary to ensure that there are no physical barriers that they can not negotiate, that the path is not uneven or too steep. They will also require that any objects that they have to manipulate such as locks or ticket machines are situated at a suitable height directly adjacent to the path.
<b>Sensory Disabilities</b>			
Vision	A person who is blind or partially sighted will have problems carrying out tasks which require vision. The vision loss may be total blindness (18% of blind and partially sighted people), have general vision loss, have central vision loss, peripheral vision loss or areas of vision loss. They may have increased sensitivity to glare. It may also take longer for their eyes to adapt to changing light levels.	A mobility aid (long cane, guide cane, symbol cane or guide dog) can be used to assist a person to find a clear path to travel through. A low vision aid (magnifying glass, or monocular) can be used to assist a person to see features of the countryside.	A person with a visual impairment can be assisted by ensuring that they can make best use of their vision and by ensuring that where possible information is provided in tactile or audio forms. Methods of assisting a blind or partially sighted person would include ensuring; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; that the path has a different tactile surface to the surrounding area,</li> <li>&gt; the paths is wide enough for a visually impaired person to be accompanied by a sighted guide (1200mm)</li> <li>&gt; there are no features to negotiate just after a large change in light levels (for example just after leaving or entering a wood),</li> <li>&gt; that there are no unexpected obstacles,</li> <li>&gt; that any locks or gates are simple and straightforward to use,</li> <li>&gt; that where possible information is available audibly or tactually as well as visually.</li> </ul>



Disability	Description	Assistive Devices Used	User Requirements in the Countryside
Hearing	A person with a hearing loss may have a general hearing loss or may have lost a certain band of frequencies. The type and amount of their hearing loss will effect whether they can hear speech, birdsong or other countryside sounds.	Hearing aid to assist the user to use their remaining hearing. When they are in a safe place this can be switched to the 'T' position to enable them to use loop systems. A notepad may be used for short messages.	A person with a hearing impairment may have problems obtaining information from countryside staff and other users. Ensuring that information is available visually as well as audibly will assist them. A person who has sign language as their first language may have problems with over complex written information.
Vision and Hearing	The degree of vision and hearing loss experienced by a person can vary considerably, a person may have mild or extreme vision and hearing loss.	A person who is deaf blind may use a hearing aid or aids and/or a guide dog or a long cane with red bands on it.	The design features for hearing impaired and visual impaired people will help many deaf blind people
<b>Other Disabilities</b>			
Learning	A person with a learning disability will have difficulties understanding complicated tasks or instructions.	None	People with a learning disability can be assisted by ensuring that any information given out or displayed is easy to use.
Illiteracy	A person may have a problem with written information if they have a learning disability or if they had problems at school or if their first language is not English.	None	Any written information should be as clear and concise as possible. The use of pictograms may be helpful to some people but pictograms are often not recognisable by people with partial sight or with a learning disability or with a different cultural background. Pictograms should therefore always be accompanied by text.
Speech	A person with speech impairment will either be unable to, or find it difficult to speak.	An electronic communication aid or a notebook and pen may be used to communicate	Any staff or countryside rangers should be willing to communicate as required

Disability	Description	Assistive Devices Used	User Requirements in the Countryside
Multiple Disabilities	Any staff or countryside rangers should be willing to communicate as required Many disabled people will have complex needs.	Various	A user may have a number of different requirements to enable them to use the countryside. The meeting of one need should not preclude the meeting of other needs.

## Appendix 2 - Access Restrictions

The tables below are designed to meet the need expressed by countryside access managers to be able to recognise the effects on disabled people where path criteria fall below the BT Countryside for All standards. These observations cannot be taken as definitive because of the enormous diversity of disabled people. They illustrate the trends that exist: as specifications diverge from the BT Countryside for All standards, the restrictions imposed on disabled people tend to increase.

### People with Learning Disabilities

People with learning difficulties have not been included in these tables because generally there is not a direct relationship between physical access issues and their disabilities. However, the following points should be noted:

Many people with learning disabilities also have other disabilities and the combination may increase the likelihood of them encountering difficulties and the impact of resulting restrictions.

Some people with learning disabilities are likely to lack confidence and skills in countryside use and where problems exist for other disabled people they may also be restricted.

For those unfamiliar with the countryside obstacles, difficult paths and stiles may prove a problem. Where stiles, gates and latches, for instance, are all the same design along a particular route this could help some people to feel comfortable and gain confidence.

Path Surface	Firm Stable non slip	Not Firm	Not Stable	Slippery
Examples	Compacted Stone Tarmac Concrete	Dry Mown Grass Stones and Loose Material	Bark Chippings Pea Gravel Loose Sand	Wet Grass Man - made grass bases
Wheelchair Users	Should have no difficulty	Effort required to progress is greater, may churn up surface & impede movement	Wheels may dig in and make progress very difficult or impossible	Wheels cannot gain traction - progress limited or impossible
Mobility Impaired		Increased effort required, extra foot lift may be tiring	Difficulty increases according to depth - increased effort causes fatigue	Long stick and walking stick users fear fall and progress very difficult
Reduced Reach and Dexterity		Should have no difficulty		
Impaired Balance		Becomes difficult as emphasis is on maintaining safe gait - limits progress	Very difficult risk and fear of falling likely	Extremely difficult without support.
Reduced Stamina and Strength		Generally acceptable, extra effort will reduce potential travel distance	Greater effort required, causes fatigue, scope of travel reduced	Fear of falling will reduce opportunities
Vision Impaired		Should have no difficulty, if using guide dog or if confident long cane user. New cane user may lose confidence. Also problems may be caused if stones and gaps are large enough to trap the cane end. The surface may not provide audio clues for users of traditional long canes.	Difficult if using mobility aid, may upset guide dog, long cane with roller ball may become difficult to move, traditional cane may get stuck. The surface will not provide audio clues for users of traditional long canes.	Should have no difficulty, if using guide dog or if confident long cane user. New cane user may lose confidence. The surface will not provide audio clues for users of traditional long canes.

Path Width	1200mm	1000mm	900mm	815mm	700mm	600mm
Examples	Urban/formal & Managed/Urban Fringe Standard	Rural Working Landscape Standard			Domestic door about 750mm	
Wheelchair User	Should have access with companion at side	Should have access	Should have access but not able to pass push chair or another wheelchair without some manoeuvring off the path	May find width restricts arms and hands, difficult to manoeuvre around another wheelchair or pushchair	Narrow wheelchair users may have access scooters may find absolute barrier	Absolute barrier for some wheelchair users
Mobility Impaired		May find it necessary to walk slightly before or after escort	With companion it will be even more difficult, may need to walk in single file support cannot be provided - people using long sticks may need to use edge of path	Cannot pass in pairs, physical support possible but undignified.	Can only pass single file, very difficult over distance	May need to walk/turn sideways - difficult for most impossible for some
Reduced Reach and Dexterity	Acceptable					
Impaired Balance	Should have access with companion at side		Difficulty passing other users	Cannot pass in pairs, physical support may be undignified	May find it difficult to remain on path	
Reduced Strength/Stamina	Acceptable					
Visually Impaired	Acceptable as long as path surface is different in texture and colour (chroma, hue and tone) to surrounding area.		Difficult passing other users if being guided.	Difficult passing other users if being guided.	Sighted guidance becomes more tiring and difficult.	



Frequency of Passing Places					
	50m		100m	150m	200m +
Examples	Urban and formal Standard	Urban Fringe and Managed Standard	Rural and Working Standard		
Wheelchair User	Should be no problem if easy to see and know where next passing place is.		Should not cause a problem, but some concern may be evident if other people are approaching	Longer distance could create difficulty if other people can not move off the path or other chair users are encountered	
Mobility Impaired				Increased distance may deter less confident and agile users	
Reduced Reach and Dexterity	Acceptable				
Impaired Balance	Should be no problem if easy to see and know where next passing place is		Should not cause a problem, but some concern may be evident if other people are approaching		
Reduced Strength and Stamina					
Visual Impairment	Should be acceptable especially where passing places are easy to locate by the use of path surfaces with different texture and colour (chroma, hue and tone).				

Frequency of Resting Places				
	100m	200m	300m	400m
Examples	Urban / Formal Standard	Urban fringe / Managed Standard	Rural / Working Landscapes Standard	
Wheelchair Users	Acceptable	Acceptable	Beyond optimum, but acceptable to majority, may deter some who cannot see next resting place	Many confident users will find distance acceptable, but may deter some on route where resting point cannot be seen.
Mobility Impaired			Acceptable	Generally acceptable, but some may find distance too far for comfort, beyond 400m may become barrier to some.
Reduced Dexterity and Reach			Acceptable	
Impaired Balance			May cause some difficulty and concern, but acceptable to many	Tiredness due to extra concentration and effort may cause barrier increasing at distances beyond 400m
Reduced Strength and Stamina			Beyond optimum distance, may cause some difficulty and concern but acceptable to many.	Will cause difficulty and tiredness to many and act as barrier, becoming absolute as distance between resting places increases
Vision Impaired			Acceptable	

Linear Gradient	1:20 - 1:12 (5 - 8.3%)	1:12 - 1:0 (8.3% - 10%)	1:10 - 1.8 (10% - 12.5%)	1.8 + (12.5% )
Examples	Urban & Urban Fringe/ standard	Rural/Working landscapes standard		
Wheelchair Users	Acceptable	Acceptable to majority of wheelchair users	Acceptable to some wheelchair users, but may prove difficult to others. Powered wheelchairs and scooters acceptable	Possible by adventurous wheelchair users, but barrier to many. Generally Acceptable to powered wheelchairs. Increasing barrier as linear gradient goes beyond 1:8
Mobility Impaired		Acceptable	Acceptable to some mobility impaired people, but not all and may be a barrier to some.	Acceptable to some mobility impaired, but mainly confident and active users - the position is more difficult on a meandering track when extent of rise cannot be seen.
Reduced Dexterity and Reach			Acceptable	
Impaired Balance			Acceptable to some and difficult for others; effort and concentration required may mean steepness is a barrier	Increased steepness will prove difficult to larger numbers of people and will be a barrier to many.
Reduced Strength and Stamina			This gradient and steeper a problem for some people	With increasing steepness more people will be restricted
Visual Impairment			Acceptable	

Height Rise of Ramp				
	750mm Rise	820mm Rise	950mm	1020mm
Examples	Urban / Formal Standard 9m ramp at 1:12	Urban fringe / Managed Standard 9.84m ramp at 1:12	Rural/Working Standard 11.4m ramp at 1;12 9.5 Ramp at 1:10	12.24m ramp at 1:12 10.2m ramp at 1:10 8.16m ramp at 1:8
Wheelchair User	Acceptable	Acceptable, but border line to some	Becoming difficult without resting deck	Difficult - would need to know where resting point is, some may find it a barrier to progress.
Mobility Impaired		Acceptable	Generally acceptable	Acceptable over reasonable distance
Reduced Dexterity and Reach		Acceptable		
Impaired Balance		Acceptable, but border line to some	May affect balance and cause fear of progressing	Increased difficulty due to concentration and difficult gait - barrier to some
Reduced Strength and Stamina			May cause tiredness and steepness may deter some.	Steepness may cause fatigue and act as deterrent to many, would need to know extent of height rise of ramp
Vision Impaired		Acceptable		

Steps Levels							
	5mm	10mm	15mm	25mm	50mm	100mm	150mm
Examples	Urban/ Standard	Urban Fringe Standard	Rural Standard			Kerb Height	
Wheelchair User	Acceptable		Acceptable to most wheelchair users.		May prove difficult for some, power chairs with kerb climber ok and acceptable to people with assistance.	Acceptable to skilled and confident wheelchair users, may be borderline for some.	Acceptable to skilled and confident wheelchair user - barrier to some.
Mobility Impaired				Acceptable to majority	Acceptable to many people.	Generally acceptable to most people.	Acceptable to most people - extra foot lift may begin to cause difficulty
Dexterity and Reach				Acceptable			
Impaired Balance			Acceptable		Acceptable, but extra foot lift may cause problem for some		Becoming more difficult as extra foot lift may affect balance.
Reduced Strength and Stamina				Acceptable to majority	Acceptable to majority.	Acceptable, but extra foot lift may cause tiredness for some and act a deterrent	Generally acceptable, if recurring could be absolute barrier because of fatigue
Vision Impaired	Long cane users and guide dog users should be able to detect and climb any reasonable step. Partially sighted people who are not using an aid may trip, if the steps are not colour (hue, tone and chroma) contrasted, if they are in an area with low light levels or if they are unexpected.						

Cross Gradient					
	1:50 (2%)	1:45 (2.2%)	1:35 (2.9%)	1:25 (4%)	1:15 (6.7%)
Examples	Urban and Formal Standard	Urban Fringe and Managed Standard	Rural/ Working Standard		
Wheelchair User	Acceptable		Generally acceptable	Acceptable over short distances, becomes more difficult to push and to maintain straight route	Less acceptable - difficult over longer tract, hard to push in a straight line, discomfort may arise. May deter less bold.
Mobility Impaired				Long stick users may experience discomfort - acceptable over short distances	More difficult to maintain balance, unbalanced gait causes fatigue - increased fear of falling for some.
Reach and Dexterity			Acceptable		
Impaired Balance			Generally Acceptable	Risk and fear of falling - some will become tired due to increased effort and concentration - acceptable over short distances	More difficult to maintain balance, unbalanced gait causes fatigue - may induce fear of falling for some.
Reduced Strength and Stamina				Some will become tired due to increased effort and concentration, may deter some users, but generally acceptable over short distances.	May cause fatigue and act as deterrent to some due to increased effort of unbalance gait - acceptable over obviously short distances.
Visual Impaired			Acceptable		



## Clear Walking Tunnel

All standards                      2100mm high

Any lowering of the height above a path may be a safety risk and nuisance for ambulant path users.

The lower the intrusion of obstructions into the clear walking tunnel the more people will face greater difficulty.

It will be particularly difficult for visually impaired people who can not see over hanging obstructions.

People with impaired balance may find it difficult to duck and manoeuvre around over hanging obstacles.

People with reduced reach or dexterity may not be able to brush aside over hanging vegetation.

Lateral intrusion of obstacles can also create difficulty for visually impaired people especially for long cane users who will not pick up obstacles sticking into the side of the path if the bottom of the object is more than 560mm above the ground.

## Surface Breaks

This parameter relates to such things as the gaps between planks along board walks.

All Standards 12mm in line of travel

For wheelchairs users there is a danger of the small front wheels of the chair catching and even getting stuck in the gaps.

People with mobility impairments who use sticks are at risk of their sticks slipping through the gaps.

Unless well maintained, board walks can increase the risk of tripping for all walkers and this may be a particular issue for people with visual, mobility or balance impairments .

The wider surface breaks are the greater will be these difficulties for more people.

## Appendix 3 - Gaps, gates & stiles and their use by disabled people

The following tables provide a summary of the specifications required by various categories of disabled people using gaps, gates and stiles

### Wheelchair Users

Gaps	Gate – self closing without latch	Gate – non self-closing without latch	Gate – self closing with latch	Gate – non self-closing with latch	Stile
A gap or gate has to have a minimum width of 815 mm to allow most users of manual and power wheelchairs through. If the width is increased to 1200 mm travel through the gap will be easier.					Not useable
The ground surface in a gap or gate may become worn away. If this is likely to happen regular maintenance must be undertaken to ensure that the surface remains smooth enough to allow wheelchairs to pass.					
	The gate should be hung so that it can open in either direction, this will enable wheelchair users to open the gate by pushing with footplate of their chair.				
	The force required to open and close the gate must be 25 Newtons or less.				
		A clear space of 600 mm wide is required beside the opening side of the gate to enable the wheelchair user to get beside the gate to shut it. This clear space and the clear space in front of the gate needs to extend back by 1600mm.		A clear space of 600 mm wide is required beside the opening side of the gate to enable the wheelchair user to get beside the gate to shut it. This clear space and the clear space in front of the gate needs to extend back by 1600 mm.	
			The gate latch must be easy to operate. It must be situated between a height of 600 mm to 1200 mm from the floor.		

## People with a Mobility Impairment

Gaps	Gate – self closing without latch	Gate – non self-closing without latch	Gate – self closing with latch	Gate – non self-closing with latch	Stile
Regular maintenance of the site may be required to ensure that the ground surface beneath the gap or gate does not become uneven and prevent people with a mobility impairment passing through it.					<p>The top step of the stile should act as a seat to enable the user to sit down and assist their legs across.</p> <p>Hand holds need to be provided on each side of the stile to enable the person to pull themselves up.</p> <p>The steps of the stile should have a maximum height of 150 mm and a minimum tread depth of 280 mm.</p>

## People with Reduced Dexterity and Reach

Gaps	Gate – self closing without latch	Gate – non self-closing without latch	Gate – self closing with latch	Gate – non self-closing with latch	Stile
Useable			<p>The latch must be easy to operate.</p> <p>The latch handle should be at least 100 mm long, between 20 to 35 mm thick and with a minimum clearance of 30 mm between the handle and the gate.</p>		Useable

## People with Impaired Balance

Gaps	Gate – self closing without latch	Gate – non self-closing without latch	Gate – self closing with latch	Gate – non self-closing with latch	Stile
Useable					The top step of the stile should act as a seat to enable the user to sit down and swing their legs across.
					Hand holds need to be provided on each side of the stile to enable the person to balance themselves as they move over the stile.

## People with Reduced Strength and Stamina

Gaps	Gate – self closing without latch	Gate – non self-closing without latch	Gate – self closing with latch	Gate – non self-closing with latch	Stile
Useable	The force required to open and close the gate must be 25 Newtons or less.				Hand holds need to be provided on each side of the stile to enable the person to pull themselves over the stile.

## People who are Visually Impaired

Gaps	Gate – self closing without latch	Gate – non self-closing without latch	Gate – self closing with latch	Gate – non self-closing with latch	Stile
The sides of the gap or gate should be colour contrasted with the surrounding vegetation and environment to enable partially sighted users to see the gap.					Colour contrasted hand holds need to be provided on each side of the stile to enable the person to pull themselves up.
			The latch handle should be made of a different material and colour contrasted to the rest of the gate for easy recognition and operation.		

## People who have a Learning Disability

Gaps	Gate – self closing without latch	Gate – non self-closing without latch	Gate – self closing with latch	Gate – non self-closing with latch	Stile
Useable	Useable	Useable	The method of use of the latch should be obvious.		Useable
			The latch handle should be made of a different material and colour contrasted to the rest of the gate for easy recognition and operation.		
			Uniformity of latches on a route will assist people with learning disabilities.		

## Conclusions for All Users

Gaps	Gate – self closing without latch	Gate – non self-closing without latch	Gate – self closing with latch	Gate – non self-closing with latch	Stile
A gap or gate has to have a minimum width of 815 mm. If the width is increased to 1200 mm travel through the gap will be easier.					The top step of the stile should act as a seat to enable the user to sit down and assist their legs across.
The ground surface in a gap or gate may become worn away, if this is likely to happen regular maintenance must be undertaken to ensure that the surface remains smooth.					Hand holds need to be provided on each side of the stile to enable the person to pull themselves up.
The sides of the gap or gate should be colour contrasted with the surrounding vegetation and environment.					
	The gate should be hung so that it can open in either direction.				The steps of the stile should have a maximum height of 150 mm and a minimum tread depth of 280 mm.
	The force required to open and close the gate must be 25 Newtons or less.				The hand holds or sides of the stile need to be colour contrasted.
			The gate latch must be easy to operate. It must be situated between a height of 600 mm to 1200 mm from the floor.		
			The latch handle should be at least 100 mm long, between 20 to 35 mm thick and with a minimum clearance of 30 mm between the handle and the gate.		
			The latch handle should be made of a different material and colour contrasted to the rest of the gate for easy recognition and operation.		



## Appendix 4 - Observations on the Accessibility for Disabled People of a Selection of Gates, Stiles, Barriers, Bridges and Boardwalks

### Gaps and Gates

Attention should be paid to the quality of the surface at gates as these are the areas along a path to receive the greatest level of wear.

If the gate is in a hedgerow, particular attention should be paid to the encroachment of vegetation; it may aid maintenance and how often it is necessary to extend a short run of fencing either side of the gate.

For maximum accessibility gates should be hinged to open both ways.

For one-way opening gates a surface of equal quality to that of the path should be maintained for 600mm wide and 2000mm long away from the gate on its opening side, to aid manoeuvrability for many users.

The force required to open and close any gate should not exceed 25 Newtons.

Gate posts and latches should be colour contrasted against the surrounding environment to assist partially sighted people

### Timber Wicket Gate

If the clearance width of this type of gate is at least 815mm (preferably 1000mm), it can open both ways and if it has an easily operated latch it should present very few restrictions to disabled people.



### Two-way Gate

These gates are not latched and open in different directions allowing users to push in the direction of travel. They are self-closing.

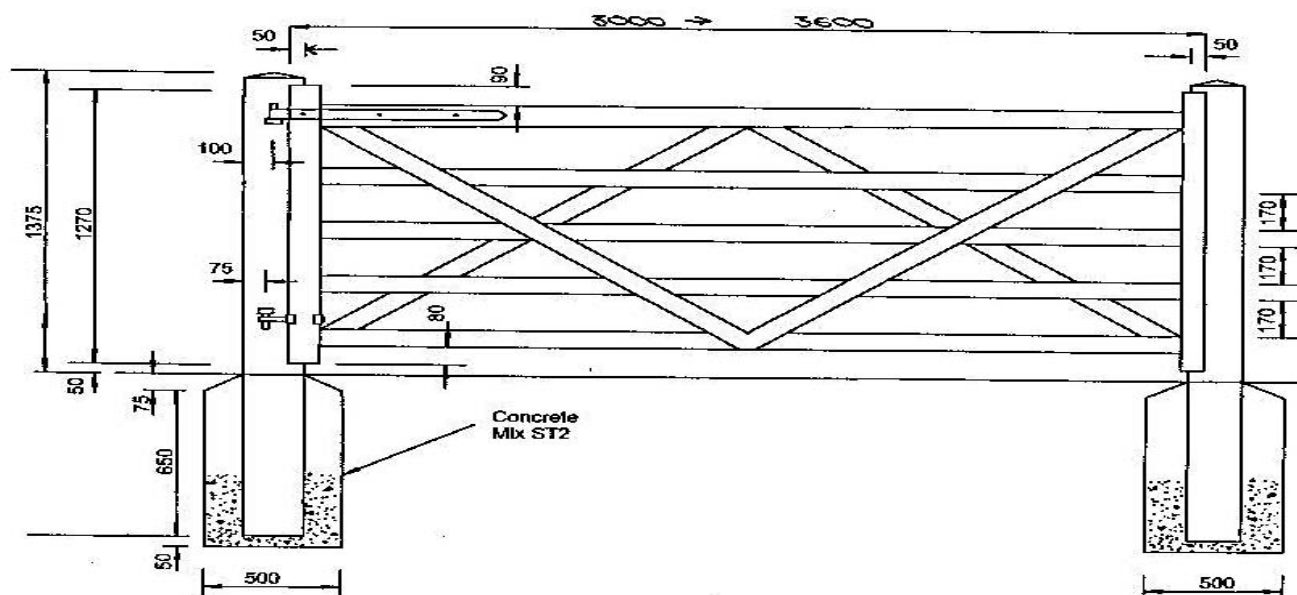
This is a very accessible arrangement.



