

CUMBRIA COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS STRATEGY

2019 to 2024

**A strategic framework for the management and
improvement of countryside access in Cumbria**

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1. Introduction

Cumbria as a diverse array of landscapes with large areas of the county protected through formal designation where public access is a key objective. They include; the Lake District National Park, the North Pennines, Arnside and Silverdale and Solway Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

The primary means of access is through Cumbria's 7,671 km public rights of way network – the second largest in England - made up of footpaths, bridleways and byways. There are also some 390km of unsurfaced minor roads, which provide valuable links for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. In addition there are now some 226,000 hectares of open access land, defined through the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, enabling people to walk across large areas of open country.

This access enables people to take part in a wide variety of outdoor recreation and goes towards attracting over 40 million visitors per year to Cumbria with an estimated value of £2.2 billion per year to the economy. 51% of these visitors undertake short walks of less than 2 miles and 36% go on longer walks.

2. Vision

To keep the countryside of Cumbria available to visitors and communities as a means of enjoying its special qualities and its health and wellbeing benefits.

3. Awareness – where are we now

We are in a period of continual change in the countryside, pressures on budgets/staffing, changes in countryside use, developing access provision, changes to legislation and changes to both national park boundaries are only a number of issues directly effecting access provision in Cumbria. This makes it challenging to produce a strategy that is robust, achievable and flexible enough to respond to any changes ahead. At the same time it provides the opportunity to do things differently, to be more innovative, imaginative and collaborative in how schemes are developed and funded, and to ensure that countryside access is integrated with other strategic priorities across the County.

4. Purpose

The purpose of the new strategy is to;

- Identifying the priorities of the key access authorities who will deliver the maintenance and management of countryside access and realign its annual programming to reflect these changes,
- provide a means to engage with access organisations, interest groups, local communities, district councils and other potential funders about what we aim to achieve in the future and how 'we' can achieve it.

The new CCAS will also help to advise how we better manage countryside access in a more integrated way and involve all those who have a role to play in shaping and delivering it. Integrated access can be defined as using and improving access to meet wider social goals such as – health & wellbeing, education, social inclusion and sustainable transport.

5. The development of the Cumbria Countryside Access Strategy 2019 -2024

In 2005 the Cumbria Countryside Access Strategy outlined a county-wide consistent approach to access and recreation management for the first time among the three access authorities – Cumbria County Council, the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Park Authorities. The Countryside and Right of Way Act introduced the requirement for Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP) to be developed. This put forward specific proposals for improvement to both physical infrastructure and information about access in Cumbria.

This was reviewed by the 2014 strategy when the value of the ROWIP to rights of way management lead to it being an integral part of the new strategy. Although the new strategy doesn't include the ROWIP, rights of way improvements are still a high priority.

It is intended that the development of this new strategy will further develop the joined up approach to access management and also take into consideration the agency agreements that are in place between Cumbria County Council and its two agents; the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.

Part one of this is an overview of access management that includes the goals the strategy will set. It aims to show how the strategy fits in and links with other policy and management documents of the three authorities within Cumbria and puts access and recreation closer to all those organisations that have a role to play in providing for, maintenance, managing, delivering and using it. Part Two is a strategic action plan that describes the detail of what will be achieved year on year and what SMART objectives are set to ensure the targets are measurable within each individual authority.

PART ONE

6. Goal - where we want to be

Our goal for access and recreation in Cumbria is that:

“Cumbria is a place where visitors and local people can explore, enjoy and develop an understanding of the diverse countryside, and are enabled to do so in a variety of sustainable and responsible ways.”

In order to achieve this goal the three access authorities, the statutory local access forums and district councils are committed to working together to maintain and improve public access and recreation to the countryside of Cumbria.

This can be summarised as four strategic aims; describing what we will do:

- a) Provide well maintained access to the countryside including the public rights of way network and open access areas.
- b) Develop an integrated network of routes that will contribute to improved health & wellbeing and carbon emission reduction, by encouraging people to walk and ride.
- c) Ensure access contributes to a thriving economy whilst protecting and, where possible enhancing, the sustainability of the County's natural and cultural resources.
- d) Work with partners, visitors, businesses, residents and landowners to encourage responsible use of the countryside and to minimise conflict through appropriate management and guidance.