## Field Gate

Larger gates will provide greater width for users but without regular maintenance they may prove heavy and difficult to operate.

If the path width is equivalent to that of the gate those who walk with the support of a companion will find access easier.



## Latches

Latches should contrast well in colour with the surrounding materials on any gate to aid their location and operation by walkers with a visual impairment.

Latches or other mechanisms should be visible and useable from both sides. Poor latches can be an absolute barrier to some people with reach or dexterity impairments.

Latches should be between 600 - 1200mm high for pedestrian users

Self-closing mechanisms should continue to operate when the gate is open to its greatest extent.

The point(s) of use on a latch or mechanism should have colour and/or texture contrast

If unusual mechanisms are employed then information on their operation should be clear.

The latch handle should be at least 100mm long and between 20 - 30mm thick with a minimum clearance of 30mm.

## Keys

The use of keys, including the National Key System (NKS key) has been employed at a minority of access points to the countryside with the intention of specifically affording access to disabled people while excluding other users eg motor cyclists.

This may provide a limited increase in access over the option of a stile but, it will continue to deny access to many disabled walkers; not all disabled people have or always carry NKS keys and, there are many people who would not consider themselves disabled yet are denied access where stiles are installed.

The NKS keys were also not originally designed for such outdoor use and are therefore not particularly suited to this application; they are additionally not very secure in design and may be acquired by the users you seek to exclude.

Difficulties in operating key systems also come from the barrier they can present to those with limited dexterity. Padlocks are usually difficult to use from both directions.

## Small Refuge Kissing Gate

This gate would be an absolute barrier to wheelchair users and people with pushchairs.

Even though the gate width is 1000mm the refuge for this gate is small and will restrict some people with mobility disabilities. It will be inconvenient for many more including those with guide dogs.

Unlatched and self closing this gate provides some stock proofing though some hill sheep and lambs may still pass through



## Backpackers Kissing Gate

The low level 'V' is to prevent sheep and lambs getting through while the large square refuge allows people with large rucksacks to pass easily.

The low level 'V' could present difficulties to visually impaired people who will be expecting a clear entrance to the gate and could benefit from a strong colour contrast on the top bar of the 'V'.

The design is not accessible to wheelchair users though without the 'V' it could accommodate manual wheelchair users if the refuge is large enough.

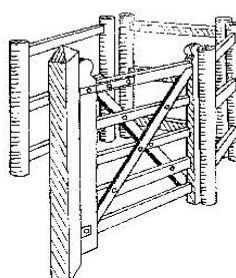
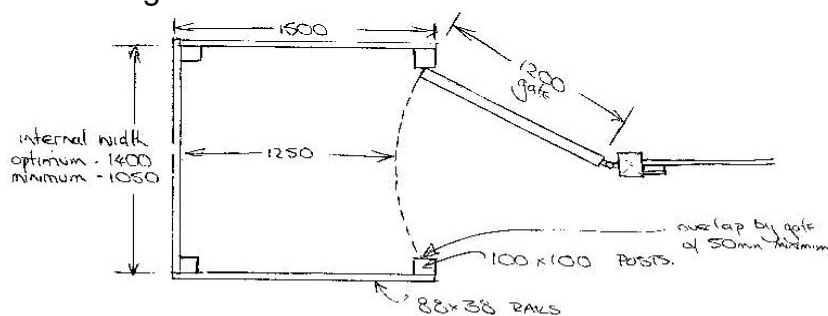


## Medium Refuge Kissing Gate

The size of the refuge on this gate (1050mm wide x 1400mm deep) should allow manual wheelchair users access but large Class II and Class III vehicles will be restricted

Some wheelchair users will have difficulty moving the gate from within the refuge (behind themselves if they enter forwards) if they have difficulties from their wheelchair. Even if they reverse into the refuge the same problem may apply.

Where a wheelchair user is pushed by a companion the lack of space to manoeuvre may make this design an absolute barrier.



GENERAL INDICATION OF LAYOUT

FINAL DESIGN TO USE  
100 x 100 SQUARE POSTS  
- NOT MORTISED ROUNDS



## Large Kissing Gate

The large refuge (1250mm wide x 1700mm deep) and wide gate should allow most disabled people, including Class II and Class III wheelchair users, to use this gate

Unless latched this gate may not be stock proof, even against cattle, and is unlikely to stop motor-cyclists.

The use of a straight forward latched, self-closing gate could be just as functional, cheaper and easier to use for all visitors



## Countryside for All Gate

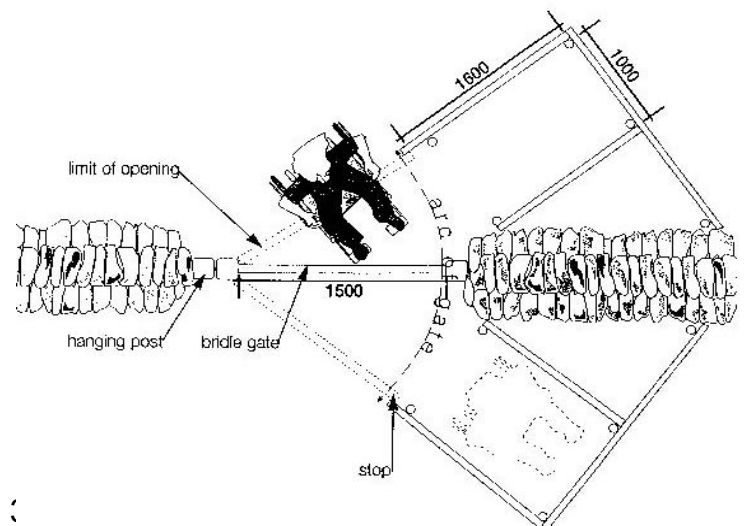
The size of refuge illustrated (1000mm wide x 1600mm deep) should allow all but the very largest of wheelchairs and powered buggies to pass.

The gate is self-centring and latched so as to provide stock proofing

The advantage over other kissing gate arrangements is that wheelchair users can push the gate, do not have to close it behind them and it can be used equally well in both directions.

This gate requires an easily operated latch that will catch the return of the self-centring gate.

The footprint of the gate is obviously larger than other designs and may be obtrusive in some settings.



## Barred Kissing Gate

This design has cross bars over the refuge to prevent motor cycles from being lifted onto their rear wheel to pass through.

Without the bars this gate could provide reasonable accessibility for many people. The grass surface in the picture (right) would reduce manoeuvrability for wheelchair users and some other disabled people.



## Rotagate

This design allows easy access for pedestrians, wheelchair users and people with pushchairs.

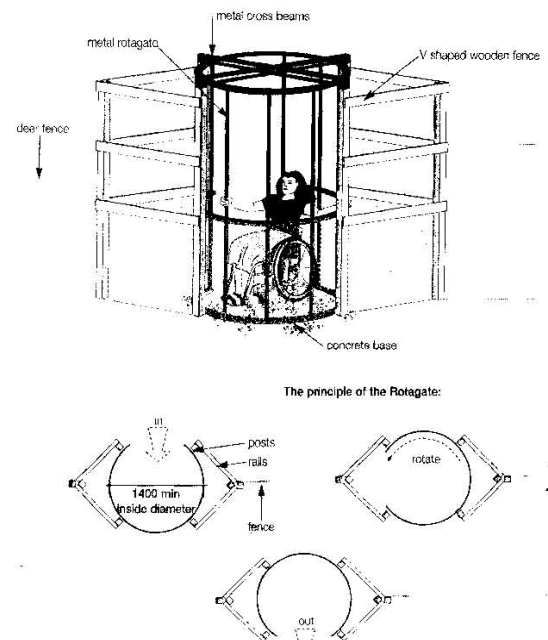
With an internal diameter of 1400mm it should exclude motor bikes, horses, deer, cattle and other stock. However it would exclude users of large powered mobility scooters who might also be legitimate users of the path.

The method of operation should be clearly marked on the gate and grip dimensions be followed.

A larger diameter refuge could accommodate other users while maintaining its stock control security.

People with reach and dexterity impairments may have difficulty with this design.

The height clearance of the structure should be 1,200mm.





## Stiles

Stiles are generally the most restrictive of structures frequently used in the countryside creating absolute barriers for a lot of disabled people and proving difficult or inconvenient for many more.

### Dog-Gate & Stile

Stiles with a dog-flap maintain security for livestock but additionally provide access for people who walk with guide or support dogs.

The gap when open should allow passage for even large dogs. Alsatians and Labradors are often used as guide dogs.

It should be made clear how the mechanism operates, preferably with colour/texture contrast at its point of use.



Handles should provide for easy grip and require limited strength to operate.

### Parallel two step stile

Stiles which have two steps set in parallel are preferred by some walkers with a visual impairment as it provides greater certainty as to the location of the step when crossing the top rail.

This arrangement is also likely to offer a greater useable foot area for the direction in which they place their feet.

A higher hand-post to one side will aid balance and confidence for all as they cross the stile.

The top of the hand-post should be easily gripped with a diameter of 40 -50mm for at least 200mm.

Colour contrasting the upper rail and hand hold could improve accessibility for visually impaired people.



## Crossed two step stile

A crossed two step stile can be easier for some walkers as it maintains the natural walking gait as the stile is crossed.

It may not provide the certainty of footing preferred by some visually impaired walkers.

Including two hand-posts can benefit walkers with balance difficulties but may further restrict access for some with limited mobility who may need a wide gap to swing their legs through.



## Ladder Stile

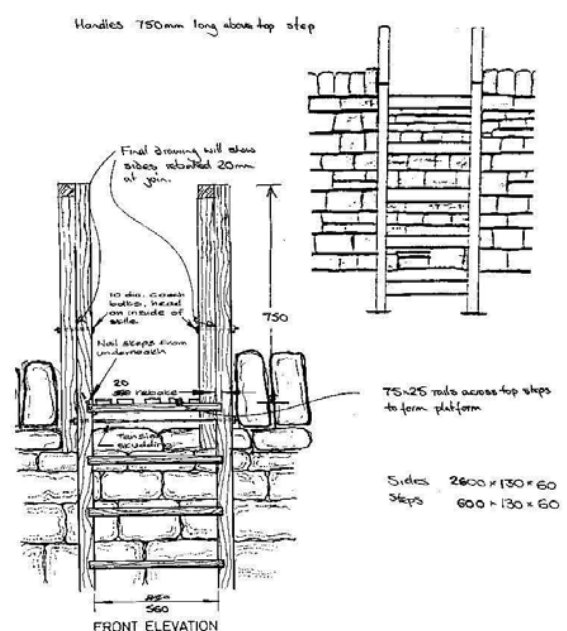
Ladder stiles can offer some means of access over immovable boundaries, though they are among the most restricting stile designs.

They do not provide easy access for walkers with guide or support dogs.

They may be an absolute barrier to walkers with balance difficulties.

If provided they should have hand-post and rail support which can easily be gripped and used.

There should be good visual contrast for the support especially at the top of the ladder.



## Step through stiles

These stiles may be preferred by some people with limited mobility who can not lift their legs over some of the higher top rails of other stiles.

They should have at least one and preferably two hand-posts to support passage across the stile.

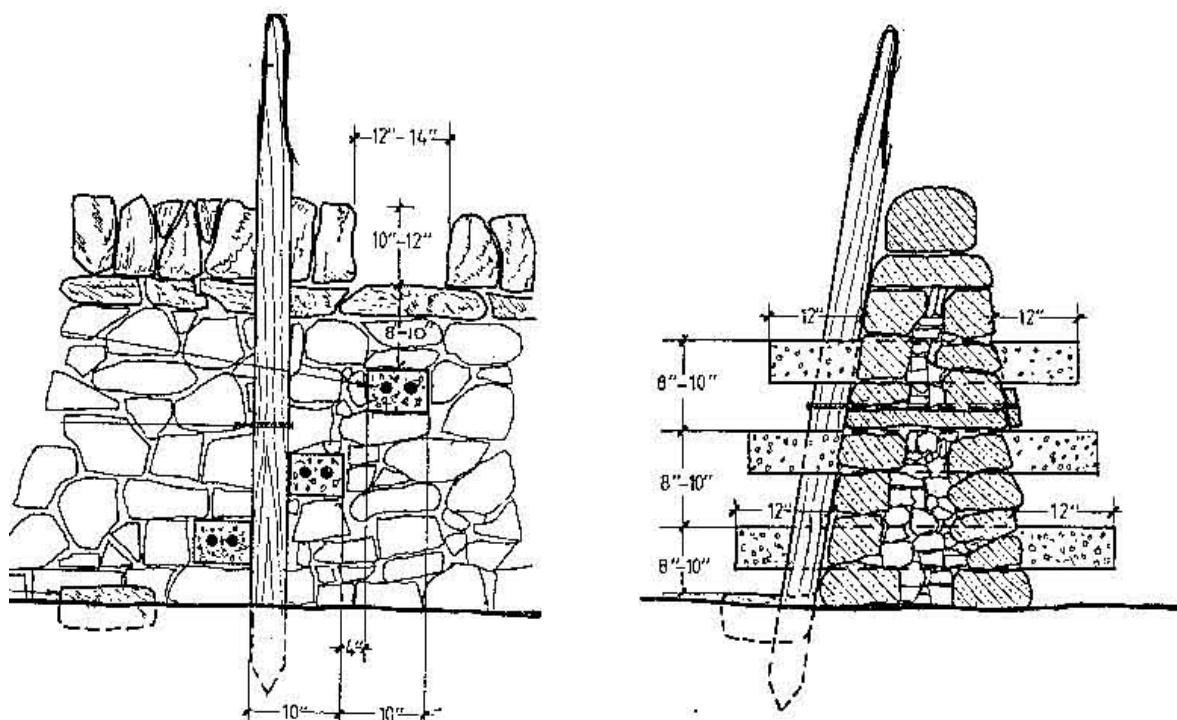
They do not provide easy access for walkers with guide or support dogs.

## Step over stile

This design of stile presents the same type of access barrier (and possibly greater) as the ladder stile.

It would benefit from hand-posts at both the low and high step ends of the stile and on both sides.

Steps should be evenly spaced and level. Often this type of stile uses uneven stones from the wall itself which may prove difficult for many disabled people.



## Barriers

### Vehicle Barrier

Where vehicle barriers are used solely to exclude cars or four wheel vehicles from the countryside an open gap to one side should provide access for everyone else.

The gap should be minimum 1500mm wide on a bridleway and 815mm (though preferably up to 1200mm) on a pedestrian path.



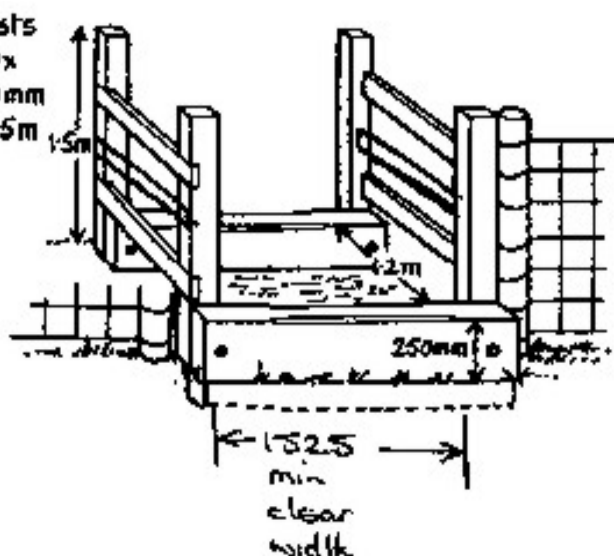
Materials used to provide the barrier and bound the gap should have good visual contrast with the surrounding environment so that they can be identified by walkers with visual impairments.

The type of barrier shown could be a hazard to visually impaired people using a long cane.

### Horse stile

A horse stile on a bridleway may be designed to exclude motor bikes but will additionally be a barrier to some other legitimate users of the path.

It will operate as a similar barrier to a stile for some walkers and therefore if employed should be supported by hand-posts etc



Wheelchair users, powered scooter users and cyclists using hand cranked machines will find these stiles an absolute barrier.

Motor cyclists can occasionally get through.



## Three Valleys Barrier

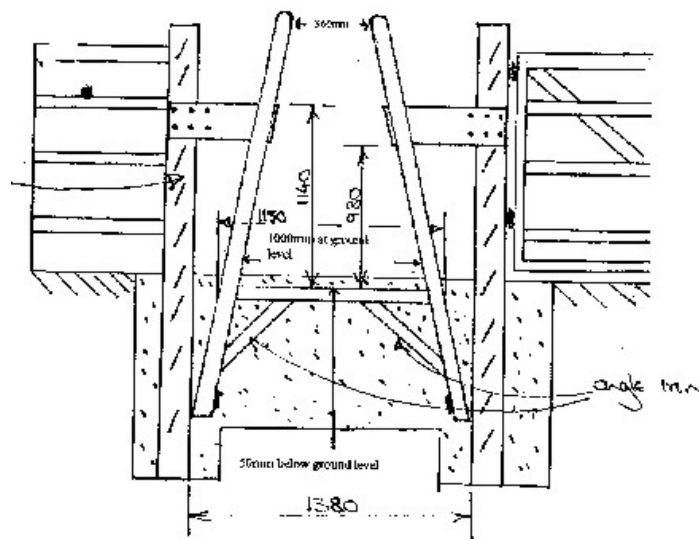
This design of barrier provides a restricted open gap intended to exclude motor bikes while maintaining easy passage for other users.

It may however be an obstruction to some blind and visually impaired walkers and if used should have clear colour contrast illustrating its full gap profile.

Its design may also be an absolute barrier to some tall wheelchair users and the largest of powered mobility scooters.

Motor cyclists can occasionally get through.

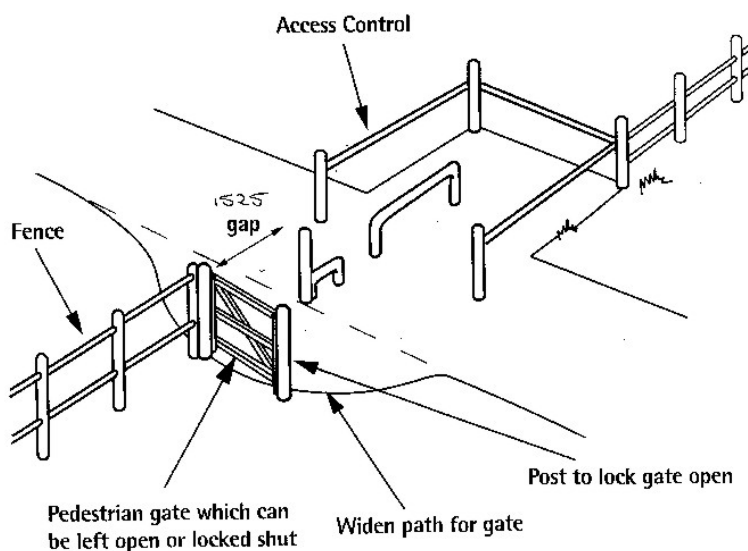
The 'Three Valleys Barrier' is manufactured by Fearn Truck Bodies of Rotherham and is a patented design (No. GB2322149). Any attempt to copy the design concept or functionality of this barrier is an infringement of the patent and is liable to prosecution.



## Chicane Barrier

This design of barrier is intended to allow for access for all legitimate users while being able to exclude motor bikes and other vehicles when needed.

In its open gate mode it provides good access for all users, however, with the gate closed and locked it will not only exclude motor bikes but also the largest of powered mobility scooters, hand-crank cyclists, tricyclists etc



## Bridges & Board Walks

Where bridges and boardwalks are constructed it is clear that access is being promoted and therefore should be to the highest standard of accessibility.

The surface of bridges and boardwalks should meet the path performance specification for the BT Countryside for All Standard.

Decking should be laid at 90 degrees to the direction of travel and, gaps between decking should not exceed 12mm.



Care must be taken in maintenance programmes to ensure that the junction of the path with the constructed feature preserves a level threshold.

Particularly on boardwalks without hand rails, there should be an edging strip (75mm high) to clearly identify the width of the path and aid the passage of some users along it (e.g. wheelchair users.)

Where these structures require hand rails or fencing due to the surrounding environment and height above ground, the specification should firstly conform to appropriate safety requirements, and secondly provide a handrail and support, and thirdly allow views over or through for wheelchair users, children and people of various heights.

Where there are long lengths of boardwalk at the minimum width for the path passing places should be provide as part of the board walk or have clear flat access to them from the boardwalk.



Access and egress should be ramped, not stepped, and care should be taken that where the boardwalk meets an unsealed path a step does not develop.







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# Countryside Path Network Guidelines



Planning accessibility across  
countryside path networks



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Countryside Path Networks

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# Introduction

The objective of these guidelines is to assist you as a countryside access manager to make informed decisions about accessibility across countryside path networks. They will also enable you to more effectively manage these networks with reference, as appropriate, to the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) and other countryside and highways legislation.

Improving access to the countryside for disabled people is not just a matter of improving the physical condition of individual paths and trails. There are many similarities between the thought processes in identifying the least restrictive access for a single path and developing an action plan for a network of countryside paths. The important distinction is that at the individual path level you may reasonably decide it is impossible to provide full accessibility whereas at the network level it is very unlikely no good accessibility can be provided.

For disabled people to have equal opportunities they must be able to make the same sort of choices as the rest of the community in seeing varied landscapes, getting into different environments and gaining diverse experiences. Few people with a countryside interest would be satisfied with only one or two sites to which they could gain access, yet for many disabled people this is the reality.

These guidelines address this issue by looking at:

- the accessibility for disabled people of countryside path networks;

- the procedures that need to be followed in considering the needs of disabled people in planning countryside path networks.

The guidelines focus specifically on disability issues. However, disabled people are not a separate, discrete group of people. They are as diverse as the rest of the community. Their activities, capabilities and aspirations overlap with other peoples'. Therefore a lot of these guidelines are as relevant to meeting the needs of communities in general as it is to meeting the particular needs of disabled people.

Before examining the key activities that must be pursued in order to plan an accessible countryside network we need to consider what is meant by reasonably accessible and what is an accessible network.



# Countryside Path Networks

## What is a network?

Networks exist and are managed on a variety of scales. For example a network may be a series of paths within a wood, a valley, on a hill or mountainside or across a whole district, indeed multiples of districts. Different partners may have responsibility for different parts of a network, and potentially different sources of funding may contribute to the maintenance and development of its various components.

As an individual countryside service provider you may be considering the network as the specific area for which you have responsibility or over which you have influence. In the wider context you might consider the area which you manage to be within a broader network which is defined by a geographic boundary (natural, man-made or artificial).

The management and planning of the network may be undertaken in conjunction with some or all of the other recreation providers within an area. In that way you can look at the wider opportunities for the delivery of the full possible range of experiences on offer in partnership with other local agencies.

Whatever the scale or nature of the network you are considering, the approach in these guidelines is relevant at any level whether the network has been defined geographically, functionally (according to its use by various people) or with reference to the management regimes that operate it.

For many disabled people linear routes (paths and trails) have been the primary opportunities to gain accessible countryside experiences, and particularly so when it has come to experience in the wider countryside where public access is not the sole purpose of the land use. Paths and trails will remain the most important means of access to the countryside. These guidelines on network planning relate primarily to paths but you should also consider accessibility issues relating to open countryside, moorland and the wider 'natural' environment.

## Reasonable Accessibility

In most countryside networks all the paths and trails cannot and should not be made fully accessible. The two questions that arises are:

what level of accessibility can be reasonably expected by all users?

and

what level of accessibility can be reasonably provided by access managers?



The task of the countryside service provider is to balance these two questions and come up with a practical answer.



You should aim to provide a network to a standard that allows the maximum variety of people to use it without unreasonable difficulty. This does not mean simply increasing the number of people using the network. Increasing accessibility means that the diversity of people able to use it and gain the experiences and enjoyments that a given environment has to offer is increased. This requires a physical network that allows disabled people as individuals to choose what, where, how and when that experience is gained in the same way as other users or visitors.

What is reasonable will vary in different situations and according to the needs and capabilities of users. It is exactly because of this circumstance that network planning is so essential. As it will not be possible or appropriate to make all paths fully accessible networking planning is the process which will ensure that disabled people have some choices available to them within the overall system. It may be reasonable, because of cost or conservation restrictions, that a particular countryside path can not be used by some disabled people. It is far less likely that an entire network offers no opportunities for disabled people.

## What is an accessible network?

It is a network which.....

- gives all disabled people choices in the experiences they can enjoy in the wider countryside, the countryside immediately around settlements and urban green spaces;

- gives disabled people the same range and quality of choices as everyone else;

- includes fully accessible paths (i.e. to [BT Countryside for All Standards](#));

- includes paths where the least restrictive access has been achieved;

- has all development and maintenance work leading to increased accessibility.

It is not a network which:

- has to have all its paths fully accessible;

- has just those routes which were easy to make accessible as the only ones available to disabled people;

- has generally good accessibility but not at the most popular or special sites.

This is based on the idea that

Total Access	=	Programme Access	+	Physical access
having the same		experiencing the enjoyment,		reaching quality
choices as everyone		excitement, relaxation or		countryside
else		adventure of the countryside		experiences



Figure 1



A policy states the aims of an organisation.

A strategy lays out how policies are to be achieved.

An action plan details what is to be done.

# Policy

## What are policies for?

Policies exist to inform and lubricate both the internal workings and the external relationships of an organisation. Accordingly they should meet the needs of:

those responsible for implementation  
(e.g. access managers, land owners, planners, contractors)

those who are to be its ultimate beneficiaries.  
(e.g. disabled people, young people, elderly people, the public)

## The Need for Specific Policies

Policies specifically addressing issues relevant to countryside access for disabled people are needed for five reasons:

**Raising Expectations and Demand:** Many disabled people do not expect countryside services to be accessible to them. Clear and positive policies can and will stimulate interest among local communities, disabled visitors and tourists in general. A trading advantage in the tourist market can be built up over areas that do not embrace accessibility.

**Managing Change:** Change will be needed if the needs of disabled people are to be met through core path network planning. Explicit statements on disability issues demonstrate the political will to make those changes and provide a clear framework for staff and other stakeholders who will be expected to implement and respond to those changes.

**Accountability:** Published policies and strategies explain intentions, provide a measure against which success can be measured and a framework against which shortcomings can be identified and rectified. Clear policies also provide a means of assessing cost effectiveness.

**Duty:** Under the [Disability Discrimination Act](#) service providers might be required to justify their policy with respect to its effect on a particular disabled person. A clear policy, thoughtfully developed, consulted upon and implemented, is likely to indicate that reasonable steps have been taken to avoid discrimination.

**Reversing Exclusion:** In the past disabled people were less visible in society, more dependent on support services and less involved in community life. It has taken a long time to alter perceptions based on the medical model which saw and treated disabled people as unwell, less able and dependent. The social model of disability recognises that it is the environment that handicaps people. Policies and strategies which reflect this will more effectively and transparently tackle social exclusion.

## Developing Countryside Access Policies

Most countryside service agencies will have policies in place governing various aspects of their work such as access, conservation and equal opportunities. Fewer are likely to have specific policies that detail their aims with regard to the accessibility of their services for disabled people.

General policy statements such as “.....will have regard to the needs of disabled people” are not a great deal of help. They do not tell providers of a service what they have to aim for, and they do not tell disabled people what they should expect from the service.

In order to develop policies that can inform and guide the planning and management of countryside access networks you need to consider a number of factors. These may vary according to whether you are part of a public, voluntary or private sector organisation but collectively they simply involve a review of existing policies with a view to their integration with a specific accessibility policy.

**Countryside Legislation:** The requirement to have regard to the needs of disabled people is now a greater part of countryside access legislation in England, Wales and Scotland than previously. The duties placed on individuals and organisations require that they consider what they intend to do, i.e. what their policies are. The duties of highway authorities in England and Wales to prepare rights of way improvement plans which cover accessibility have an implicit requirement that disabled people should expect some improvements in service over a period of time. In Scotland the requirement to prepare core path network proposals also carries with it a responsibility to cover the needs of disabled people.

**DDA:** There are duties on all service providers to actively avoid discrimination against disabled people (see [the Guidelines on the DDA for Countryside Service Providers](#)). Although many countryside services are provided free of charge this does not remove the provider from these duties under the DDA. The need to show disabled people, service users and the general public that you agency aims to meet these needs and duties is common to all countryside services.



**Public Consultation:** The involvement of local communities in the development of policies is generally considered worthwhile in terms of ensuring more practical and more acceptable policies. It is also important in informing all stakeholders of your organisation's intentions.

**Policy Context:** Policies for the provision of countryside access opportunities for disabled people cannot be dealt with in isolation from existing countryside or equality policies. Nor can they be isolated from other quite distinct policy areas with which they occasionally conflict.

For instance, in an area with stone walls as field boundaries, traditional stiles may be important features in the landscape. You might have to consider gates as replacements or adjuncts to improve access for disabled people. Over a wide area there may be several hundred stiles. On the one hand it is unlikely to be reasonable to say that all stiles can be replaced irrespective of the loss to the local heritage. Equally it is unlikely to be reasonable to say none of them can be replaced even though many disabled people will remain severely restricted. By developing a policy that takes into account both the historic value of the stiles and the legitimate needs and rights of disabled visitors you will be better able to deal with each situation as it arises. Perhaps you will be able to prioritise the type or location of the stiles that can be replaced or must be retained. A clear policy context will enable you to explain to visitors who cannot gain access why the position is as it is.



### The Content of Specific Countryside Access Policies

Suggested policies that a countryside service provider might adopt with respect of countryside access for disabled people are illustrated in the [Appendix](#). The main themes of those policies include

**Equality:** Outlining the sorts of opportunities and outputs disabled people can expect from the service, its approach to integration, the standards it will pursue and how the needs of disabled people will fit in alongside other policies.

**Resources:** Stating the principles by which resources will be applied, recorded and made available to public scrutiny.

**Consultation:** Outlining the intention and processes for consultation with and representation for disabled people.

**Staff:** Detailing the commitment to training, developing, and appraising staff with respect to their responsibilities to deliver equitable services.

**Evaluation:** Statement of the principles, and processes by which the evaluation will take place, and how complaints from disabled people will be dealt with.

## Strategy

To develop a strategy designed to meet the policy goals you have established you need a lot of information about your network and the people who it is to serve.

**Facility Catalogue:** Paths are just a means to an end. People with and without disabilities use paths to reach some part of the countryside where they can enjoy the view, have a picnic or any other activity of their choice. In many instances just enjoying the general environment along a path is sufficient for many people. This may lead you to see which paths provide access through a particularly pleasing environment and can be seen as facilities in their own right.

Your network will probably comprise a series of features of interest linked by paths, and served by amenities such as car parks, toilets and visitor centres. Your strategy will need to take account of all these facilities, amenities and the paths that link them.



**User Demand:** An effectively managed network should meet the demands of its users. A strategy that is to change and develop a network must therefore begin with an understanding of the facilities and paths people are currently using, would like to use or could use if made more accessible. Assessing current demand will provide you with very helpful information but it may not give you the whole picture as many disabled people may not be able to express their current interests where access is poor or they may have little knowledge of areas they have not been able to get to. You will need to consider latent and potential demand as well.

**Path Network Survey:** Unless you know where there is already good accessibility, where good accessibility might be provided and where good accessibility might be very difficult to provide you will not be equipped to make decisions about access to your network for disabled people. This means you must undertake a survey of the network and specifically collect information on factors relevant to access for disabled people. The [Accessibility Survey and Access Audit Guidelines](#) will help you complete this task without, necessarily, covering every inch of the network in extensive detail. Where you have clear policies you should be able to formulate your strategy on the basis of good background information so long you are willing to adapt and respond to the more detailed picture that will emerge as you progress to the action plan stage.

**Resources:** A strategy that proposes action must include the means to achieve its goals. Before developing an action plan you must be clear as to the money, time and expertise it can draw on. It is often the case in countryside access work that the desired output far exceeds the resources available to achieve it. If this is the case and fund raising is to be part of the programme, the targets and approach should be detailed.



Public Consultation: As with policy development the quality and robustness of a strategy will be enhanced if all relevant stakeholders have been involved in its production. This is especially important where you are going to make judgements on such issues as which facilities visitors think are most important, or which currently inaccessible paths disabled people would most like improved.

## Key Strategic Issues

Having collected all relevant information you will now need to consider a range of issues in drawing together your strategy. All aspects of the network must be considered such as conservation, transport, education and interpretation, and information provision. The strategy should also be relevant to all actual and potential users including disabled people, children, cyclists, horse riders and walkers. With respect to the specific issue of accessibility for disabled people across the network the key issues to consider are:



## Targets

Under new legislation in Scotland, England and Wales the public will have access rights to many areas and paths that they previously did not use. This will increase the extent of many networks but realistically it is not expected that all local authorities will manage all paths. In many areas it is the priority paths or core path networks that will be the focus for resources and management. With the likelihood that little improvement of the accessibility of the wider countryside beyond this core will be undertaken it will be even more important that core path networks meet the needs of people who need good access standards to enjoy the countryside. If a core path network represents only 10% of the paths available in an area, and full accessibility is provided on only 10% of the core paths then only 1% of the countryside access the public at large can use will be available to all disabled people. For this reason the inclusion of targets for the level and extent of access for disabled people should be an important part of your strategy.

Targets are a only a tool but as a part of a strategy they can be very useful. They give you something to aim for and a measure by which success and failure can be assessed. In terms of accessibility, targets are useful in presenting to disabled people how and how quickly you are going to make progress in meeting their needs.

Qualitative targets are notoriously difficult to define and monitor but they can have merit in guiding your decisions. For instance, a target to provide full accessibility to three distinct environmental experiences within a network could significantly influence which paths across a network are improved first.

Quantitative targets can be a valuable means of demonstrating accessibility has been improved. Such targets could be set as a proportion of a network, say 15% fully accessible, or as an absolute measure, say 10 kilometres. This will usually only provide an indication of the level of service provided to disabled people. If the accessible routes that meet these numeric targets are the least interesting or least popular ones disabled people will not have been given the same countryside opportunities as the rest of the community.



The following table provides some suggested criteria for setting targets for the accessibility of core path networks for disabled people. Targets may need to be used in combination to provide a comprehensive picture of the service that is to be delivered to disabled people.

User based targets	Qualitative targets	Quantitative targets
more disabled people using provision	greater variety of accessible experiences	more kilometres of fully accessible paths
wider range of disabled people able to use provision	wider diversity of accessible experiences	more kilometres of barrier free routes
greater frequency of use by disabled people	better quality of accessible experiences	more kilometres of paths achieving least restrictive access

## Path Quality

The countryside access industry does not appear have to reached a consensus on what constitutes a good path. Whilst recognising the enormous diversity of countryside environments there are not even consistent descriptions of what constitutes a good upland path as opposed to a good urban fringe path. There are guides on good practice in the construction of paths both in lowland and upland environments. Standards exist for cycleways and for paths that are fully accessible to disabled people. The difficulty is in identifying on other paths not for those two purposes where, and by what degree, variation from these standards is acceptable. If full accessibility is not considered appropriate for a path, what is? The question this leads to is should money be spent on improving a path when, say because of stiles along its route, the number or range of people able to use it will not change.

The [Least Restrictive Access Guidelines](#) focus on accessibility on individual countryside paths. These processes consider the needs of disabled people and the potential impact upon them of factors including poor surface, excessive gradient and barriers such as stiles. This approach effectively gives a measure of the ‘fitness for purpose’ of a path where that purpose will include use by disabled people. The significance of determining ‘fitness for purpose’ for all paths is in achieving cost effective provision. Any path work which falls short of making a route fit for its purpose is a waste of limited resources.



The [BT Countryside for All Standards](#) are part of a continuum of specifications. Disabled people are not a separate user group, their abilities overlap with other people’s. For instance, athletes who use wheelchairs may be able to use countryside paths that some ambulant people would find very difficult. The standards were developed from the point of view of user needs and provide performance, not construction, specifications. Your strategy may need to cover similar sets of path specifications for other uses, such as cyclists and horse riders while still achieving the least restrictive access.

## Alternative Routes

Access for disabled people is sometimes not achieved because, say, the gradients, of a particular path are too severe. Where a path is restricted to a particular line there may be little opportunity to improve accessibility. Your strategy should consider its approach to finding and utilising alternative routes where these will make a significant difference to the network and how it provides for the needs of disabled people. Indeed at the strategic level, your focus should be more on routes than on paths as part of your target is to link opportunities and experiences, not just manage the physical paths.



In the strategy you should be able to look at the use of alternative routes in improving access for disabled people. In some cases the alternative need may only be a short diversion from an existing path. In others you may have to find a completely different route into an area to avoid a steep hill or other physical feature. A reluctance to confront the alternative route issue means that you will be trying to achieve a good level of accessibility from a set of paths that probably never considered the needs of disabled people as it evolved.

## Potentially Accessible

The phrase 'potentially accessible' is a relative term. With unlimited resources nearly all paths could be made accessible. Nonetheless in developing your strategy you will find it useful to be able to look at routes which with a reasonable application of effort and resources could become fully accessible. The relevant factors are:

linear gradients: This is the single most important factor that is likely to affect the cost of creating accessible routes. Where a path to a particular feature climbs a slope that is a lot steeper than the required standard you can either create an accessible route by zig-zagging the path or finding a separate alternative. The steeper the slope the greater the likely cost of achieving full accessibility.

physical features: Where paths are not accessible because of major physical features (e.g. rivers, bridges, gulleys, etc) the cost of improvement to a good standard may be too great. Achieving accessibility will usually be by means of alternative routing.

Where routes are not affected by either severe slopes or significant physical features they have a greater potential to be accessible. They can be considered alongside existing accessible paths within a network plan that can build new paths on potentially accessible routes.

The identification of potentially accessible routes should aim to include as much of the network as possible rather than be an excuse to limit the range and extent of routes that disabled people might enjoy. By considering the potential of all routes you will deselect some from your accessibility planning. This will save some time and effort in developing your strategy. You should bear in mind that even routes which do not seem to have the potential to become accessible may need to be included in access improvement plans because they are particularly popular or lead to special points of interest.

## New versus Old

Just as re-routing paths may be a cost effective way of securing improved accessibility so the construction of new paths may be a better option than modifying existing ones. Even when working on an existing route a small diversion involving new construction may be an easier way of improving accessibility than trying to modify the gradient or surface of the existing path. Over whole lengths of paths new construction may be quicker, easier and less disruptive than trying to meet all necessary criteria over the constraints of the old path. A network strategy which envisages no new path construction would indicate a very low priority had been given to meeting the needs of disabled people.

Some access managers have considered working towards improved access for disabled people by modifying their networks bit by bit. For instance, where a stile needs replacing to install a gate, or where a surface deteriorates repairing it to the required standard. This strategy means that access for disabled people is driven by factors which have nothing to do with what people want or need. It also means that it might be some considerable time before any fully accessible routes are available to disabled people. If the first stile to be replaced is in the middle of a path with stiles all along, it could be many years before that route can be used by disabled people.



## Least Restrictive Access

The [Least Restrictive Access Guidelines](#) examine the process you can follow to identify what level of access for disabled people is the best that can be achieved on paths. Across a network as a whole the least restrictive access will still be identified by reference to three key factors:

how many people will be restricted?

(See the [Least Restrictive Access: Appendix 1- The Access needs of Disabled People in the Countryside](#))

how severely will those people be restricted?

(See the [Least Restrictive Access Guidelines: Appendix 2 - Access restrictions](#); and [Appendix 3 - Gaps, gates & stiles and their use by disabled people](#); and [Appendix 4 - Observations on the Accessibility for Disabled People of a Selection of Gates, Stiles, Barriers, Bridges and Boardwalks](#))

how much will its cost (financially and environmentally) to remove or reduce the restriction?

## Strategy Production

Armed with all the information you have now collected (network survey, demand assessment, facility catalogue, available resources, and public opinion) you should be able to review the key issues (targets, path quality, alternative routes, potentially accessible routes, new construction and the least restrictive access) to decide how you are going to create a network which meets the needs of disabled people.



Your strategy should tell everyone with an interest in access for disabled people :

which features, facilities and environments are currently accessible;

which features, facilities and environments you are seeking to make more accessible;

what levels of accessibility will be achieved across the network;

what targets you have set for disabled people's access in the short, medium and long term;

what resources are needed for all this, and how you will get them;

how the public's views have been considered and are reflected in your strategy;

how your strategy on access for disabled people integrates with other plans for countryside access.



## Action Plan

The action plan is the most detailed stage. This is where you make decisions about individual paths and facilities in the context that you have established for the network with your policies and strategies.

Whereas you will have undertaken an accessibility survey to collect information for your strategy, you will now need to audit some paths to be sure about their condition and to estimate the costs of improvements. See the [Accessibility Survey and Access Audit Guidelines](#) for guidance on the application and methodology of access audits.

### Paths to Standard

These paths are important as they represent the immediate opportunities you can promote to disabled people. Hopefully they will have been created to serve some of the most interesting and popular areas of the network. Where you already have fully accessible paths in your network these could well form the core around which you develop the rest of the system.

The action plan is likely to need a maintenance component so that these important routes remain available to disabled people in the future.

### Paths to be Improved to Standard

Where there are gaps in the range of opportunities available to disabled people paths that add to the choices available should be made fully accessible. According to the results of your strategic review you are likely to be making decisions as to where new routes and fully accessible paths are needed as well as up-grading existing paths. Some of your routes for improvement may link to and complement those that are already up to standard. However, paths in areas that are currently not accessible are likely to be important if the range of choices available to disabled people are actually going to increase.

The number and total distance of paths that will be improved to standard should be identified and included in the plan with the specific object of meeting the targets set in the strategy.

### Paths to be Improved to Least Restrictive Access

Given that resources are likely to be a limiting factor on the decisions there will be quite a number of paths where the cost of reaching the standard, at least in the short term, is excessive. The strategic review should have thrown up a series of routes which are important in terms of the opportunities they provide and can be made considerably more accessible than at present at relatively little cost. The removal of barriers, the improvement of short sections of poor surfaces and the clearance of encroaching vegetation can be cheap and easy options that can make a difference for many disabled people.



### Other paths

You are likely to have to commit resources to paths which do not form an important part of your accessibility strategy. This may be to accommodate other users such as horse riders or cyclists. Wherever resources are applied across the network they should not result in access for disabled people getting worse. In many cases simple maintenance programmes across the whole network can contribute to a general improvement in accessibility. For instance, the gradual replacement of stiles with gates will greatly extend access for some people.

### Priorities

Your plan of action is unlikely to solve all the access problems disabled people currently face in the short term. You will need to decide your priorities. These may be influenced by the public consultation you have undertaken. They should also be influenced by the results you expect from the application of the resources available to you. For instance, will your priorities mean that after the first phase of activity there are more and better opportunities available for all disabled people.

### Budgets

Effective budgeting will help you and other stakeholders see the return your investment in access for disabled people achieves. Just selecting the cheapest options for access improvements may not deliver much new or improved accessibility. One or two larger, more expensive projects may have a greater impact more quickly as far as improving things for disabled people is concerned.

### Programme

Your action plan needs a timescale. This will guide your work and provide stakeholders with a picture of the progress they can expect. It may also help you avoid problems under the DDA. If you are challenged that a particular path is not accessible you may legitimately point to the fact that you are working on other areas of the network and will be looking at that particular path at some future point in the programme.

### Evaluation

Your action plan should be subject to continual review. You need to consider more than just is it on schedule and within budget. The key evaluation criteria is whether access for disabled people has improved as a result of your work.



# Consultation

## Purpose of Consultation with Disabled People

Because public consultation features in policy and strategy development some general comments on inclusive planning are provided. More detailed considerations on networking with disabled people are provided in the [Networking Guidelines](#). In planning countryside path networks it is especially important to consult with disabled people because:

many disabled people do not see the countryside as accessible to them and there is likely to be a high latent demand among them;

the particular problems various disabled people face in accessing the countryside may not be understood by other people;

## Benefits of Consultation with Disabled People

Consultation with disabled people is not a matter of political correctness, it has practical benefits.

disabled people are the best people to identify access opportunities that will mean something to them;

they are best placed to suggest priorities for accessibility improvements;

disabled people know how to find access solutions that meet their own needs;

where some disabled people have been involved in access planning others will be more confident that provision will meet their needs;

## Consulting with Disabled People

If you expect disabled people to turn up to general consultation meetings about the countryside you may well be disappointed. When they cannot currently get into the countryside they are not likely to see such meetings as relevant to them. Specific meetings with disabled individuals and representatives of disability organisations are essential if you are to get any significant response on issues of accessibility.

The methods you adopt in contacting and talking to disabled people may have to be varied from other consultation approaches. You may have to use different media, for instance audio tapes for visually impaired people, when sending out material. When talking directly to disabled people you may have to adjust the topics you cover, the amount of time you allow and the language you use to make your consultations accessible and meaningful. Advice can be obtained through local disability organisations that will usually be pleased to help you contact and involve disabled people.



As in all consultation exercises you have to assess how representative the people you consult are. Too often access for disabled people is seen in terms of wheelchair users only. The needs of sensorily impaired people and people with learning disabilities must be considered. Among people with mobility disabilities there is such a diversity of different circumstances that one person may find it difficult to give a complete overview of everyone else's needs. Where the people you talk to are clearly representing a wide range of different disabled people you should be more confident you will receive a balanced response.

Some things may seem obvious but it is useful to remember during consultations with disabled people:

- some disabled people may talk to you through an advocate

- hold meetings in accessible venues;

- disabled people will know what they need but may not be familiar with countryside paths so as to be able to identify solutions;

- many disabled people will not be able to comment on areas that are not currently accessible, you may need to explain or bring photographs, etc;

- not all disabled people will want to use the countryside;

The questions you want answered by disabled people are likely to be the same as other sections of the community:

- what experiences should the path network lead to?

- which existing paths give access to where you want to go?

- are there any new routes that would add to the value of the network?

Additional questions you could ask disabled people include:

- are there any accessible paths that you value at present?