7. Priority Areas of Work

We have identified three priority areas of work, and under each of these are a series of strategic actions that will contribute to the achievement of our goal and our strategic aims. The three priority areas of work are:

- **Improving Rights of Way and Countryside Access**
- **Managing Rights of Way and Countryside Access**
- **Managing Access to open country**

Priority Area 1: Improving Rights of Way and Countryside Access

Background

Since 2007 the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) has been behind Cumbria County Council's delivery of a programme of access improvements to enhance people's access to the countryside and to work with groups to deliver improvements they require.

The programme is a valued way of working and has attracted a constant level of match funding in Cumbria over the years.

The current situation

Improvements have been delivered in two broad areas:

- Barrier reduction –the three authorities have undertaken a programme of improvements to access and rights of way furniture where restrictive items such as ladder or step stiles are replaced by kissing gates or wicket gates.
- Specific improvement projects – There has been a large range of access improvements from safe access to schools and village services to carrying out works to routes to further develop walking and riding opportunities.

The ROWIP has had mixed success across the County historically but in the area managed by Cumbria CC the scheme has proved very successful in attracting

additional funding. Over the past four years it has attracted over £219k in match funding from third parties and £400k of capital funding from the council's active travel fund. This has been a direct result of making the ROWIP a pivotal part of the 2014 strategy.

In the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Public Rights of Way have remained a 'Priority Programme' of work for the Authority over the last four years. The recently produced National Park Management Plan 2019-24 sets the following objectives:

- Benefit a wide variety of users by raising the standard of all public rights of way so that 90% are 'easy to use' by 2023.
- Maintain and promote the Pennine Trails and other recognised long-distance routes, identify opportunities for new multi-user routes, and campaign for the Coast-to-Coast path to become a National Trail by 2024.
- Carry out works to improve access on appropriate public rights of way and establish permissive routes, so that 262km (10%) are suitable for users of all ages and abilities by 2024.

In the Lake District National Park they have continued to improve our rights of way network to make it meet the needs of the community and visitors, including through the Golakes Travel programme, creating 50km of new multi user trail suitable for cycling, walking, pushchairs and use by people with disabilities. This work was achieved through a Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid of £4.5 million from the Department for Transport for an integrated sustainable travel programme.

Key strategic actions (see Part Two for more details on proposed actions)

1. We will identify and implement the development of the countryside access network through rights of way improvements, to provide a more effective resource for utility journeys and recreational activities.
2. We will continue to develop and implement improved access and recreation opportunities especially to the coastline of Cumbria through the Marine and Coastal Access Act.
3. Ensure that the any improvement works are promoted through the media.

Priority Area 2: Managing Rights of Way and Countryside Access

Background

The core statutory duty of the County Council, as with any Local Highway Authority, is to assert, protect, map, record, continuously review and update the Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way (PROW), as well as practically maintain the PROW network across Cumbria. The LDNPA and YDNPA have an agency agreement with the County Council to maintain PROW on the Definitive Map and Statement within their respective National Parks, apart from the urban centres of Windermere/Bowness, Ambleside and Keswick in the Lake District. Fulfilling this duty is a fundamental role for all authorities and will remain a key priority.

Managing access is more than legal and practical work however. All access providers have to balance the needs of countryside users with those of local communities, landowners and managers. There is therefore an important advisory role to play in encouraging responsible use of the countryside and resolve conflict through appropriate management and guidance which should be done in partnership with relevant stakeholders.

The current situation

The main areas of involvement over the last five years have been:

- Continually reviewing and updating the Definitive Map and Statement through statutory legislation such as Definitive Map Modification Orders
- Ensure that all public rights of way are in a safe and usable condition and survey programmes are in place.
- Recreational green road driving – although the number of routes available to motorised users is much reduced after the NERC Act 2006, the authorities maintain information for their use across the county and provides the basis for a sustainable management regime for mechanically propelled vehicles.
- Fix the fells, delivered by LDNPA and the National Trust external to the agency agreement – currently carrying out maintenance on over 350 upland paths. 15 projects per year are being carried out, where a higher level of intervention is required. We have a current budget requirement of £600,000 per annum. A grant has recently been approved which secures £850,000 over 3 years, the remainder is covered through fundraising and partner contributions.