- which parts of the countryside do you think should be given priority for improvements to accessibility;



## Access Fora

In the future Access Fora will provide a clear basis for community consultation on all aspects of countryside access. It is quite possible that these fora will be liable under the DDA should their decisions, actions or advice lead to discrimination against disabled people. If you ensure your Access Forum has effective representation of the disability community the chance of it a) discriminating and b) being liable under the DDA should be greatly reduced.

The roles and functions Access Fora may perform with respect to disability issues included:

- receiving the views of disabled people on countryside access;
- informing disabled people of proposals and activities in countryside access;
- ensuring 'reasonable' accessibility is maintained across networks;
- ensuring that landowner, recreational user and conservation interests are not always allowed to over-ride the needs of disabled people;

## Conclusion

Planning a network that meets the needs of all potential users should not be seen as a daunting or threatening task. You are not expected to provide full accessibility for all of the people on all of the paths. You are expected to provide for all of the people on some of the paths. You should remember that where good accessibility is provided for disabled people many other users will benefit from more convenient, more enjoyable paths.

By approaching your network plan in a logical way that sets the policy climate within which strategies are developed and action plans implemented you will demystify the whole process and especially any concerns you may have about your services for disabled people. As the disabled people become more and more visible and integrated in our communities there is less reason why meeting their countryside access needs should be seen as exceptional or an extra duty.

Any network plan that you produce should now cover some measure of access provision for disabled people. In that this is liable to change over time you and your customers will be able to see that improvements are taking place and progress is being made. That is all disabled people, indeed, everyone should expect from countryside service providers.

# Appendix

## Model Policy for Accessible Countryside Path Networks

### Equality

#### Opportunities

Our organisations will seek to ensure that disabled people have equality of opportunity in pursuing the countryside recreation activities of their choice. This means that disabled people can have the same range and quality of experiences as other members of the community.

#### Outputs

Services and facilities will be provided in ways that do not make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to access them and where necessary all reasonable efforts will be made to change inadequate services.

#### Integration

Wherever possible disabled people will receive the same services and have access to the same facilities as other members of the community, having due regard to the fact that some disabled people may require or prefer modified provision to meet their individual needs.

#### Standards

Where recognised standards of provision for disabled people exist our organisation will adopt them or provide justification for any divergence or variation in their content or the way in which they are applied. In all situations our organisation will try to follow current best practice.

#### Other Policies

Where other policies are going to affect the ability of our organisation to deliver countryside accessibility these will be reviewed to ensure a proper balance is achieved and the needs of disabled people do not always take second place.

### Application of resources

#### Principles

All resources will be applied fairly and equitably. All resources will be allocated and utilised with due regard to the needs of disabled people. The provision of accessible services and facilities will not be seen as an additional cost but as an integral part of all expenditure programmes.

#### Recorded

To facilitate effective monitoring of performance and cost effectiveness our organisation will, wherever practical, identify the resources it has specifically allocated to provision for disabled people. The benefits for disabled people and the rest of the community arising from the application of resources to provision for countryside accessibility will be identified and recorded.

#### Transparency

Our organisation will report at least annually on the level and manner of resource allocation on provisions for countryside access for disabled people.

## Consultation

### Disabled People

Our organisation will consult with disabled people and other relevant individuals and organisations in the application of countryside accessibility policies and programmes. Procedures will be established to facilitate periodic public consultations on major issues or at the time of significant events such as the preparation and publication of strategies and plans.

### Standing Committees

Wherever standing committees or other groups are established to consider countryside recreation matters in our organisation representation will be sought from disabled people. The basis of that representation will be as wide as possible and, where practical, disabled or other people who genuinely represent a significant section of the disabled community will be encouraged to participate. Support will be provided by our organisation to encourage and facilitate disabled people to make a positive contribution as community representatives.

### Transparency

The outcomes of these consultation processes will be made available to interested parties so that they may see and evaluate the nature and extent to which our organisation has taken on board the views of respondents.

### Staff Training

### Equality

Our organisation's equal opportunities policies with respect to recruitment and staff development will be applied to all staff and volunteers involved in the planning and delivery of countryside recreation functions.

### Procedural

As its most significant resource all staff and volunteers will be made aware of our organisation's countryside policies relating to services and facilities for disabled people.

### Development

Our organisation's staff will be required to pursue development and training opportunities in disability awareness, access auditing and related fields. The our organisation's partners will be encouraged to put in place similar requirements.

### Appraisal

Discussion of issues relating to the provision of services and facilities for disabled people will be included in the personnel appraisal procedures operated by our organisation.

## Evaluation

### Principles

Our organisation will evaluate its performance and the value for money achieved in the delivery of countryside recreation services and facilities for disabled people.

### Auditing

Access audits will be utilised to evaluate the development, planning and management of accessibility and to guide the establishment of priorities for both new developments on-going management and maintenance.

### Feed-back

The results of evaluations of countryside recreation services and facilities for disabled people will be made available to consultative groups and other interested individuals and organisations.

### Complaints Procedure

Our organisation will establish fair and equitable procedures to respond to complaints from disabled people concerning any aspect of its countryside recreation functions.



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# Accessibility Survey & Access Audit Guidelines



Surveying and auditing countryside paths  
and trails for accessibility



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Accessibility Survey and Access Audit Guidelines

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# Introduction

If you are to improve access for disabled people to countryside paths and trails you need to know what level of accessibility already exists. Some of your countryside routes may be quite accessible at the moment and carefully thought out improvements on other paths should lead to you providing disabled people with a wider range of easy access choices.

Accessibility surveys and access audits are the processes you can use to find out what accessibility is like at present. Where you prioritise your effort in surveys and audits should be linked to the whole process of network planning ([see Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#)) which takes account of what people need and want as well as the physical condition of the paths and trails.

By undertaking accessibility surveys and access audits you will:

- develop a greater understanding of how the physical characteristics of countryside paths and trails enable or restrict access for disabled people;

- collect information on where good and poor access for disabled people exists;

- have a basis for making decisions on where access improvements can be made;

- have a basis for making decisions on what sort of access improvements are essential, necessary and desirable;

- obtain access information that may be immediately valuable to disabled people in helping them decide where they can go in the countryside.

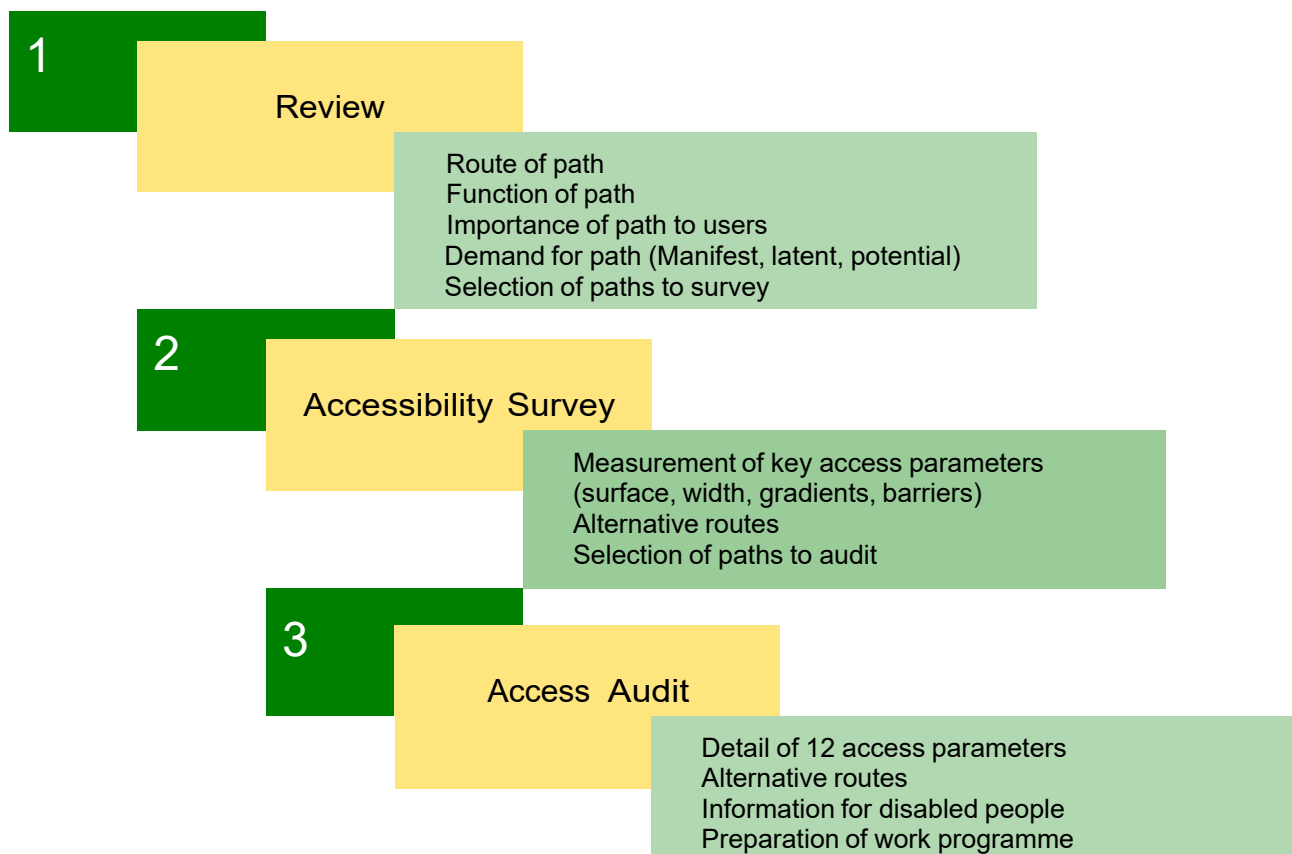


Accessibility surveys and access audits are both processes which can help you achieve the above outcomes but they are different in a number of ways:

Table 1

	Accessibility Surveys	Access Audits
Scope	cover whole networks or extensive lengths of countryside paths	cover specific routes and paths
	several (5 - 10) kilometres per day can be surveyed	several hundred metres (2 - 5 Km) per day can be audited
Detail	give a general overview of accessibility	give a detailed information on accessibility
	use surface, width, gradients and barriers as primary indicators of accessibility	use all 12 parameters relevant to access for disabled people ( <a href="#">see Accessibility Standards</a> and <a href="#">Least Restrictive Access Guidelines</a> )
Decisions	help you to decide where access audits should be carried out	help you to decide where access improvements should be made

In these guidelines we advocate a three tier approach to surveys and audits. It begins with a desktop review of relevant factors. Amongst other things the review should guide your decisions on which parts of the network are to be covered by an accessibility survey. The survey returns should then help you decide which paths to audit. This is to ensure that the limited time and resources available for the exercise are efficiently used.





## Review

The main value of a desk-top review before any site survey work is undertaken is to direct your limited resources to the paths and trails which are most important and for which you most need accessibility information. If you are responsible for only a few short paths you may be able to survey all of them relatively easily. Even then you will need more information than just the physical condition of the paths if you are going on to make decisions on where and how improvements are to be made to benefit disabled people.

The primary purpose of the review is to enable you to prioritise your paths and decide which should be surveyed. The policies and strategies you developed for your path network ([see Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#)) should guide your decisions. By asking the following questions you will begin to see which of your paths are likely to be of interest to disabled people and therefore are likely to be worth surveying.

Which of your paths lead to interesting features or facilities that people will want to enjoy?

Which paths are already popular with the public?

Which paths are easy to get to from local communities, by public transport or are served by good car parks?

Which paths have amenities such as car parking, public toilets, shelters or picnic areas which may help disabled people enjoy their visits?

Are any of your paths to be maintained or redeveloped in the near future so that there will be an opportunity to make accessibility improvements?

Which areas or paths have been mentioned by disabled people as places they would like to gain access to?

You should be aiming to survey all paths over a period of time but in the short term you are likely to be limited by the staff and financial resources available to you. This is why the review is worthwhile. With this approach you will produce a list of paths indicating their priority within the accessibility survey you are about to undertake.



## Accessibility Survey

Survey work across a countryside access network will require the collection of data about many issues, including levels of use, features of interest and path condition. Information on the physical condition of paths is essential if the access needs of disabled people are to be considered properly.

Once the routes to be surveyed have been identified a plan of action for the accessibility survey itself is needed. This should have its own process developed to meet the needs dictated by the aims you set for the network as a whole. It should have its own objectives, a plan, resources allocated to it, and provide for evaluation.

**Objectives** may vary from one survey to another depending on the wider goals of your own organisation and of those with whom you consult. However, they should be functional, centred around the needs of all potential users and, as with all other objectives, SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time limited). Objectives for an accessibility survey could include some or all of the following:

- to identify the most important paths in a network that require access auditing;
- to complete an annual accessibility survey of at least 20% of all paths;
- to complete an accessibility survey of the whole network over the next 3 years;
- to identify the “potential accessibility” of all paths surveyed; ([see Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#))
- to survey as much of the path network as possible with the commitment of one staff day per month to field survey work;
- to provide basic access information to disabled visitors to the network.

### The Accessibility Survey Plan

should clearly identify the paths to be covered by the survey. It should also determine the exact level of detail that needs to be collected and how it will be recorded. As later with the access audits, the information must relate to the needs of disabled people wanting to visit the countryside and, therefore, the parameters of the [Accessibility Standards](#) are the obvious starting point.





In order that the survey process is both efficient and speedy and does not replicate the more detailed auditing process to follow, the information collected should meet the specific objectives you set for the survey. For instance, if the survey is primarily to be used to decide which paths should be subject to a full access audit there may be less need for detailed information as this will be generated by the audits themselves. However, the survey should collect sufficient information to distinguish between those paths which are worth auditing and those which are less likely to eventually provide accessible routes for disabled people.

The table below illustrates the sort of information to be collected in an accessibility survey.

**Table 2**

Accessibility Survey Information Collection		
Path function	destination	record where paths go; a route between a car park and visitor centre may be particularly important
	route	circular walks are often popular, but linear routes between key features can also be significant
	shared use	disabled people may often benefit from knowing that a path has to be shared with horse riders, cyclists, motor vehicles or other users
	surface	path surfaces can be recorded as 'natural', 'managed' or 'constructed'; the condition of the path should also be recorded; this will give some indication of the sort of interventions that could lead to access improvements
	width	paths widths may vary considerably; record the average width with notes on any particularly narrow sections that may restrict disabled people
	linear gradient	the overall gradient along the line of a path should be measured at intervals of about 50m with additional measurements of steep sections (1:10 or steeper)
	cross gradient	occasional cross gradient measurements (every 100m or where an obvious problem exists) should be taken to indicate over what length of the path this restriction exists so as to guide the access audit to follow and so that the extent of necessary reparation or construction work can be estimated
Barriers	obstacles	where any feature (width, surface, etc) is so severe as to be likely to cause a lot of people to face considerable restriction, record its condition, location and duration
	barriers	stiles and difficult gates, for instance, should be recorded with a brief description

Accessibility survey information can be recorded in various ways according to what you find most convenient. Appendices 1, 2 and 3 illustrate tabular, map-based and linear recording formats. Details of the measuring equipment and how to use it are provided in the section below that looks at access audits.

Survey information can include or allow for the development of general descriptions as long as they are relevant to the needs of disabled people. As an accessibility survey is a quicker and more generalised information collection process than an access audit. It can not give you all the information you need to decide on detailed access improvements. Such decisions must in any case be made in conjunction with information on other factors not least of which is the amount of money available for the improvements. The survey will provide you with a general impression of where current accessibility is good or poor and where in the future good accessibility could be achieved.

It is, therefore, possible to follow an abbreviated recording approach in an accessibility survey. Better trained and more experienced surveyors will be able to use abbreviations and generalisations to speed up the survey while still providing the necessary information at an appropriate level of detail. One way of doing this is in relation to the BT Countryside for All Standards. All the parameters to be measured can be aggregated and each section of path classified according to one of the following descriptions:

meets the appropriate standard on all parameters (as measured by the survey, i.e. less precisely than would be the case in an access audit)

is very close to the standard but diverges by some measurable degree in relation to one or more parameters;

has the potential to meet the standard (with specified action); for instance there is a constructed path over generally level ground but the width is restricted and the surface broken with excessive cross gradient in parts;

all parameters are markedly outside the measurements required by the standards; substantial work or a completely new path would be needed to achieve the standard and an assessment of the least restrictive access possible will be required to decide upon access improvements.



## Resources

Accessibility surveys and access audits take time. It is important that you anticipate and provide for the staff time necessary to collect the information you need to make meaningful improvements to access for disabled people.

An investment in training can be very cost effective. Where the people who are required to undertake accessibility surveys have been trained they will:

- take less time to complete the exercise;
- provide more accurate and reliable information;
- be familiar with the factors that matter for access for disabled people;
- be capable of contributing to decisions on how and where access improvements should be made.

Trained staff will also be able to help you estimate the time that will be needed to undertake surveys and audits more accurately. Your allocation of sufficient time will depend greatly on the ability of the surveyors and auditors.

Depending on the level of detail to be recorded in an accessibility survey and the difficulty of the terrain to be covered, it should be possible to survey at least 1km per hour. If you plan for this rate of survey you should be able to identify the best use of whatever limited resources you have available.

## Evaluation

An evaluation of survey activity is important for a number of reasons. Most importantly you may find that the paths you prioritised for survey have very poor levels of accessibility and would be very hard improve. You may need to review your path network to identify other potential routes that satisfy public access needs (for instance, access to a good view point). You will then need to survey other paths that can satisfy those needs and provide good accessibility.

## Access Auditing

Access auditing is the exercise to measure all the parameters that matter for disabled people using countryside paths.

The functions of access auditing are:

for countryside service providers:

Audits tell you how accessible your facilities are.

They provide good access information which is good customer service.

They help you apply limited resources in the most important places.

You can show clear access improvement needs when making applications for additional resources.

for disabled people?

Audit information lets disabled people make informed choices about where is accessible.

It gives confidence to disabled users that they will find the level of access they expect.

It lets them express a view as to where and how access might be improved.

Which paths are to be audited?

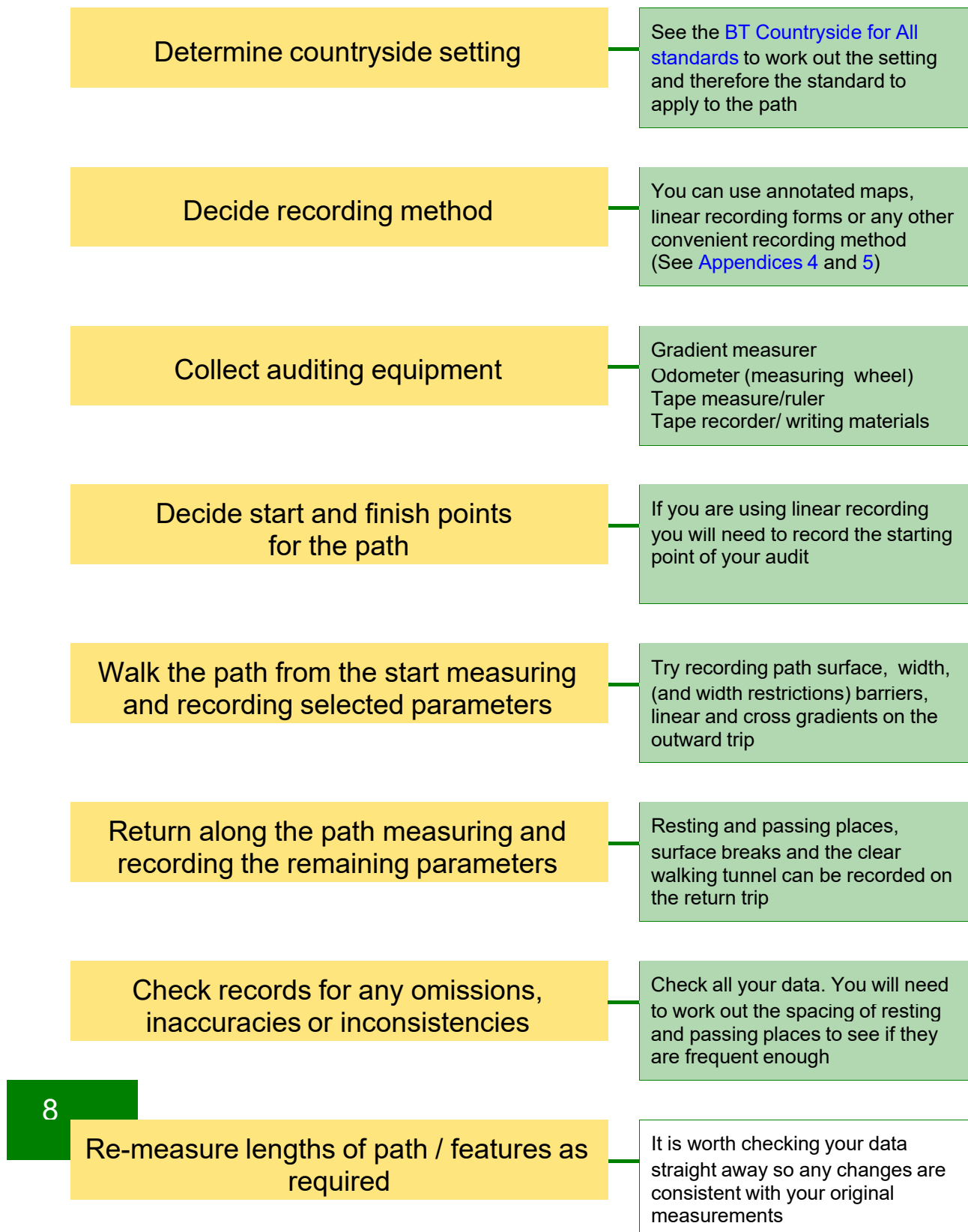
Your first task is to decide which paths to audit. Just as your network review gave you a way of prioritising on which paths you would undertake accessibility surveys, so your survey results should indicate which paths you should undertake an access audit on.

Care should be taken in selecting those paths based on the survey results. If you choose to audit only those that the survey showed to have good accessibility already you will be in danger of providing for disabled people on the basis of how easy it is to create accessibility. The aim of network planning is to make whatever routes people want to use as accessible as possible. This may mean at times that a very rough, difficult path that leads to a special feature or experience should be given priority for access auditing and subsequent improvement work ahead of a better quality path that leads nowhere in particular.

The Access Audit Process

Access auditing is not rocket science. It simply involves measuring the 12 parameters that make a difference to disabled people's access on countryside paths. These parameters are detailed in the [Accessibility Standards](#) and the [Least Restrictive Access Guidelines](#). The sequence of activities in auditing are shown in [Figure 1](#).

## Figure 1 Access Auditing





## Access Audit Recording

To help you recognise and measure the parameters that are important for access for disabled people the following notes should be read prior to starting an audit. If you can not get on an access audit training course you may need to practice and refer to these guidelines until you are confident.

Your records should highlight where the path diverges from the required access standard. As a general rule the more accessible a path is the less recording you will have to do. See Appendices [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#) and [5](#).

### 1 Path Surfaces ([See Information Sheet 2.2](#))

Countryside paths vary enormously in the quality and performance of their surfaces. You should start by observing the type of path surface:

Constructed: for instance, tarmac, concrete, setts, crushed stone or boardwalk paths;

Managed: for instance, mown grass or bark chippings paths

‘Natural’: for instance, earth trodden paths and paths over unmade ground.



This information can be helpful when you come to assess access improvements and the amount of work necessary to bring a path up to an acceptable level of accessibility. You should next observe and record what you see with respect to the following key characteristics:

**Hard or Firm:** This means the path should be free from soft material into which a foot, stick or wheel might sink. Even quite small areas of soft mud or sand could, for instance, cause a wheelchair user to become stuck.

**Smooth:** All but well maintained sealed surfaces are likely to have some irregularities and a judgement must be made as to whether these constitute a problem. A cobbled street has irregularities but might well fall within the standards as long as the level differences between adjacent setts are not too severe. A path with numerous large stones protruding from the surface by 50mm would not meet the standard.

**Stable:** Loose material on a surface can create a risk of feet or wheels slipping. The size of the loose material, its depth and the extent to which it covers the surface can all affect accessibility. Loose material over the whole surface of a path is always likely to cause problems. Even a light covering of sand on a sealed surface can be slippery. Rounded loose material (such as pea gravel) is more likely to cause problems than sharp stone but even this, if it is loose and covers the whole surface, will reduce accessibility.



The size and compaction of path material is significant to how easily many people can use a path. Fine compacted material (left) is a far better surface than larger loose material (right) (The 50p piece is 27mm across)



## 2 Path Width and Allowable Width Restrictions ([see Information Sheet 1.1](#))

The width of the path should be measured at regular intervals. Your records should show the lengths of path which are wide enough, and those lengths which are too narrow and by how much.

It is the useable surface of the path that is important. This may often be reduced by encroaching vegetation. If the path varies a great deal in width you might represent the width as an average measurement along a long section of the route all of which is narrower than the required standard. However, you should bear in mind the following key measurements when recording and describing the path:

1,200mm; wider than this and the path allows two people to move side by side with relative ease and meets the standard for urban/formal and urban fringe/managed countryside settings;

1,000mm; on a path of this width two people may have to stagger their positions a little to move together. It is wide enough to meet the standard for rural/working countryside settings but not urban/formal and urban fringe/managed settings..

915mm; this is wide enough for most people to pass but if it continues for a distance of more than 1,600mm it will restrict some people. A kissing gate refuge with dimensions of 915mm by 1,600mm should allow most people access though the larger powered buggies may face difficulties. This would meet the BT Countryside for All standards in rural/working countryside settings.



815mm; this is the minimum acceptable width for a gate. This width restriction should not continue for more than a short distance (300mm) along the line of the path to avoid restriction to a wide range of users.

A path with numerous potholes may be acceptable if there is sufficient width for people to pass and the remaining part of the path surface is satisfactory.



You can use any tape measure to check the width and width restrictions along a path. You can save a lot of time and effort by using poles or boards cut or marked to appropriate lengths (say, 1,200mm, 1,000mm, 815mm) which you can just lay on the path to check its width. The board illustrated (right) is 1,200mm long in total and hinged at 815mm. It also has a mark on it at 1,000mm.



### 3 Barriers

(See Appendices 3 and 4 in the Least Restrictive Access Guidelines)

Stiles, flights of steps, vehicle barriers and some gates represent absolute barriers to many disabled people and uncomfortable or inconvenient obstacles to many more people. You should record where barriers exist and provide a brief description of the nature of the restriction.

Some of the common features of barriers which make them inaccessible include:

gate latches which can only be operated by leaning over the top of the gate will not be useable in both directions by people with reach difficulties including many wheelchair users;

vehicle barriers across a road may not be 'seen' by visually impaired people using long canes;

where people are channelled through gaps or gates the surface can become worn and uneven such that manoeuvring is very difficult;



latches that require intricate or strong hand movements will cause problems for people with dexterity difficulties such as people with arthritis;

the weight of a gate's self-closing mechanism can make it very difficult to open and may be dangerous if people need time to manoeuvre through the gate;

on locked gates even when a key is provided or a National Key Scheme lock is used, some disabled people will be excluded;

stiles will always represent a barrier to many disabled people but their condition should still be recorded so that if they must be retained they can be made as useable as possible.

the absence of hand-holds on stiles can be significant factor in limiting some people's use of them.





#### 4 Passing places (see [Information Sheet 1.1](#))

For people to pass comfortably on a path there should be a clear area of path surface 1500mm x 2000mm. These areas should occur at least as frequently as required according to the standard that applies to the countryside setting of the path with more passing places provided the busier the path is. For instance, in an urban/formal setting the passing places should occur at no greater than 50m intervals.

A path 1500mm wide or wider does not need specific passing places. Where this is not the case the easiest way of auditing is to record the location of all passing places of the required dimensions and then to check at the end of your audit the intervals between them to see if any additional passing places need to be added.



#### 5 Resting places (see [Information Sheet 3.1](#))

Many disabled people who can walk may be limited in the distance they can cover without a rest. Seats or perches at regular intervals along a path will increase the number and range of people that will find that route more comfortable and accessible. For instance, in a rural/working countryside setting resting places should occur at no greater than 300m intervals. As with passing places the easiest way of auditing is to record the location of all seats and perches and then to check at the end of your audit the intervals between them to see if any additional resting places are needed.



Seats and perches need not be formal benches. Perches can be made attractive features of a route or they may just be natural seats on walls, rocks or tree stumps which can provide perfectly adequate resting points.



## 6 Linear gradient (see Information Sheet 2.1)

The steeper a path gradient the more disabled people are likely to be restricted. Gradients in several ranges need to be measured in an audit:

level to 1:20: gradients in this range are not considered to pose any restriction to disabled people;

1:20 to 1:12: gradients in this range are acceptable in the urban/formal and urban fringe/managed countryside settings but they are still considered to be ramps and should not continue for too great a distance (see 7 below)

1:12 to 1:10: these gradients will meet the standards in rural/working settings but not in urban/formal and urban fringe/managed countryside settings; again they should not continue for too great a distance (see 7 below)

steeper than 1 in 10: gradients steeper than 1:10 do not meet any of the standards though access audits should still record gradients in this range as the information will help reveal where alternative routes are necessary to achieve better accessibility. Where a least restrictive access approach is being followed, the audit record will help determine what the gradient could be reasonably reduced to.



Recording linear gradients requires the use of a gradient measurer (below) and some common sense in how often and where to measure. Until you become familiar with gradients it is worth measuring any gradient that you are unsure of. Some slopes appear more or less steep because of the lie of the land around them which can deceive the eye.



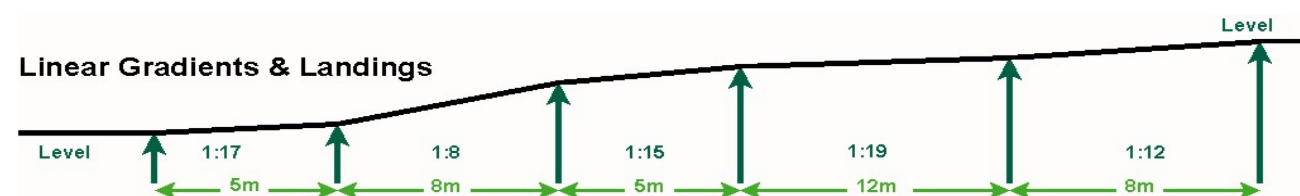
## 7 Height rise of ramps (see Information Sheet 2.1)

The longer a slope runs along a path the more likely it is that some disabled people's access will be restricted by it. Landings or level areas are a help, particularly for wheelchair users.

The distance needed between landings varies with the steepness of the slope. The steeper the slope the more frequent should be the landings. The following example will help you audit gradients and work out the average grade and number of landings needed.

When auditing slopes with variable gradients you need to record both the gradient and the distance over which that gradient runs. You need only start recording distance when the slope becomes steeper than 1 in 20. As the gradients change, measure for what distance each gradient lasts. You should end up with a diagram similar to that in Figure 2.

Figure 2



A table of these gradients and distances will enable you to work out the height rise along each section and over the whole slope.

Slope	1 in 17	1 in 8	1 in 15	1 in 19	1 in 14	Totals
Length	5 m	8 m	5 m	12 m	10 m	40 m
Height Rise	0.29 m (5 ÷ 17)	1.00 m (8 ÷ 8)	0.33 m (5 ÷ 15)	0.63 m (12 ÷ 19)	0.71 m (10 ÷ 14)	2.96 m

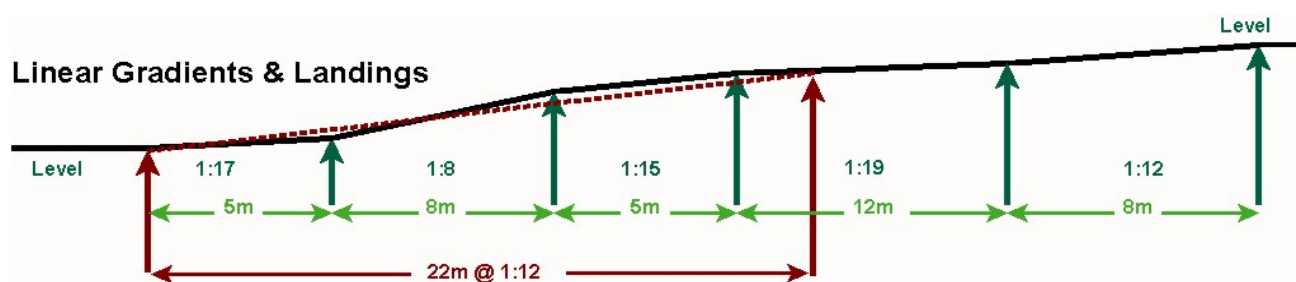
In this example 4 landings would be required over the 40m of path to meet the urban/formal settings standard. As each landing is 1500mm long, 6m of the path would need to be level. This means that the remaining 34m of the path section must accommodate the overall height rise of 2.96m. However, level landings can be provided to the side of a path so that the gradient can be sustained over a greater length, hence reducing the overall gradient.

In this example accessibility improvements could be made to the gradients by reducing the steepness of the worst section. By regrading the first 22m of the slope to a gradient of 1 in 12 gradient this path would meet the standard for urban/formal settings.

(See Figure 3)



Figure 3



Even with a re-graded path landings remain necessary as the overall height rise along the 40m of this path is still 2.96m; i.e. four landings are required.

Slope	1 in 12	1 in 19	1 in 14	Totals
Length	22 m	8 m	10 m	40 m
Height Rise	1.83 m (22 ÷ 12)	0.42 m (8 ÷ 19)	0.71 m (10 ÷ 14)	2.96 m

## 8 Cross gradient

A slope across the line of a path can make access very difficult for wheelchair users and other disabled people. Pushing a wheelchair for any distance along a sloping path can be very tiring, it is much more difficult to manoeuvre on and can lead to people straying off the path surface.



In auditing a path it is not practical to measure the cross gradient every metre along the path. The frequency with which you take measurements will link to the objectives of your audit. An efficient method of collecting accurate information

is to measure the cross gradient approximately every 30m along the path and where there is some obvious indication that the cross gradient is excessive. Where these measurements show a problem, return and take more frequent measurements to build up a more detailed picture of how severe the cross gradient is and for how far along the path it lasts.

Where the cross gradient varies across the width of the path it is the best part that should be measured so long as this extends for at least 815mm across the path. If there is a double camber on the path you will be able to measure a zero cross gradient across the ridge of the camber. This is an acceptable position so long as the cross gradients are not very severe, i.e. greater than 1 in 15.

Over several hundred metres of path it is unlikely that you will not record at least one instance of the cross gradient being steeper than the required standard. This does not mean that the whole route fails to meet the standard. Short sections of a few yards where the cross gradient is only slightly steeper than the desired gradient can be tolerated. Long sections with a consistent cross gradient can mean wheelchair users having to push harder with one hand to the point of discomfort and tiredness. Short very steep cross gradients can actually be a barrier to some people.

## 9 Steps (see Information Sheet 2.5)

A full flight of steps represents a barrier that should be recorded under [Section 3](#) above. This section relates to small level changes and surface irregularities that might create access difficulties for path users. Small 'steps' often occur on countryside paths, for instance, where one type of surface changes to another and erosion leaves an edge. Tree roots across a path are also effectively 'steps' that may cause a trip hazard or stop a wheelchair user passing easily. On paved paths irregular and uneven slabs often create small but significant 'steps'.

Depending on the countryside setting of the path being audited you should record steps that are deeper than the required maximum (5mm, 10mm or 15mm).

## 10 Surface breaks (see Information Sheet 2.3)

Drains, grills and the gaps in boardwalks can be a problem for people using sticks, canes or wheelchairs. The maximum gap should be 12mm. This 12mm maximum applies whether the gap is running along the line of the path or across it. Ideally gaps should be across the line of the path.

You need to measure and record all surface breaks where they exceed 12mm.



## 11 Clear walking tunnel (see Information Sheet 2.4)

Obstacles over hanging or intruding into the side of a path can cause difficulties for visually impaired people and people who might have problems bending or manoeuvring. The clear tunnel should apply vertically above the full surface width of the path.

You should record the location and duration of any intrusions into a clear walking tunnel. It will also be helpful to record the nature of the obstacle. Over hanging vegetation is likely to be a less difficult problem to resolve than the arch of a bridge.

## 12 Other information

Other information relevant to how the public can access and enjoy the countryside can be collected as you are undertaking an access audit for instance:

**Shared use:** although the fact that cyclists or horse riders use a path or trail does not necessarily restrict access for disabled people but many may choose to use a path that is not shared rather than one that is.



**Signage:** Information can be helpful to disabled people where it tells them what they can expect in terms of the level of accessibility they will encounter. For instance, telling people how long a route is will help them decide how far they want to venture. Even when paths meet the standards they will differ quite a lot. A path that has no gradients greater than 1 in 12 but continues to climb for quite some distance will be a very different proposition to a path which stays level with only a few 1 in 12 sections.

**Waymarking:** Disabled people may not be confident about following routes that are not clearly marked. Not only should paths be waymarked but where some paths are accessible and some are not their waymarking should clearly distinguish between these routes. ([See Information Sheet 4.7](#))

**Safety:** All members of the public should be protected from and warned about safety hazards (e.g. dangerous trees or high drops to the side of a path). Disabled people are quite capable of looking after themselves and should not be seen as a greater liability than any other category of user, including children. Proper risk assessments should be undertaken separately from the access audit process.



## Measuring Equipment

### Positioning

When you record any piece of information about the condition of a path you will need to know where on the path you are located. If you are using a map -based recording system you will need to check your exact position on the map each time you note some feature or characteristic of the path.

The tabular recording approach requires that you track your distance from the point on the trail where you started your audit. This is most easily done using an odometer, or measuring wheel. This will allow you to move along the path and note data as you go, with the certainty that by recording the reading on the odometer you will be able to relocate your position.



The odometer is also especially useful when it comes to measuring over what distance along the path a particular characteristic applies. It is relatively easy to note the fact that the surface of the path is poor from the 215m reading to the 237m reading on the odometer.



The odometer will also help you locate the position of passing and resting places along the path. When you have finished your field work it is relatively easy to look at the distances between resting and passing places and work out if there are enough for the path to reach the BT Countryside for All standard.

### Linear Measurements

You will need a tape measure to record path width, width restrictions, and the clear walking tunnel. A quicker and simpler method is to cut poles or boards to specified lengths and use these to check whether a particular feature exceeds the required specification. Relevant measurements are:

815mm	Minimum allowable gap width
915mm	Allowable gap for up to 1000mm in rural/working landscapes
1000mm	Minimum path width in rural/working landscapes
1200mm	Minimum path width in urban/formal and urban fringe/managed landscapes
1600mm	Length of allowable restrictions
2100mm	Height for clear walking tunnel



For other linear measurements you will need a ruler. For the step levels and surface breaks you need to measure 5mm, 10mm, 12mm, and 15mm. In each case you could cut a piece of board to that thickness and use it for comparison. A 12mm circular dowel is especially useful to insert into the gaps of grills, boardwalks and drains to check they are not too wide.

## Gradients

Linear gradients can be measured with a clinometer. However, these will give an average reading over a given distance and they cannot easily be used to take spot gradients on a path. When checking new routes or seeking alternative routes where no path currently exists a clinometer is a useful tool to give a general impression of the slope over which you are considering constructing a path.

For auditing linear gradients and cross gradients a gradient measurer as shown in the photograph is required. This is a spirit level with a calibrated arm that provides a means of reading off the gradient. Two sizes are available, the smaller will measure to



no steeper than 1 in 6, the larger to no steeper than 1 in 12. You could easily make your own version of these instruments using a builder's level and a ruler, though you may find the homemade version less easy to use and less accurate. Where the path is uneven a board under the gradient measure will take out some of the irregularities of the slope.

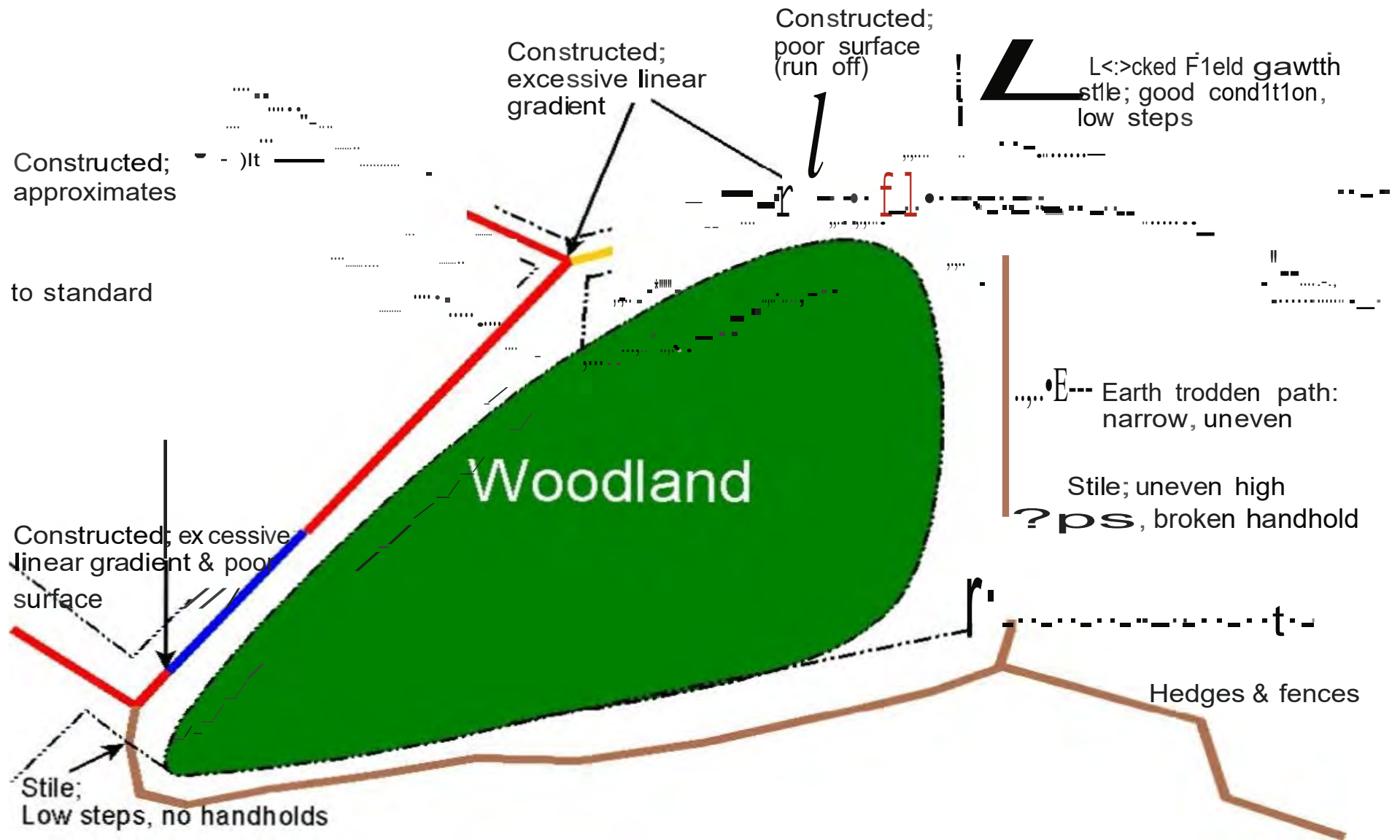
When auditing you only need to check the linear gradient when it becomes steeper than 1 in 20. You then need to keep recording every few metres until the gradient ceases to be as steep as 1 in 20. By recording your readings and the distances between them you will be able to build up a profile the slope. (See [Sections 6 and 7](#) above).



## Appendix 1 - Tabular Accessibility Survey Recording

COUNTRYSIDE PATH NETWORK ACCESSIBILITY SURVEY REPORT										Sheet no	1	
SURVEYOR							ROUTE NAME			DATE		
GRID REF START							WEATHER			GRID REF FINISH		
Section	Location	Setting	Photo#	Type	Surface	Grdnt	Xfall	Features	Extent (Linear metres & describe)	Comments		
1	Start	U	1	C	B	A	B					
2	Woodland Edge	U		C	B	A		OV	25M from start			
3		U		C	A	B			10M "			
4		U		C	A	C			60M "			
5		U		C	A	A	B		90M "			
6	Path Junction	U	2	C	C	B/C		WO	125M "			
7		U		C	C	B			150M "			
8		U		C	C	C	C		220M "			
9	Large Oak	U		C	B	A		WR	250M "			
10	Field edges	U	3	N	B	A	C	G / CA	375M "	Field gate has to be lifted		
11		U		N	C	A		CA	425M "			
12		UF/M		N	C	B	B	CA	500M "			
13	Farm track	UF/M	4	C	C	A		G / TR	525M "	Field gate - good latch & condition		
14									"			
15												
KEY - FEATURE CODES												
V	Vegetation	ST	Steep fall-off		Surface	A	Even, firm & stable	Cross fall	A	< 1:35		
S	Stile		OV	Over head intrusion		B	Firm but uneven, or loose		B	1:35 to 1:20		
G	Gates			WR		Width restriction / side intrusion			C	Loose, soft or unstable	C	>1:20
WO	Wash-out	L	Water next to path		Gradient	A	To standard	Types	C	Constructed		
WA	Wet area/swamp		TR	Traffic next to path		B	1:10 to 1:8		M	Managed		
CF	Cliff			CA		Livestock(cattle)			C	1:8 to 1:6	N	Natural

## Appendix 2- Map Based Accessibility Survey Recording



## Appendix 3 - Example of Linear Accessibility Survey Recording

### West Argyll Forest District Surveys and Audits

#### Barnluasgan - Accessibility Surveys

##### Barnluasgan Car park and Visitor Centre

Car park has a rope segregated walkway for pedestrians but is so little used that the better, but not standard, surface is across the car park itself.

No designated bays - could be one for trails and one for the centre. One picnic bench, not accessible in design and located 2m over grass.

Access from the end of the car park towards the centre is via a two stage ramp, 1.5 - 2m wide, fair surface but with 5mm loose material. 1<sup>st</sup> stage is 9.5m long with gradient 1:6.2 - 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> stage alongside the centre is a slope.

Reaches the entrance @15.5m, wooden ramp 1.6m long, 20-50mm step up and initial 700mm is >1:6. Thumb latch on door 1250mm high, no side access.