Key strategic actions (see Part Two for more details on proposed actions)

1. Consult with and facilitate a local access forum.
2. We will work with countryside users, local communities, landowners and managers to encourage responsible use of the countryside, and resolve conflict through appropriate management and guidance.
3. We will fulfil our statutory duties under relevant legislation to survey and maintain the public rights of way network. We will maintain a consistent record of the current condition of the PROW network and review the Definitive map and Statement.
4. We will continue to ensure works encourage access to the countryside.

Priority Area 3: Access to open country

Background

Open Access commenced in May 2005, significantly increasing the available access land in wider Cumbria. In 2009 the Marine and Coastal Access Act set out to extend this access and develop new levels of access to the coastline.

The current situation

The three access authorities are managing the 2005 open access areas and using their best endeavours to ensure that the access remains available. The new access to the coast is currently being developed by Natural England and are working with Cumbria CC to establish the route on the ground. Currently one

section is complete from Allonby to Whitehaven and makes up the first part of a round England National Trail, the England Coast Path. Additional sections from Gretna to Allonby, Silecroft to Silverdale, Whitehaven to Silecroft and Walney Island are all under development. This work is 100% funded by Natural England.

Key strategic actions (see Part Two for more details on proposed actions)

The national parks are the relevant authorities within their boundaries while Cumbria CC are only the maintenance authority, the relevant authority in the CCC area is Natural England. All three authorities will maintain the existing access asset while, the parks will also deal with any applications for closure or restrictions in these areas. Cumbria CC will also continue to work with Natural England to establish Coastal Access and as this develops the LDNPA will also become involved in its establishment within the Park.

1. We will continue to manage the right of access to open country and registered commons as part of our duties under the CROW Act 2000
2. Continue the delivery of the Marine and Coastal Access Act and the new national trail along the coast line of Cumbria.

PART TWO

8. Strategic Action Plan CCC

Part 2 of the Strategic Action Plan will differ from authority to authority in the way in which they choose to meet the strategic actions. A working example of how this will be presented is given below:

Cumbria CC Countryside Access Strategic Action Plan 2019 – 2024					
Priority Area 1: Improving Rights of Way and Countryside access					
Key Strategic Action	Proposed actions	Lead Organisation/ Partners	Estimated annual budget	Completed by (where applicable)	End of year status and comments
1. Improving Rights of Way and Countryside Access	1a. Develop and implement an annual action plan of practical improvement projects across Cumbria, based on proposals by parishes, communities and users groups.	CCC	1a, 1b & 1c £100k plus match funding.	Annual	
	1b. Implement an annual programme of barrier reduction such as replacing stiles with gates, improvements to bridges	CCC		Annual	
	1c. Promote the improvement of route surface/drainage with the most suitable option.	CCC		Annual	
We know we are succeeding when:	The amount of match funding and time in kind fund generated by working with third party groups. Number of pieces of access furniture replaced. Number km of rights of way improved.				
Key performance indicator	1a. A minimum of £60,000 generated annually through the ROWIP programme 1b. Minimum of 30 pieces of access furniture made less restrictive per year 1c. Minimum of 2km of route improved per year.				

Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan 2019 – 2024

Priority Area 1: A friendly, open and welcoming place with outstanding opportunities to enjoy its special qualities					
Key Strategic Action	Proposed actions	Lead Organisation/ Partners	Estimated annual budget	Completed by (where applicable)	End of year status and comments
1. Improving Rights of Way and Countryside Access	1a Benefit a wide variety of users by raising the standard of all public rights of way so that 90% are 'easy to use' by 2023.	YDNPA		Annual	
	1b Maintain and promote the Pennine Trails and other recognised long-distance routes, identify opportunities for new multi-user routes, and campaign for the Coast-to-Coast path to become a National Trail by 2024.	YDNPA		Annual	
	1c Carry out works to improve access on appropriate public rights of way and establish permissive routes, so that 262km (10%) are suitable for users of all ages and abilities by 2024.	YDNPA		Annual	
We know we are succeeding when:	Percentage of routes that meet the national park family indicator definition of 'Ease of Use' increases The amount of match funding and time in kind generated by working with third party groups.				
Key performance indicator	1a Percentage of routes that meet the national park family indicator definition of 'Ease of Use' is 90% by 2023 in the Cumbria area of the National Park 1b Continue to be the lead organisation for National Trails. Identified an opportunity for a new multi user route in the park 1c 262km (10%) of routes in the national park are suitable for users of all ages and abilities by 2024.				