Inside the centre there are similar wall high boards to Loch Awe on the calendar design - mix of styles, designs and themes at varying heights (not as bad for over printing and contrast as othersite).

Circulation inside is good and it would provide a good shelter from the elements.

##### Barnluasgan Wildlife Trail - Easy Going Trail

Potential accessible bay(s) at this end of the car park but marred by crossfall.  
From start, width 2m, surface in standard, crossfall variable.

- @6m crossfall 1:12.9, no reason for this
- @12m Info boards, good design, good access, angled boards
- @16m 1<sup>st</sup> pull down fingerpost 'Grazers and corncrakes', passes over the stream in standard
- @23m Millennium Marker. Short 3m gradient of 1:9 then levels. Width 1.5m, surface good crossfall can be found
- @50m crossfall from here becomes an issue, constantly falling in and out of standard eg.@64m 1:14.4 - no reason for this
- @125m width down to c.1.2m
- @140m crossfall improving, back in by 176m but then just out again @199m 1:30
- @212m 'Flying Dragons' fingerpost. Pull down of these arms is not consistent in terms of their relation to the path. Crossfall ok here, width still 1.2m
- @333m 'Host to 1000's' fingerpost. Crossfall 1:25
- @357m gradient 1:15 but within ramp rise

- @445m crossfall failures no greater than 1:20
- @494m passing width returns
- @556m 'Dry Stone Home' fingerpost by stone wall
- @561m width <1.5m
- @566m crossfall 1:18
- @571m crossfall 1:10.9 (no reason)
- @603m crossfall 1:10.6, gradient 1:14.4 but within ramp rise
- @615m path junction to the left but not part of a promoted route (service vehicles), but makes crossfall 1:8.4, passing place
- @630m crossfall 1:20, some grass growth through surface from here but insignificant at present
- @709m junction to the right (passing place) to the hide - will return to this spur
- @762m crosses the end of the loch wetland. 'Animal Tracks' fingerpost
- @771m joins the Oakwood Trail with a 270mm step up to boardwalk.
- Spur to  
hide Start, 1.5m wide, crossfall ok, surface good. Reaches hide @42m. Open back hide and magnipost - hide is 4m wide with central bench 1600mm and 1100mm gaps either side for access. Knee height gap is 800mm, viewing height 980-1250mm

## Appendix 4 - Examples of Tabular Recording of Access Audit Information

### EXAMPLE

Urban/formal Setting:													Location of path:		Start Point
Record Distance	Surface	Width	Restriction	Barrier	Ramp Gradient	Rise of Ramp	Cross Slope	Steps	Breaks	Tunnel	Passing	Resting	Sheet No.		
	Firm stable non-slip	Min 1200mm	815mm or 1000mm	None	Max 1:12	Max 750mm	Max 1:50	Max 5mm	Max 12mm	1200 x 2100mm	50 metres	100 metres	#	Notes	
Start			750mm gap in gate	Gate				45mm lip							45mm lip on threshold of gate
										U	D				D - passing space
7m	Loose stones over surface to 50mm depth						> 1:50 but < 1:35								
10m										U					U - overhanging tree branches
13m		Vegetation narrows path to 1005mm								U	D				D - passing space
										U					
18m										U					
20m							> 1:50 but < 1:35			U					
22m										U					
26m										U					
										U					
30m			815mm boardwalk for 9m						Gaps greater than 12mm	U					
							> 1:50 but < 1:35								
39m															
40m					Gradients between 1:11 and 1:8	No landings									
43m										U					
47m												D			D - Picnic Bench
50m															



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[illegible]

## EXAMPLE

Urban fringe / managed Setting:													Location of path:	
Record Distance	Surface	Width	Restriction	Barrier	Ramp Gradient	Rise of Ramp	Cross Slope	Steps	Breaks	Tunnel	Passing	Resting	Start Point	Visitor Centre
	Firm stable non-slip	Min 1200mm	815mm or 1000mm	None	Max 1:12	Max 830mm	Max 1:45	Max 10mm	Max 12mm	1200 x 2100mm	100 metres	200 metres	Sheet No.	1 of 6
													#	Notes
Start														
5m					Gradient 1:10 for									
											D			D - passing space available
8m		average width 900mm												
10m														
12m														
20m			650mm											
22m	Potholes, Loose stones and mud give poor surface						Cross-fall over 1:45, worse measured 1:25							
30m														
38m														
39m														
40m														
43m														
45m				Stile										Stile - high steps (500mm)
47m											D			D - passing space available
50m								Kerb						Kerb cut need where path joins road

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[illegible]

## EXAMPLE

Rural / Working Landscapes Setting										Location of path:								
Record Distance	Surface	Width	Restriction	Barrier	Ramp Gradient	Rise of Ramp	Cross Slope	Steps	Breaks	Tunnel	Passing	Resting	Start Point					
	Firm stable non-slip	Min 1000mm	815mm or 1000mm	None	Max 1:10	Max 950mm	Max 1:35	Max 15mm	Max 12mm	1200 x 2100mm	150 metres	300 metres	Sheet No.					
													#	Notes				
Start																		
5m		width varies from 725mm to 800mm																
12m	surface un-made, earth trodden						Cross gradient very uneven and irregular as steep as 1in 15 in places											
													D	D - informal perch available on wall				
35m				Gate						Step						Gate 750mm wide - latch difficult, step on sill		
50m								Gradient as steep as 1:6, average 1:8	No landing over 28m length and 3.5m height rise									
58m																		
														Branches overhang for most of section				
75m																		
78m																		

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[illegible]

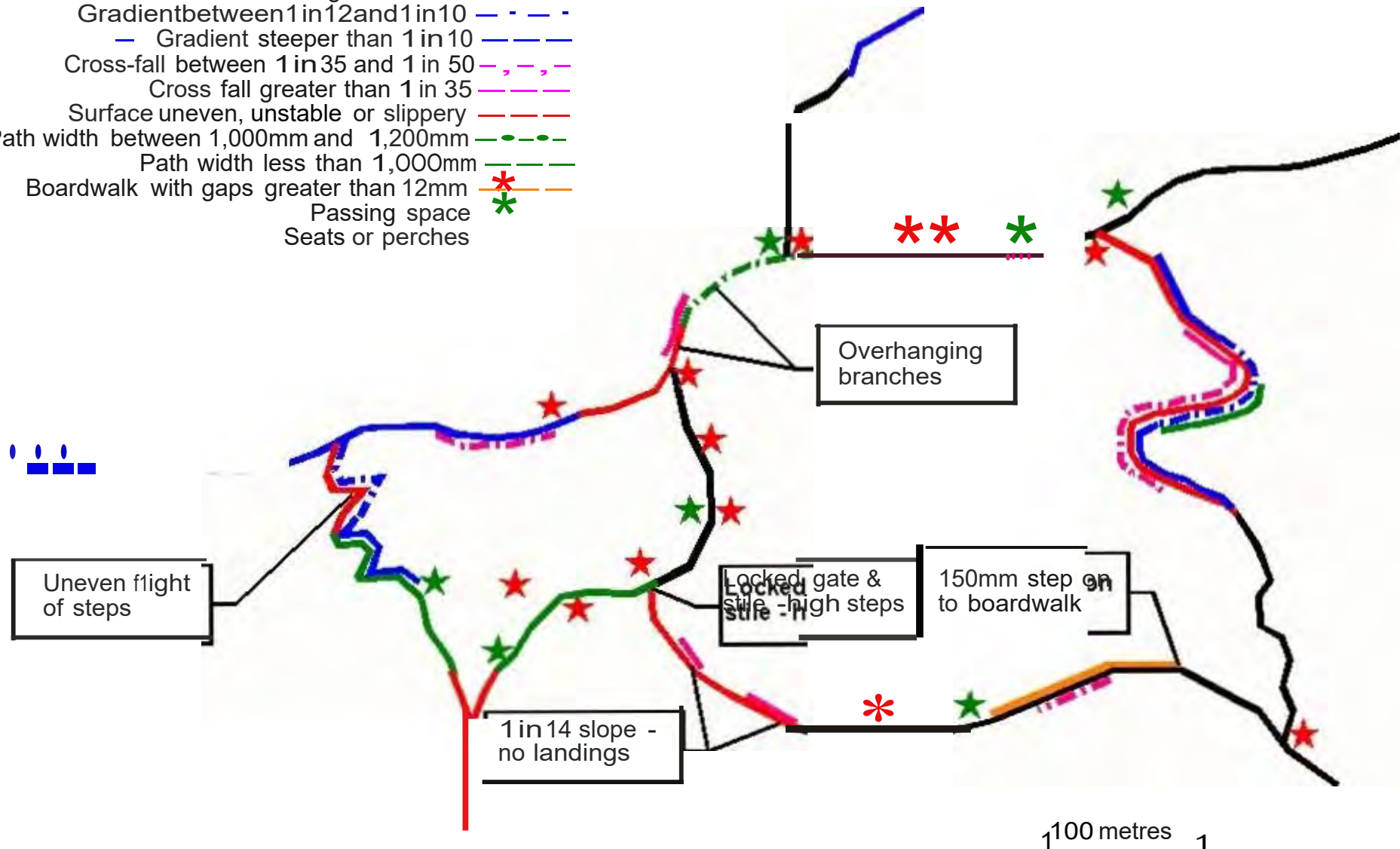


## Appendix 5- Example of Map-based Recording of Access Audit Information

### Access Audit Record -Urban / formal setting

Key

- Path width surface & linear gradients OK — — —
- Gradient between 1 in 12 and 1 in 10 — — —
- Gradient steeper than 1 in 10 — — —
- Cross-fall between 1 in 35 and 1 in 50 — — —
- Cross fall greater than 1 in 35 — — —
- Surface uneven, unstable or slippery — — —
- Path width between 1,000mm and 1,200mm — — —
- Path width less than 1,000mm — — —
- Boardwalk with gaps greater than 12mm \* — — —
- Passing space \*
- Seats or perches \*





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# Guidelines on the Implications of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 for Countryside Service Providers



Avoiding discrimination against disabled people



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

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Contents of Good Practice Guide

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the Act) came into effect on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1996 to prevent discrimination against disabled people. This note is not a comprehensive review of every aspect of the Act. Rather it examines the main aspects of the [Code of Practice, Rights of Access, Good Facilities and Services](#) (the Code) relating to Part III of the Act. The Code comes into effect on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2002. This latest version of the code takes account of the further duties on service providers to make adjustments when physical features make it impossible or reasonably difficult for disabled people to use their services. The Code aims to help disabled people understand the law and assist service providers to avoid complaints and litigation by adopting good practice.
- 1.2 This note is a guide about the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its associated Code of Practice from the point of view of countryside recreation service providers. It is not a substitute for obtaining legal advice and no-one should rely on the information contained in this guide. The author and publishers accept no liability in relation thereto.

# 2 The Content of the Act

- 2.1 Alongside provisions on employment, education and public transport an important part of the DDA for countryside service providers is Part III. This makes it unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a disabled person by:
- refusing to provide (or deliberately not providing) any service which it provides to members of the public; or
  - providing service of a lower standard or in a worse manner; or
  - providing service on worse terms,
- whether or not there is a charge for the service.
- 2.2 It is also unlawful to fail to comply with any duty imposed by Section 21 of the Act (a duty to make reasonable adjustments) in circumstances in which the effect of that failure is to make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to make use of any such service
- 2.3 The DDA says that discrimination occurs in two ways when a service provider:
- treats a disabled person less favourably (for a reason relating to the disabled person's disability) than it treats other people and cannot show that the treatment is justified;
  - fails to comply with the duty to make reasonable adjustments in relation to the disabled person and cannot show that the failure is justified.



### 3 Who has rights under the Act?

- 3.1 Adults and children have protection under the Act. A disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has an effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. That effect must be:

substantial; and

adverse; and

long term (at least a year).

### 4 Countryside Services

- 4.1 Under the Act the provision of services includes the provision of goods or facilities. It does not matter whether services are provided free or in return for payment. It is the provision of the service which is important not the nature of that service or the type of situation in which it is provided. All countryside services are therefore covered by the act: walks programmes, events, information, interpretation, paths and trails, visitor centres, etc.
- 4.2 Everyone involved in providing services is affected. A ranger providing a service to the public must not discriminate against disabled people. The most senior manager of a countryside service who rarely meets the public may also be affected if the service for which he or she is responsible treats disabled people less favourably. Volunteers and self employed people are also covered by the Act.
- 4.3 Services provided by private clubs are not covered by Part III of the Act. A Rambling Club refusing membership to a disabled person would not be liable under the Act. However, if that club provides services to the public, for instance by organising guided walks for non-members the refusal to allow a disabled person to participate would be covered.

### 5 Less favourable treatment

#### 5.1 Refusal or non-provision of service

- 5.1.1 For discrimination to have taken place under the act a disabled person must have been treated less favourably (a) in comparison with how other people are treated; and (b) for a reason relating to the disabled person's disability.

A country park runs a birdwatching programme. A blind person is told the course is full when there are in fact places available. Unless the management can justify its actions this would be unlawful refusal of service under the Act. If there are really no places available on the programme the likelihood is that there would have been no discrimination under the Act as any other member of the public would have been refused the service.

A disabled person seeking entry to a wildlife park has not brought sufficient money to cover the entrance charge. She is refused entry. This refusal is not for a reason associated with disability and is not likely to be unlawful.

A group of people, some with learning disabilities and some non-disabled people, are refused entry to a visitor centre. The fact that all members of this group are treated the same, including the non-disabled people, would not exempt the service provider from liability under the Act as other members of the public are not treated in this way.

A guided walk leader refuses to allow two deaf people using British Sign Language to join a walk because a sign language interpreter will be available on the following week's walk. This refusal of service is likely to be unlawful.

## 5.2 Standard or manner of service

- 5.2.1 A service provider must not offer a disabled person a lower standard of service than it offers to other people or serve a disabled person in a worse manner, without justification.

A ranger asks a person with a speech impediment to wait to the end of an activity before asking questions so as not to hold up other visitors' queries. This is likely to be unlawful.

- 5.2.2 A service provider does not have to stock special products for disabled people to avoid providing a worse standard of service (although as a matter of good practice it might consider doing so). However, where general services are available to the other customers a refusal to cater for a disabled person would be unlawful.

A sailing facility does not have an adapted dinghy available for hire to a disabled person. This may not be against the law. However, a disabled sailor asks to launch his own adapted boat. If the facility allows other members of the public to launch their own boats it would be likely to be unlawful to refuse to allow the

## 5.3 Terms of service

- 5.3.1 A service provider should not provide a service to a disabled person on terms which are worse than the terms offered to other people, without justification. Worse terms include charging more for a service or imposing extra conditions for using a service.

A guide walks programme requires disabled people to book in advance in order that their needs can be met. Other members of the public can just turn up and take part. This extra condition is likely to be unlawful.

A person with a learning disability is asked not to handle stuffed animals and birds in a visitor centre. The staff believe, without good reason, that the disabled person will damage them. If other people are allowed to handle the exhibits this action is likely to be unlawful. person this service.

- 5.3.2 The act does not prohibit positive action in favour of disabled people. The provision of a better seat in a visitor centre AV suite for a sight impaired person would not be in breach of the DDA. Similarly, a visitor attraction could allow a disabled person's companion free entry without breaching the law. This would allow the disabled person to enjoy the facility without having to pay two entrance fees.

## 6 Duty to make reasonable adjustments

- 6.1 From 1<sup>st</sup> October 1999 a service provider has had to take reasonable steps to:

change a practice, policy or procedure which makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of services;

provide a reasonable alternative method of making services available to disabled people where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of them;

provide an auxiliary aid or service if it would enable (or make it easier for) disabled people to make use of services.

- 6.2 Since 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004, where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of services a service provider has a duty to take reasonable steps to avoid this physical feature preventing disabled people from using the service. ([See 9.1 below](#)).

- 6.3 These duties to make reasonable adjustments are owed to disabled people at large and are not simply relevant to each individual disabled person who wants to access a service provider's services. Some of the factors which might be considered in determining what is reasonable adjustment include:

whether taking any particular steps would be effective;

the extent to which it is practicable;

the financial and other costs;

the extent of any disruption;

the extent of the service provider's financial and other resources

the amount of any resources already spent on making adjustments;

the availability of financial and other assistance.

A disabled person with arthritis complains that standing in a queue for an audio-visual show in a visitor centre causes them pain. The centre's queueing policy makes it unreasonably difficult for this person to use the service as no other people would be expected to suffer similar discomfort to access it. The provision of seating in the queueing area would probably be a reasonable adjustment. Allowing the disabled person to the head of the queue might or might not be a reasonable

**6.4** A service provider must comply with the duty to make reasonable adjustments in order to avoid committing an act of unlawful discrimination. A disabled person is able to make a claim against a service provider if:

the service provider fails to do what is required; and

that failure makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for that disabled person to access any services provided by that service provider to the public; and

the service provider cannot show that such failure is justified.

## **7 Reasonable adjustments in practice**

**7.1** A service provider must take such steps as it is reasonable for it to have to take, in all the circumstances, to change a practice that makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to access the service it provides. The Act does not define "unreasonably difficult" but service providers should consider the time, effort, inconvenience and effort needed for a disabled person to use the service and how other people would view the position if they had to endure similar difficulties.

**7.2** The terms referred to here cover:

what a service provider actually does (its practice);

what a service provider intends to do (its policy);

how a service provider plans to go about it (its procedure).

**7.3** The Act does not define what are "reasonable steps" for a service provider to take in order to changes its practices. For factors that may be relevant [see paragraph 6.3](#).

- 7.4 The purpose of making reasonable adjustments is to ensure that the practice no longer has the effect of making it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to access a service. It is not sufficient for a service provider to make an adjustment which does not achieve this.

On a countryside path there is a locked gate with an adjacent stile. It would be a reasonable adjustment for the gate to be unlocked for people who cannot use the stile. The erection of a sign indicating that disabled people may obtain a key from the visitor centre. (several hundred yards from the gate) is unlikely to be a sufficient adjustment unless there is justification for the gate to remain locked.

- 7.5 What might be a reasonable adjustment for a service provider to have to take initially might be insufficient later in the light of its experience.

A country park amends its car-parking policy by marking designated car-parking spaces close to the visitor centre for disabled people. This is likely to be a reasonable step for the service provider to take at this point. However, non-disabled visitors frequently use these spaces. In the light of this, simply making designated spaces available is no longer a reasonable adjustment because in practice it does not make the visitor centre accessible to disabled people. The country park manager instructs the rangers to monitor the use of the car park and discourage inappropriate use of the designated parking spaces. This is likely to be a reasonable step for the country park to take in the circumstances then known to

- 7.6 A practice may have the effect of excluding or screening out disabled people from enjoying access to services. Or the practice may create a barrier or hurdle which makes it unreasonably difficult for disabled people to access the services. In such cases, unless the practice can be justified, a reasonable step for the service provider to take might be to abandon it entirely or to amend or modify it so that it no longer has that effect.

A residential field studies centre refurbishes a number of rooms in its main block so that they are accessible to disabled people. However, the booking policy is such that rooms are allocated on a first come first served basis with rooms in the main block being allocated first. The effect is that sometimes only non-accessible rooms are left for disabled people seeking accommodation. The centre decides to change its booking policy so that the accessible rooms are either reserved for disabled people in advance or are allocated last of all. This is likely to be a reasonable step for the centre to have to take.

## 8 Auxiliary aids and services

- 8.1 A service provider must take reasonable steps to provide auxiliary aids or services if this would enable (or make it easier for) disabled people to make use of any service which it offers to the public. An auxiliary aid or service might be the provision of a piece of equipment or simply extra assistance to disabled people from (perhaps specially trained) staff. The act give two examples of auxiliary aids and services: the provision of information on audio tape and the provision of a sign language interpreter.

A nature reserve provides binoculars and telescopes for visitors to view birds. Some of these are on adjustable mountings that can be used by disabled people unable to hold heavy objects. A country park has several steep paths. Disabled people may borrow powered scooters to get round the facilities. These are examples of auxiliary aids.

Disabled visitors with a visual impairment or learning disability may need assistance to locate various events and activities at a large agricultural show. The organisers have volunteers available to help such people find their way around the show ground. The organisers are providing an auxiliary service which makes its show accessible.

- 8.2 The reasonableness of the service provider's response to disabled people's requirements will inevitably vary with the circumstances. The factors that may be relevant are described in paragraph 6.5.

## 9 Reasonable adjustments and physical features

- 9.1 Where a "physical feature" makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of a service which is offered to the public, a service provider must take reasonable steps to:

remove the feature; or

alter it so that it no longer has the effect; or

provide a reasonable means of avoiding the feature; or

provide a reasonable alternative method of making the service available to disabled people.

- 9.2 The Disability Discrimination (Services and Premises) Regulations 1999 make provision for various things to be treated as physical features, including:

any feature arising from the design or construction of a building on the premises occupied by the service provider;



any feature on those premises or any approach to, exit from or access to such building;

any fixtures, fittings, furnishings, furniture, equipment or materials in or on such premises;

any fixtures, fittings, furnishings, furniture, equipment or materials brought onto premises (other than those occupied by or on behalf of the service provider) in the course of (and for the purpose of) providing services to the public.

any physical element or quality of land comprised in the premises occupied by the service provider

9.3 All these features are covered whether temporary or permanent. A building means an erection or structure of any kind.

9.4 Removing the physical feature may be a reasonable step, and the most effective one, for a service provider to take.

A countryside visitor centre includes, as an attraction, a lakeside walk. However, a stile prevents access to the walk for those with mobility difficulties. The park authority removes the stile and replaces it with an accessible gate. This is likely to be a reasonable step for the service provider to take.

9.5 Altering the physical feature so that it no longer has the effect of making it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use the services may also be a reasonable step to take.

The entrance to a bird hide has four steps. To ensure disabled people are able to use the hide the wildlife group responsible for it installs a ramp with a handrail. This is likely to be a reasonable step for the group to have to take.

9.6 Providing a reasonable means of avoiding the physical feature may also be a reasonable step for a service provider to take.

The route from a car park to a popular viewpoint climbs a steep track. The service provider might not feel able to modify the gradient and surface of the track because of cost and/or environmental impact ([see justifications below](#)). However, it might be a reasonable step to allow disabled people to drive to and park at the top of the gradient in order to reach the viewpoint.

A path to a popular beach crosses sand dunes where the grass paths have eroded to leave deep soft sand along a lot of the route. Many people with mobility difficulties find this unreasonable difficult. It is likely to be a reasonable step for a service provider to take to install a board walk from the car park to the firmer sand on the beach.

- 9.7 Providing a reasonable alternative method of making services accessible may also be a reasonable step for a service provider to take.

A visitor centre provides audio-visual presentations in first floor facilities. This makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for some people to access this service. Since October 2004 the duties relating to physical features mean it might be reasonable to install a lift or move the audio-visual presentations to an accessible ground floor room. A reasonable alternative way of providing the service could be to install a video of the presentations in an accessible position.