LDNPA Countryside Access Strategic Action Plan 2019 – 2024

Priority Area 1: Improving Rights of Way and Countryside access				
Key Strategic Action	Proposed actions	Lead Organisation/ Partners	Completed by (where applicable)	End of year status and comments
1. Improving Rights of Way and Countryside Access	1a. Develop and implement a pipeline of practical improvement projects using approved prioritisation tool.	LDNPA	Annual	
	1b. Implement, as opportunities arise, barrier reduction such as replacing stiles with gates, improvements to bridges and other furniture improvement	LDNPA	Annual	
	1c. Increase the overall distance of miles without stiles routes	LDNPA	Annual	
We know we are succeeding when:	Opportunities for active recreation increase for people of all abilities			
Key performance indicator	1a. A minimum of 10km of new or improved trail created over the 5 years through the Access and Recreation project pipeline 1b. Minimum of 20 pieces of access furniture made less restrictive per year 1c. 83% of promoted Miles without Stiles routes which retain their MWS designation			

LDNPA Countryside Access Strategic Action Plan 2019 – 2024	
Priority Area 2: Managing Rights of Way and Countryside Access	

Key Strategic Action	Proposed actions	Lead Organisation/ Partners	Completed by (where applicable)	End of year status and comments
1. Managing Rights of Way and Countryside Access	1a. Review and make legal orders to ensure a safe network, limit obstructions and support priority access development initiatives where required on the rights of way network	LDNPA	Annual	
	1b. Survey the rights of way network to ensure condition is effectively monitored, recorded and issues are reported	LDNPA	Annual	
	1c Complete Ease of Use surveys twice a year	LDNPA	Annual	
	1d. Implement and use the new ROWMANS asset management system for better management of the Rights of Way Network	LDNPA	March 2020	
	1e. Work collaboratively with landowners, communities, volunteers and businesses to ensure the rights of way network continues to be maintained to a high standard	LDNPA	Annual	
	1f. Work in partnership with the National Trust to deliver the Fix the Fells programme	LDNPA/NT	Annual	
We know we are succeeding when:	The 3203km of rights of way in the national park are easy and safe to use, which includes 124km of miles without stiles routes and 425km of promoted routes			
Key performance indicator	Minimum of 500 rights of way maintenance issues resolved in a year 76% of total length of footpaths and other rights of way that were easy to use by the general public, even though they may not follow the definitive line 63% of total length of footpaths and other rights of way, that were easy to use by the general public and follow the exact definitive line 100% Rights of way safety issues completed within 48hrs of report >80% Fix the Fells planned annual work programme funded and delivered			

LDNPA Countryside Access Strategic Action Plan 2019 – 2024

Priority Area 3: Promoting Rights of Way and Countryside Access				
Key Strategic Action	Proposed actions	Lead Organisation/ Partners	Completed by (where applicable)	End of year status and comments
1. Promote and integrate Rights of Way and Countryside Access	1a. Develop further information on access and recreation online and through social media	LDNPA	Annual	
	1b. Promote access and recreation opportunities through our information centres at Bowness, Ullswater and Keswick	LDNPA	Annual	
	1c Run a programme of guided walks and events attracting 2000 participants	LDNPA	Annual	
	1d. Work with the Ordnance survey to include entry level routes in the Get Outside app	LDNPA	March 2020	
We know we are succeeding when:	We are reaching more people and enabling a more diverse audience to enjoy active recreation in the Lake District			
Key performance indicator	>2000 participants in LDNPA volunteer led guided walks and events >95% customers satisfied with volunteer led guided walks and events Number of people reached on social media and through website (analytics data) Number of visitors to LDNPA information centres >578,000 per annum LDNPA routes on Get Outside app (number)			

The Key Strategic Actions for each priority area will not change over the five year lifespan of the Strategy. The ‘Proposed Actions’ column provides a greater level of detail on how each strategic action will be implemented but without listing every individual project. These will be more dynamic as time limited projects will come and go and other initiatives and priorities will undoubtedly evolve over the next five years, giving the strategy a degree of flexibility to adapt.