- 9.8 **Building Regulations:** A service provider who operates from a building is unlikely to have to make alterations to features specifically covered by building regulations if those regulations were complied with in the last ten years. The Code provides considerable detail on the subject of compliance with building regulations in relation to duties under the Act and should be consulted in reference to specific queries.
- 9.9 **BS 8300:2001:** The British Standards Institute publishes a standard for 'Disability Access'. This is another useful source of information for specifications for access for disabled people in buildings and to formal environments. In that this publication embraces what may be recognised as current best practice compliance with its specifications should go a long way to avoiding discrimination under the Act.
- 9.10 **BS 5709:2001:** This British Standard relates to the provision of features where countryside paths cross field boundaries (i.e. gaps, gates and stiles). As well as providing specifications and examples of various structures the standard gives some basic indications of how various gates and stiles will restrict different users including disabled people.

## 10 Justifying less favourable treatment or failure to make reasonable adjustments

- 10.1 A service provider should not be looking for reasons or excuses to discriminate against disabled people. In limited circumstances the Act does permit a service provider to justify the less favourable treatment of disabled people or a failure to make reasonable adjustment. This cannot be used as a reason for a general exclusion of disabled people from access to services.
- 10.2 The test of justification is both subjective (what did the service provider believe?) and objective (was that belief reasonably held?). A service provider does not have to be an expert on disability, but it is expected to take account of all the circumstances, including the information available to it, whether it was possible to seek advice, and whether the service provider asked or took account of the opinion of the disabled person concerned. The lawfulness of what a service provider does or fails to do will be judged by what it knew (or could have reasonably known), what it did and why it did it at the time of the alleged discriminatory act.
- 10.3 If a disabled person can show that he or she has been treated less favourably than others for a reason related to his or her disability, it is for the service provider to show that the action taken was justified.
- 10.4 **Health & Safety:** The Act does not require a service provider to do anything which would endanger the health or safety of any person.

A country park refuses to loan a disabled person a powered scooter because they believe that person to be unable to operate the braking system effectively. The refusal is based on genuine concerns for the safety of the disabled person and others and is likely to be justified. However, this justification cannot be used to bar all disabled people from using this service. Those who can demonstrate the ability to operate the scooter safely may need to be considered differently. The requirement to make reasonable adjustments will still apply and if the braking system of the scooters can be modified or alternative access routes opened up these may be reasonable steps for the service provider to have to take.

- 10.5 **Incapacity to contract:** The Act does not require a service provider to contract with a disabled person who is incapable of entering into a legally enforceable agreement or of giving an informed consent. If a disabled person is unable to understand a particular transaction, a service provider may refuse to enter into a contract. This might justify discriminatory standards or manner or terms of service, as well as a failure to make a reasonable adjustment.

- 10.6 Any such refusal must be reasonable. A person may be able to understand less complicated transactions but have difficulty with more complex ones. Unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, a service provider should assume a disabled person is able to enter into a contract.

A country craft shop refuses to sell a person with learning disabilities an item. It claims that she does not understand the nature of the transaction. This is even though her order is clear and she is able to pay for the item. This is unlikely to be justified.

- 10.7 The Disability Discrimination (Services and Premises) Regulations 1996 prevent service providers from justifying less favourable treatment of a disabled person on the grounds of incapacity to contract or inability to give an informed consent where another person is legally acting on behalf of the disabled person.
- 10.8 **Otherwise unable to provide the service to the public:** A service provider can justify refusing to provide (or deliberately not providing) a service to a disabled person if this is necessary because the service provider would otherwise be unable to provide the service to other members of the public.

A guided walk leader refuses to allow a person with a mobility impairment on a moorland walk because he has well-founded reasons to believe the extra help the leader would have to give would prevent the rest of the party from completing the walk. This is likely to be justified.

Refusing service in this manner is only justifiable if other people would be effectively prevented from using the service at all. It is not enough that those other people would be inconvenienced or delayed. Before a service provider seeks to rely on this justification it should first consider whether there are any reasonable adjustments that could be made to allow the disabled person to enjoy the service.

In the example above in paragraph 10.8 the leader might consider using an easier alternative route for the walk or providing an auxiliary service in the form of an additional helper.

- 10.9 **To enable provision of the service:** A service provider can justify an inferior service if this is necessary to be able to provide the service to the disabled person or other members of the public.

A fishing facility restricts a wheelchair user to those fishing stations accessible from a surfaced track. These are by the poorer fishing areas. The disabled person would otherwise not be able to fish the lake. The restriction is necessary in order to provide the service to the disabled angler. This is likely to be justified.

This only applies if the disabled person or other people would effectively be prevented from using the service at all. A service provider cannot justify such treatment simply because of other people's preferences or prejudices.

A bird watcher with an impairment causing erratic and irregular hand movements is restricted to a bird hide some distance from the main features of interest because of other birdwatchers' groundless fears that the birds might be disturbed. Despite the reassurances of the disabled person the hide manager has bowed to the pressure from other customers. This is unlikely to be justified.

- 10.10 Greater expense:** A service provider can justify charging a disabled person more for services where the service is individually tailored to the requirements of the disabled person and the charge reflects the additional cost of meeting the disabled person's specification.

A canoe builder charges more for a paddle with a special moulded grip for a disabled person than for standard paddles. This is likely to be justified.

- 10.11 Additional cost of providing services:** The Act does not allow a service provider to pass on additional costs of complying with the duty to make reasonable adjustments to disabled people alone. Reasonable adjustments form part of the general expenses of providing the service and cannot be used to justify different terms for disabled people.

A visitor centre modifies its AV presentations so that subtitles can be displayed on request. People requesting this service are charged an additional fee even though the presentations are the same in every other way. This is unlikely to be justified.

- 10.12 Protecting the nature of the business:** The Act does not require a service provider to take steps which would fundamentally alter the nature of its service.

A guided walk leader refuses to change a walk onto an accessible route thus preventing a disabled person from enjoying it. The leader's reason is that only by following the planned route will a particular butterfly be seen. This is the main purpose of the guided walk. This is likely to be justified.

A nature reserve warden refuses to give a talk at a disabled person's day centre on the grounds that this would be the provision of a different kind of service than that usually provided at the nature reserve visitor centre. This is unlikely to be against the law. However, if the warden gives talks at other places such as schools it is likely to be discriminatory to refuse to serve the disabled people in this way.

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(Publishes:

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(Publishes:

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# Information Guidelines



Providing information about  
countryside opportunities



A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access to the Countryside

# Information Guidelines

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## Introduction

Independent, accurate and relevant countryside information is very important to everyone choosing to go to the countryside. Disabled people have extra information needs. Without the right information they will often assume that the countryside is not accessible to them. Providing good information will have an effect on the number of visits disabled people make to the countryside.

Staff at many countryside sites respond to enquiries from the general public by encouraging them to visit. On the other hand, when disabled people want to visit the countryside, staff often give them a list of problems they may find on the site, not what can be seen and enjoyed.

These guidelines have two main aims.

To help countryside managers give disabled people the encouragement and information they need to enjoy the countryside.

To make sure disabled people can get at the information they need to visit and enjoy the countryside.

## Planning countryside information

Disabled people go to the countryside for the same experiences of relaxation, excitement, adventure or peace and quiet as anyone else. As with all visitors, disabled people will need to know why it is worth visiting your site or event, and what options are open to them when they get there. The role of countryside managers is important in giving positive, accurate, good-quality information so disabled people can make up their own minds about where to go and what to do in the countryside.

When you plan any information consider the following:

### Promotion

Disabled people who are new to visiting the countryside will not always know what options are open to them. Give a general statement on what the site offers visitors. This will help people decide whether they want to visit or not. Include any wildlife, historical or other features of interest as well as the range of organised events and activities all visitors can take part in. If you only give information about toilets suitable for disabled people, it will not be enough to gain any visitor's interest!

## Accuracy

Very few countryside sites or events have perfect access for every disabled person. Your information should allow them to make informed choices about where to go and what to do. The information you give should be clear and honest. Describe a site and do not judge it. Do not say that your site is not accessible as there will always be some disabled people who will not find the current access a problem. Instead it is best to describe a trail as muddy, steep and 1000 metres long, rather than, 'difficult to get at'.



## Integration

Most people will visit the countryside in family groups or with friends. They are all looking to share an experience and not have one member of the group end up alone. Provide information about the accessible facilities, events and activities everyone can use.

## Accessibility

Design information and produce it in accessible ways. People are usually more willing to try new things if they feel that the people providing the service understand their needs, and have made an effort to take those needs into account.

## Targeting

Some disabled people will not be able to use information from mainstream sources. Do not expect them to come and use improved facilities unless you promote the site to these people in a suitable way. Promote information facilities on the site, to make sure visitors can fully enjoy their visit. The more information disabled people have to start with, the better prepared they can be.

You can adapt all the following activities for disabled people to use.

### Active and adventurous

horse riding, canoeing, sailing, walking, cycling, adventure playgrounds, water skiing.

### Educational

guided walks and talks, visitor centres, historical landscapes and gardens.

## Volunteering

a number of countryside organisations encourage volunteers for a whole range of tasks. Some are practical conservation tasks like tree planting, but they may also include anything from administration tasks to carrying out surveys of wild flower meadows.

## Peace and quiet

View points, picnic areas, bird watching, nature trails, bird or wildlife hides, fishing.

## Paths and trails

the rights-of-way network, walking, cycling or riding trails.

## Events and attractions

county shows, farm shops, demonstration days.



## What information?

This section covers some of the questions disabled people may ask, and the information countryside managers should provide.

## Getting to the site

### Questions disabled people may ask

Are there accessible reserved parking bays for blue-badge holders?

Are these easy to find from the car park entrance?

How far is the site from the nearest town?

Is it on or near a public transport route?

How far is it from the car park to the features of interest on the site?

Are there any car parking or entrance charges?

Will you be able to send me a map of how to find the site?





## Transport information you should provide

If there are public transport links to accessible sites, give the transport companies' names and phone numbers - or a timetable if it fits the start or finish time of an event you are running.

For example, the [Greenways Project in South Pembrokeshire](#) has produced a leaflet of guided walks which start and finish at railway stations and which link in with railway timetables. For more information contact:

South Pembrokeshire Action for Rural Communities.  
Phone: 01834 860965.

Tell people whether you offer parking areas for blue-badge holders. If you don't, explain what other arrangements you have. For example, can disabled passengers be dropped off close to features of interest?

If your site is quieter at certain times or on certain days, so parking is easier, make sure that you let visitors know.

Signpost accessible spaces from the car park entrance. If people get to a site and then can't park easily, they may well just turn around and go home.

Minibuses will need larger parking space than other vehicles. ([See the Transport Guidelines](#)).

## Getting round the site

Questions disabled people may ask

What are the path surfaces like?

Are there any steep slopes or steps?

Are there any stiles or locked gates?

How long are the walks?

Are there signposts or marked trails so I know where to go?

Are there several different walks around the park?

Are there any risks I need to know about?

Are there seats along the way so I can rest if I need to?





## Physical access information you should provide

Always describe the physical access to your site in a positive way.

Advertise the paths and trails which reach the BT Countryside for All standards.

If path conditions depend on the seasons and weather, make sure all visitors know how the paths are affected. Tell people about any shelter along routes.

If there are any barriers, such as slopes, steps, gates and stiles which walkers can expect to come across along the route, make sure they know about these before setting out on their walk.

## Grading paths and trails

A grading system is a simple way of providing information about paths. Grading gives people an idea of the kind of access to expect on different routes. If you are going to develop a grading system, you should do the following.

Grade the paths and trails according to the environment, or the physical features and barriers along the routes.

Do not grade paths and trails by people's abilities. The needs and abilities of disabled people are as wide-ranging as those of the general public. It is not realistic to divide the whole population into a few ability groups. It is far more realistic to grade according to the state of the ground.

Be consistent when you grade sites so visitors can recognise what the different grades mean for them.

Remember that a grading system will not give detailed access information.

For example, the **Forestry Commission** have developed a grading system for three types of paths and trails. The category a path is in depends on how smooth it is and the slopes. The trails are then given one-two-or three-star ratings with the access symbol to tell visitors what they can expect on their walk.



A smooth path with gentle slopes between 1:20 and 1:15.



A reasonably-smooth path with some slopes between 1:15 and 1:20.



A path with some rough patches and occasional short, fairly-steep slopes between 1:15 and 1:8.

For more information contact the Forestry Commission.

Phone: 0131 334 0303.

## Information on maps

One way of giving information to visitors about the access on sites is by producing a map. Remember, not everyone can read a map. Do not expect people to have advanced map reading skills.

A well-designed and clear map will give a picture of where the path goes and what you can find along the route. Pictures and photographs on maps will help people find their way more easily. Large-print maps can be used by people who are partially sighted.

Maps which people can study at home before a visit to the countryside give them a chance to plan ahead.

You can produce maps in tactile materials (materials which can be felt) for people who are blind or partially sighted. You must keep tactile maps simple. They cannot show as much detail as other maps.

Accessible maps give a disabled person the chance to visit a site on their own rather than having to rely on other people to take them around.

For example, at the [Northumberland County Show](#) a 'tactile' map gave blind and partially-sighted people an idea of the showground, which along with other information, let them decide which exhibits to visit.

Disabled people need to know more than just where they are allowed to walk. Put extra details on maps to show disabled visitors rest points, slopes, path widths and other important details.

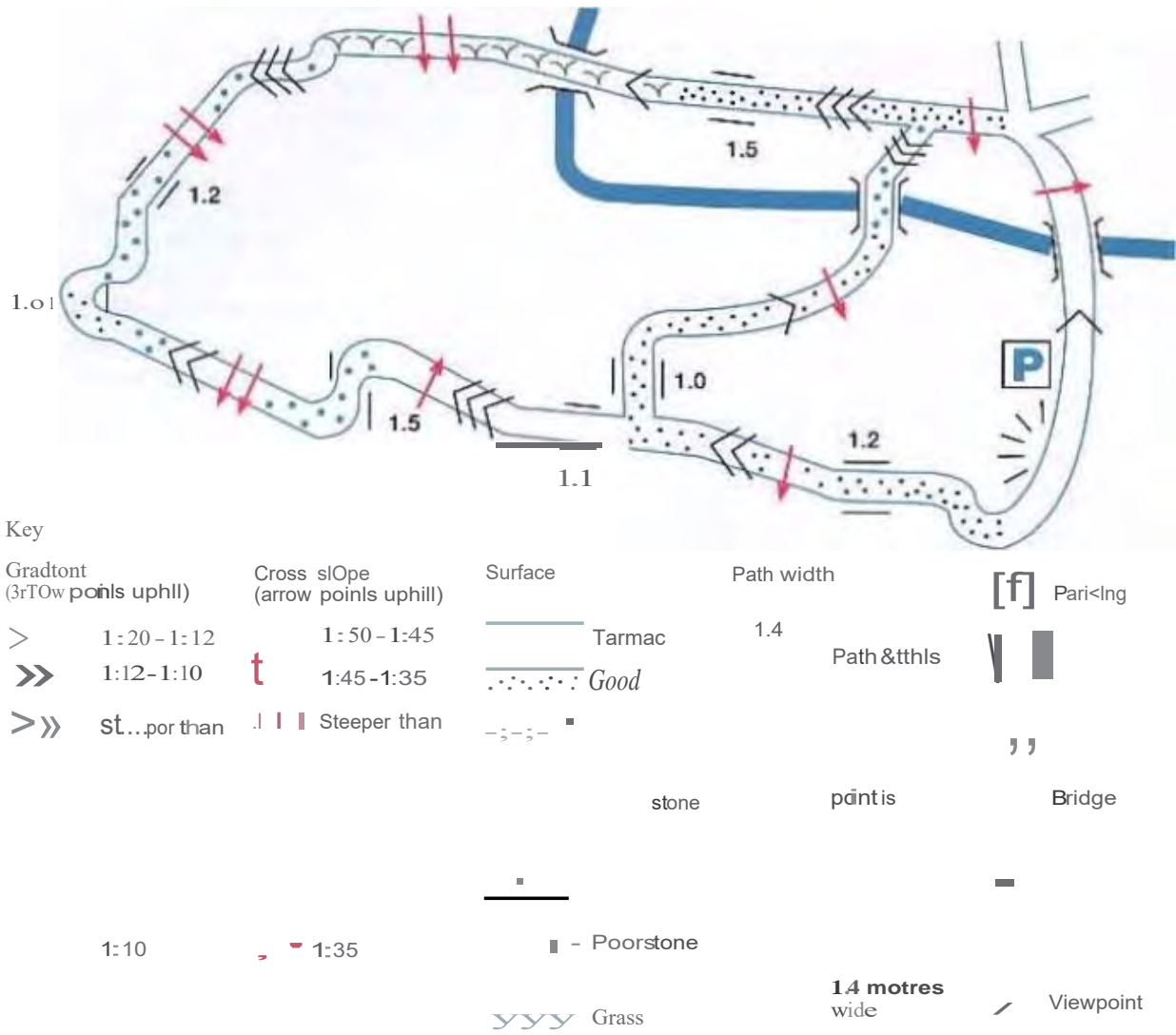
Use symbols consistently on maps to show different dangers and possible barriers. Provide a key to explain the meaning of all the symbols you use.

You should place maps on information boards so they match the actual surroundings.

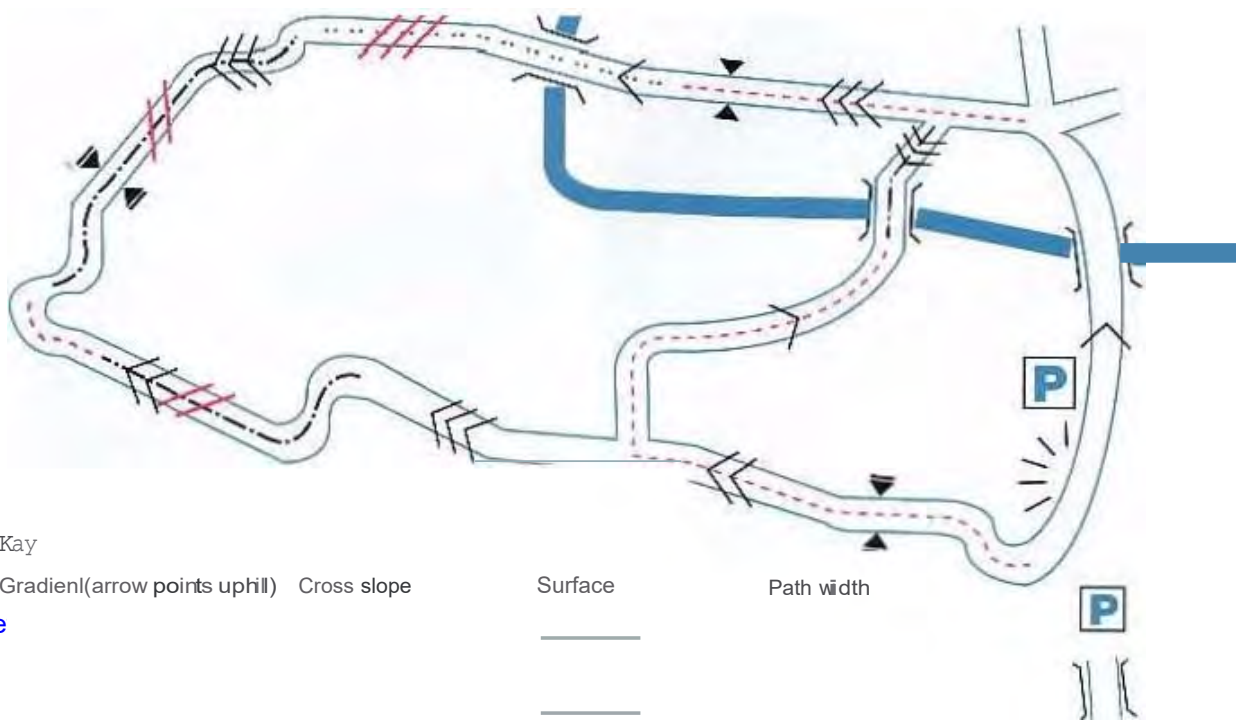
Many people will not be able to find their way around in a new environment from a map alone. They may not remember what the map looked like once they have started their walk. Signs and waymarkers can help.

[The Fieldfare Trust](#) ran a competition to get ideas on how to show information on maps about paths and trails for disabled people. In particular we were looking for simple ways to show the slopes, the path surface and the width of the path. On the page below are two examples with some of the ideas people came up with.

MAP1



MAP2



Parking

> 1:20-1:12  
 >> 1:12-1:1(  
 >>> Steeper than 1:10

1:50-1:45  
 1:45-1:35  
 Steeper than 1:35

Concrete  
 Boardwalk  
 Stone  
 Woodchip

Width at least 1200mm  
 Width less than 1200mm  
 but greater than 915mm  
 Width less than 915mm  
 but greater than 815mm

Bridg&

Viewpoint

## What's on offer?

Questions disabled people may ask

What extra facilities are provided to help disabled people enjoy the activities and events on offer?

Are there tactile information boards, maps and signs?

Are there leaflets in large print with good colour contrast?

Can the people leading the guided walks, events or other activities use sign language?

Is there a member of staff who could give help on site, or at an event, if needed?



## Programme access information you should provide

Promote all facilities which disabled people can use. Target your promotion at the right people. ([See the Events Management Guidelines](#) and [Interpretation Guidelines](#))

You can easily adapt many guided walks, events and activities to include disabled visitors. Work with local disabled people to find out how. ([See the Networking Guidelines](#))

For example, at [Dartmoor National Park](#) an 'access-for-all' guide book tells people about accessible sites and guided walks.

In Northamptonshire, the countryside service team promote their events and guided walks to social service centres and disability groups. In some cases they can also provide practical help, like transport, to make sure people can get to their events.

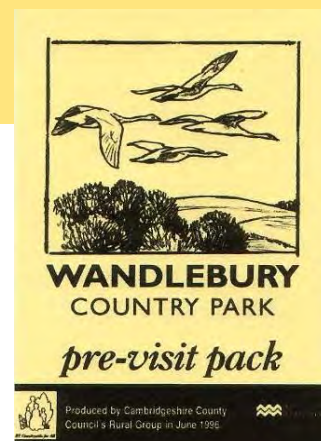
For more information contact the Northamptonshire countryside team.  
Phone: 01604 237220.

If there is an on-site ranger service, make it clear whether this is a full- or part-time service, and whether staff can meet and help visitors.

Make sure that all the information you produce is accessible. Use other methods as well so as many people as possible can use it. See pages [22](#) and [23](#).

For example, the [Cambridgeshire Consumer Group of Visually-Impaired People](#) and [Cambridgeshire County Council](#) have produced a pre-visit pack for Wandlebury Country Park. This contains information on tape about access, and tactile diagrams and maps. The pack tells people what there is to see and do before they get to the site, and gives them pointers about the most exciting features.

For more information contact Cambridgeshire County Council.  
Phone: 01223 317445.





## Other facilities and services

### Questions disabled people may ask

Are picnic tables easy for everyone to sit at?

Are there wheelchair-accessible unisex toilets which both sexes can use on the site?

Are the toilets open all the time or do you need a RADAR Key to use them? For more information about the Key Scheme phone: 0171 637 5400.

Can I hire a wheelchair or a scooter to get around?

Is there a charge for this service?

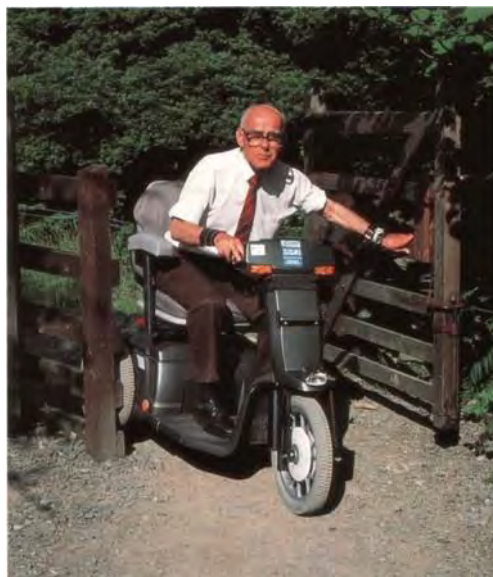
Is it easy to get into the visitor centre?

Is the children's playground fully accessible?

Is there a phone on site?

Is there a café or a refreshments kiosk?

Is this kiosk open all year round?



### Information about facilities and services you should provide

Work with disabled people and make a list of all the facilities and services you offer to the public. Tell people how accessible these services are.

Many countryside sites now hire out wheelchairs or electric scooters to disabled or elderly visitors, similar to the 'Shopmobility Scheme'. If you offer these facilities or services, make sure you advertise them well.

For example, [Wakefield Countryside Service](#) at The Heronry loans scooters to disabled people. Users who visit a lot can register to use this service. That way they do not have to fill in the hire forms each time they visit.

For more information contact the Wakefield Countryside Service.  
Phone: 01924 306203.

If there is an accessible toilet on the site, make sure visitors know whether there are any restrictions on its use. For example, if it is locked at night or during winter, or if it is opened by a RADAR key. If there is not a suitable toilet on site, find out where the nearest one is, so you can tell disabled visitors who may need to know.

Remember to tell disabled people about any entry fees.

## Contacts

Questions disabled people may ask

Do disabled people use your site?

Is there a mailing list I can be put on to receive regular information about future events and activities?

Is there a user's group I could join?

Do any special-interest groups use the site, for example, a local birdwatching society, wildlife group, or conservation volunteers? How can I get in touch with them?

How can I make comments or suggestions to help improve access at this site for other visitors?

Information you should provide about making contact

Give the name, address and phone number of the countryside manager. Having a named contact point makes it easier for anyone to confirm they are talking to the person who can help them most.

Give the date the information was collected. Disabled people may want to check that the information is still up to date.

If a local disability group has checked your access information for accuracy, make this clear so other disabled people will trust it more.

For example, [North West Water](#) and the [Countryside Council for Wales](#) both have a user's forum which include disabled people. The fora meet regularly to discuss countryside access issues in their regions.

For more information contact:

North West Water

Phone: 01204 696118.

The Countryside Council for Wales

Phone: 01248 370444.

For example, [The Lake District National Park Authority](#) updated their accessible walks guide. Local disabled people tested all the routes before the guide was published. The leaflet starts off by saying, 'each of the routes described has been 'road tested' by local residents using wheelchairs'.

For more information contact The Lake District National Park Authority.

Phone: 01539 724555.



## How to tell disabled people about the countryside

This section of the guidelines looks at:

the resources available to countryside managers to help them provide accurate information for disabled people; and

how countryside managers can make the most of those resources when providing information for all.

### Working with disabled people

It will be difficult to assess what information disabled people need, or the best way to get the information to them, without getting them involved.

Remember, disabled people will be more confident about information which uses the personal experience of other disabled people or groups.

For example, at **Lochore Meadows Country Park** in Fife a new information leaflet was produced with the Dunfermline Forum on Disability about the activities all visitors could take part in. The feedback given by disabled people showed they were more likely to trust the information provided, as they knew disabled people had been involved in producing the leaflet.

For more information contact Lochore Meadows Country Park.  
Phone: 01592 414300.

Information you produce with local disabled people will be sent round through disability networks. This means that more disabled people will learn about your countryside site, event or activities.

By working with disabled people you can learn about how to put information across to them so they can use it.

## Inviting disabled people to work with you in the countryside

If you are inviting disabled people to your site, make sure you prepare properly.

Tell them why you want their help and opinions.

Find out if they need any support from staff while they are on the site.

Let them know they can openly say when things are not right for them, and that you want to learn how to do things better.

Remind people what to bring with them. For example, waterproofs and boots might be very important.

Tell people whether there is an accessible toilet on-site, or where the nearest one is to where you will be working.

Provide refreshments and shelter, especially in poor weather.

Get everyone to agree on how long you can spend outdoors at any one time. Some disabled people may feel the cold very quickly.

After a visit, write and thank people for being involved. Then let everyone know what improvements you are going to make from their suggestions.

Pay people's expenses.

### Written materials and information boards

Leaflets allow people to take in details at their own pace, and can be taken home by visitors, who may pass them on to others.

Make sure that what you write is clear and concise.

Use language your readers will be familiar with.



You can easily and cheaply translate the text into Braille or other languages. You can send Braille items to blind people in the post free of charge. [See page 22.](#)

Use large-print sizes and colours which people who are partially sighted can use. ([See Information Sheets 4.2 and 4.4.](#))

Provide written texts for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, who may otherwise miss out on the message you are putting over. ([See the Events Management Guidelines](#))

Use a heavier paper when you design leaflets so people with poor hand control, or people who need one hand free, can turn the pages easily.

Include positive images of disabled people using your facilities. This will help people picture themselves being there too. A user-friendly site is more likely to attract people who may have little confidence about the countryside.

For example, [Forest Enterprise](#) have made sure that on the front of, and inside, their Duke's Trail leaflet disabled people are pictured using and enjoying the route. This shows other disabled people that the Duke's Trail has good access.

For more information contact Forest Enterprise.  
Phone: 01434 250232.

Information boards are a common and important resource for many countryside sites.

You can design the boards so visitors can feel them or even listen to them.

Tactile boards (boards which you can feel) are very effective for people who are blind or partially sighted.

For example, at Old Winchester Hill, [English Nature](#) has provided a tactile information board which tells people about the wildlife and features they will find during their walk. They do this through raised pictures of butterflies, plants and birds. There is also practical information about the distance of the walk and the route in indented print.

For example, at [Craig-y-nos Country Park](#), a new information point has been put at the start of all the paths and trails to show visitors the different walks they can do. Information is shown in tactile symbols, a map and pictures on the board, and the symbols are repeated along the trails so visitors know they are going the right way. For more information contact Craig-y-nos Country Park. Phone: 01639 730395.

All new boards should be accessible to wheelchair users. ([See Information Sheet 4.5.](#))

Make sure that visitors can get close to the boards to read them. For a person who is partially sighted this may be particularly important. ([See Information Sheet 4.5.](#))



An information point which can be clearly seen from the car park and entrance points will help visitors feel confident using the site.

If you use symbols for points of interest, repeat these along the trails. ([See the Events Management Guidelines](#) for information on signing and providing information at events.)



## Tactile messages

Making changes to the path surfaces can give people who are blind or partially sighted information about what lies ahead. Use messages to warn people about dangers and barriers and to tell them about features of interest. Make sure people know what the messages are there for before people start their walk.

## Graphics and symbols

Use internationally-recognised symbols which people will know about.  
(See [Information Sheets 4.1](#) and [4.7](#))

For example, in [Crawfordsburn Country Park](#) in Northern Ireland, new waymarking posts have been put up to direct visitors round the site using tourist information symbols. To find the beach, visitors follow the sandcastle signs and arrows. And, to get to the visitor centre, they follow the 'i' signs and arrows.

For more information contact Crawfordsburn Country Park.  
Phone: 01489 877547.

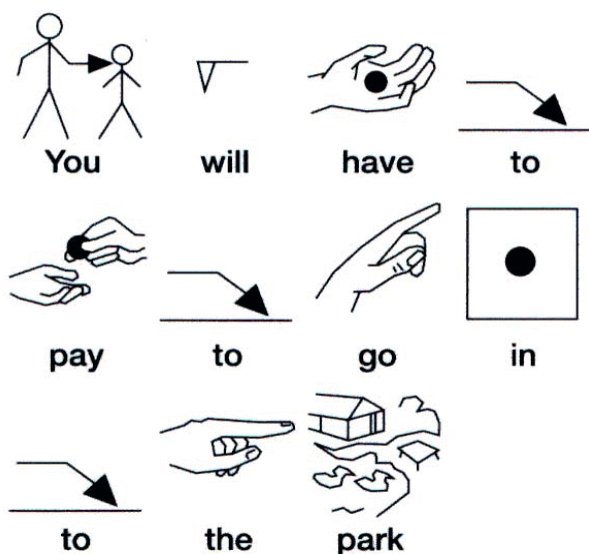
Using symbols or pictures means you can overcome communication barriers, especially for people with learning difficulties, because you do not need so much written language.

Pictures, cartoons and photographs will all help readers to understand what the text is about.

If you are preparing information for people with learning difficulties, find out if they would prefer it in a symbol system, such as Makaton or Widgit Writing.



An example of Widget writing.



An example of Widget writing.

For more information contact:

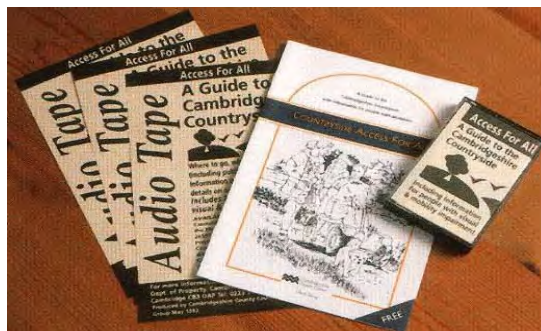
Makaton Vocabulary Development  
Project  
31 Firwood Drive  
Camberley  
Surrey GU15 3QD  
Phone: 01276 61390

Widgit Software  
102 Radford Road  
Leamington Spa  
CV31 1LF  
Phone: 01926 885303.

## Audio and video tape information

Information on tape will not be practical for all visitors. But audio tape is becoming a common way of providing information to blind and partially-sighted people.

If possible, offer to loan video tapes out to people who are blind or deaf before they visit the site so they can get a feel for it. Make sure the video tape has sign language or subtitles.



For example, the [Gower Countryside Service](#), at Mumbles Hill Nature Reserve, has produced an audio tape, a Braille map and a high-colour contrast map for people who are blind or partially sighted. The materials have been designed to be used on site, but are also used at home by people who want to visit so they can get themselves familiar with the site.

You can link audio tape information to stopping points along paths and trails.

Arrange the information in a logical order, and include a summary of the subject and a contents list at the start.

Place important information such as contact names and phone numbers at the beginning, or end, of a tape so they are easy to find.

Say when the recording has finished, so listeners know that the silence isn't a fault.

Produce tapes to a high standard, and only copy them from master tapes. It is important for people who are hard of hearing to make sure that all the sound effects are consistent and do not fade or change. A poorly-produced tape is as difficult to understand as bad handwriting.

Provide induction loops which can be carried around. This will make sure people who are hard of hearing, and who have the T switch on their hearing aids, can hear the tape clearly.

Personal stereos which have a rewind button on the machine give people a chance to repeat things if they missed it first time round. This will be especially useful for people who are hard of hearing.



Make sure that the design includes the need for steady, paced speech. Do not over-dub sounds. It will result in sounds being lost to people who are hard of hearing. Clear voices are important. Changes in tone of voice or sound effect are hard for some people who are hard of hearing to adjust to quickly.

Use captioning, or subtitles, and sign language on all videos used by the public.

## Information technology

Put information on disc so disabled people can get at the information in the best way for them. For example, in any size print, or as spoken word through a speech synthesiser.

The Internet can carry huge amounts of information to people. Because this is fairly new, not everyone will be connected to it. The Internet is becoming a more important way for disabled people to get hold of information. Some libraries have access to the Internet.

Computer technology will not appeal to all countryside visitors. For example: some people may not be able or want to use it, people who are deaf may still need sign language, and people with learning difficulties may still have problems with written language

## Countryside staff

Staff play an important role in telling disabled visitors about the opportunities to explore the countryside and make the most of their visit.

Do not assume that all disabled people need help, but do not be scared of approaching them and asking whether there is any information they need.

Staff who come into contact with members of the public will benefit from disability awareness training. This will increase their confidence in providing a good level of information to all visitors.

If there is a member of staff with special responsibility for visitor services, consider providing extra training, such as sign language or sighted guiding.

If a member of staff is trained as a sighted guide, or sympathetic hearer, advertise this fact in all your literature. For visitors already on site, wear a badge saying that you can sign. Disabled people may otherwise assume the service they need does not exist.

Staffed contact points can give extra information on a one-to-one basis.

Be patient when you answer phone enquiries and give people with speech impairments time to finish what they are saying. Do not interrupt or try to guess what someone is trying to say. Some disabled people may need to repeat questions or requests before you understand them.

## Visitor centres

If there is a visitor or information centre, you can give information to visitors in many different ways.

Fit an induction loop into visitor centres for people using hearing aids. You can get more information about induction loops from the RNID. [See page 23](#) for details.



Clearly advertise your accessible facilities.

For example, at [Crawfordsburn Country Park](#), the reception desk in the visitor centre clearly advertises accessible facilities on boldly-printed posters. Disabled visitors can then see what's on offer and ask for what they need.

## Other methods

Other methods of producing information for people who are blind or partially sighted include Braille, large print ([see Information Sheet 4.2](#)) and cassette. Other methods for people who are deaf or hard of hearing include 'Sympathetic Hearing' and signing. If you provide other methods for them, remember to advertise the fact to visitors.

## Braille

Braille is reading through touch. Not everyone who is blind can read Braille, but Braille readers often prefer Braille to taped cassettes. For people who are deaf and blind, Braille is essential for communication.

As with other printed materials, you should proof read the document before giving it to the public.

Remember to describe any illustrations, views or maps with Braille.

Grade 1 Braille is used by children and those who are learning Braille. It is also useful if the Braille reader does not have English as their first language. Grade 2 Braille needs less space than Grade 1 Braille and can be quicker to read. Contact the Royal National Institute for the Blind for which to use for your audience.

There are professional Braille producers throughout the UK.



For more information contact:

The United Kingdom Association of Braille Producers  
[RNIB](#)  
P0 Box 173  
Peterborough PE2 6W5  
Phone: 01733 370777.



## Sympathetic Hearing Scheme

The 'Sympathetic Hearing Scheme' is run by the British Association of the Hard of Hearing, who offer training to organisations in how to communicate more effectively with deaf and people who are hard of hearing.

The scheme gives people who are deaf or hard of hearing a card which they use to show that they need help.

If you have contact with the public, you should receive training through the scheme.

For more information contact:

The Sympathetic Hearing Scheme  
7-11 Armstrong Road  
London W3 7JL  
Phone: 020 8742 9043.

## Sign language interpretation

Signing can not always translate slang, local terms, and technical words. Avoid using these if possible.

It is good practice to have a member of staff trained as a sign language interpreter to help visitors in visitor centres, or on guided walks and at events.



For more information about signing contact:

**RNID**  
105 Gower Street  
London  
WC1 E 6AH  
Phone: 020 7387 8033.



## Information outlets

### Mainstream outlets for information

Mainstream information outlets are useful for the many disabled people who are not members of disability clubs, groups, or societies. Mainstream information will also be available to family members, friends and carers who can pass on information to disabled people. Provide information in other ways, such as Braille, at mainstream outlets.

For more information about mainstream outlets, see the Countryside Commission's advisory booklet, 'Delivering Countryside Information'.

### Targeted information

Disabled people cannot always use general information services for a number of different reasons.

The information may be put where it is difficult to reach. For example, too high on a wall, or in a leaflet dispenser which is hard to use.

The information may have been produced in a way which is not accessible. For example, a leaflet which is produced in small print will not give a person who is partially sighted access to the information.

Just giving general details may not be enough for disabled people to decide whether the site, activity or event is for them. Remember to provide information about access as well.

The language you use may make some disabled people feel unwelcome. For example, if they are told that a site is 'not accessible to wheelchair users' they will not come.

Carers may not know where to look for countryside information, or may not believe the countryside is suitable for disabled people. Countryside managers have a role to play in telling carers that disabled people can enjoy the countryside too.

Access information, which is targeted at disabled people, gives them a choice about where to go and what to do in the countryside.

Involve disabled people in producing new information. That way you will get expert advice. Be honest about the facilities. Let disabled people make informed decisions about whether or not to use them.



Make sure that all the information you produce is available in other methods, for example, on tape, large print or in Braille. Advertise these methods in all mainstream information.



Think carefully about where you put information for visitors. Make sure everyone will be able to reach, see or feel the information easily.

Send information direct to local disability organisations, so they can include them in their own magazines and newsletters. These will automatically be produced in ways which their readers can use. For example, talking newspapers can adapt information for their readers. However, they will need a longer lead-in time for articles than the mainstream press. Information you send to disability information and advice services will be used by disabled people, carers and professionals.

For example, [Deaf Access Wales](#) creates sign language videos for people who are profoundly deaf which give people borrowing the videos information about the Welsh countryside, and what opportunities there are for deaf people to visit and enjoy it.


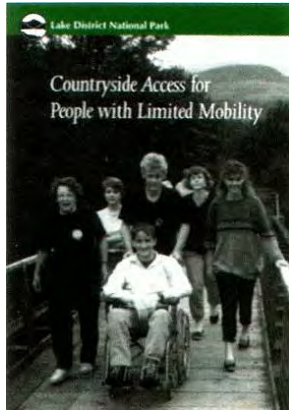
For more information contact Deaf Access Wales.

Phone: 01978 366311.



Minicom number: 01978 313427.



## Information outlets

Format	Mainstream outlets	Outlets aimed at disabled people	Other things to consider	Examples
Leaflets	Libraries, tourist information centres, council offices, other public buildings and at countryside sites.	Disability information services. ( <a href="#">See the Networking Guidelines</a> ) Local, accessible holiday accommodation. You should send any Braille or large-print leaflets to local groups for blind people. Use mailing lists to keep disabled people up to date with what's on offer.	Leaflets are often free to members of the public. You can sometimes get Braille or large-print leaflets if you ask. These should also be free to members of the public. Visitors can keep leaflets and use them again.	The RSPB's leaflet 'Advice for disabled birdwatchers' tells disabled people about specialist equipment they can use to watch birds.  For more information contact the <a href="#">RSPB</a> . Phone: 01767 680551.
Audio and video tapes	Tourist information centres and countryside sites.	Talking newspapers. Local blind groups, elderly groups and people who cannot read will be able to use information on tape. Deaf people can use videos with captions.	Pre-visit tapes, or video information give disabled people the chance to make decisions about where to go and what to do.	Deaf Access Wales are developing sign language videos which tell deaf people where they can go and what they can do in the countryside. For more information contact Deaf Access Wales.
Local and regional press	"What's on" sections of newspapers. Regular countryside radio and television shows. Information databases in libraries.	Talking newspapers and regional magazines of disability organisations.	Especially useful for local or special countryside events and activities.	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council advertise all their guided walks in local free papers. For more information contact Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. Phone: 01709 822022.

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Magazines and newsletters	Local libraries and direct from the countryside organisation.	National and regional disability magazines.	Useful for particular interest, such as birdwatching, conservation work, rambling, cycling, horse riding and angling.	The National Trust produce an information booklet which lists all their sites where there are access facilities. For more information contact the <a href="#">National Trust</a> . Phone: 020 7222 9251.
Fliers and posters	Local pubs, shops and doctor's surgeries. Also use the local church notice board. Bus and train stations and other public transport centres - especially where countryside sites or events are accessible by using public transport.	Disability groups and transport organisations such as 'Shopmobility'.  	Include details about access as well as information about the event.  	The Northumberland County Show was advertised through posters which included clear information about the access facilities on offer.



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Disability grapevine	<p>Some countryside managers are in regular touch with community, social and specialist groups to pass on any information they think is relevant to them. The local library will have lists of local disability groups. See the networking guidelines for information about contacting disabled people.</p> 	<p>To reach elderly people, contact Age Concern local groups and retirement fellowships. Contact your local Council of Disabled People or Access Officer. Promote your facility on computer databases. (<a href="#">See the Networking Guidelines</a>)</p>	<p>Remember that disabled people are always more likely to trust information provided by other disabled people.</p> 	<p>The Warrington Disability Information Service has a stall in the local market which attracts over 500 customers a week. Countryside access information is displayed alongside other leisure opportunities.</p> <p>For more information contact the Warrington Disability Information Service. Phone: 01925 240855.</p> <p>The 'Out and About' newsletter produced by the <a href="#">Countryside Agency</a>, Eastern Region, introduces its readers to different sites, events and activities in the area. Many of the articles are written by disabled people.</p> <p>For more information contact the Countryside Agency Eastern Region. Phone: 01223 354462.</p>

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Talks and slideshows	<p>Countryside organisations give public talks to encourage people to enjoy the countryside, join a conservation task team or go to their events and activities.</p> 	<p>Give talks to disability groups to encourage them to use your site.</p> 	<p>Offer talks to groups who may lack confidence in the countryside. Provide an induction loop if needed. Blind or partially-sighted people will need slides or visual aids described in detail.</p>	<p>The West Lancashire Ranger Service has given local schoolchildren with learning difficulties slide talks about the site where they were going to do some conservation work. This helped the group to understand how their work would help the site, and made them more confident about going to work there.</p> <p>For more information contact the Lancaster Ranger Service. Phone: 01695 585169.</p>



## Evaluation

### Considerations for disabled people

Ring up, or write to, the site manager to find out whether disabled people use the site or have managed to join in the event or activity you're interested in.

Look for evidence that other disabled people have been involved with the site. If disability organisations have worked with the countryside rangers their name or logo will often be put onto publicity materials. More and more countryside rangers are now working with local disabled people to make sure that everyone can use their sites.

Go and find out - first check whether you can get extra support on the day from a member of staff if you need it. That way they will know of any difficulties you face in getting onto and around the site.

If the information was passed to you by your family or a friend, find out what they got out of their visit.

If you think the information needs to be improved, offer your help.

### Considerations for countryside managers

For disabled people there is nothing more frustrating than reading that a countryside site is accessible and then finding, half way down a path, that it is not. This experience is common, and results in many disabled people not believing the information they are given or, being put off using the countryside altogether. Regularly evaluate your information to make sure it works.

Involve local disabled people in the decisions on what information to provide. That way the information is more likely to be correct and more likely to be trusted by other disabled people too. If you have involved a disability organisation, put their logo on your information.

Check through the information you provide regularly to make sure it does not go out of date.

Involve disabled people who have used the information in the past. They will be able to tell you what was useful, and which bits you should improve.

Find out how your visitors get information about your site, and which outlets work best for disabled people.

Find out who's making enquiries about information. The information people ask for may be different depending on whether they are a carer, disabled person, social services professional, health service professional, or a relative or friend of a disabled person.

Ask for feedback from disabled visitors who come to your site or events and activities, to find out where they found the information and whether it gave them everything they needed. Provide visitors with questionnaires and stamped, addressed envelopes. It will help you continue to provide the right information.

**We hope these guidelines will work for you  
and help you provide good-quality  
countryside information for everyone.**



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