



Darlington's Rights of Way Improvement Plan



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INTRODUCTION

Section 1

Why undertake a Rights of Way Improvement Plan?

1. The CROW Act

DEFRA has spent many years researching a series of initiatives aimed at improving countryside access (In particular the Milestones Process). One of its conclusions is that the current Public Rights of Way network in many parts of England and Wales is no longer delivering a facility entirely appropriate for present day and potential users. In addition, it was recognised that the existing management and maintenance regimes are not achieving significant levels of improvements. In response to this, a duty was placed on local authorities to prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan as written in the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000.

2. It Is Timely: Drivers for Change

The production of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan at this stage fits well with a host of agendas that are currently coming to the fore, for people and organisations involved in this sector. Some examples of these are:

- The new emphasis on healthy lifestyles: The countryside can have a big pull on people's willingness to engage in healthy activities.
- A new focus on the importance of local distinctiveness and its important role in securing a sense of identity: Being aware of where you live, and how and why it is special, is closely linked with where a place 'sits' in the environment.
- The importance for people to understand the vital link with the natural world, brought about through concerns over climate change and many other environmental issues.
- It is a time when farming and land-use in this country faces a crossroads. There has been recognition that one of the consequences of the present system of subsidies for food production is the intensive farming techniques that are being applied to most of the country's farmland. This system was driven by the increasing desire for relatively cheap food over the past 5 decades. These methods are now giving way to a system that allows more flexibility in the way land is managed. This is bringing to the fore a new combination of issues including the importance of access to quality countryside; in particular, where the countryside is close to where people live. Consequently there is now an opportunity to reassess the part access to quality countryside can play in a community's aspirations for a better future.

3. It gives us a chance to find out what we have

Professionals involved in the delivery of services may tend to make assumptions about the service they provide and the effectiveness of the service to cater for people's needs.

This process gives us an opportunity to consider objectively how true those assumptions are. An example of this is to reassess to what extent the work carried out to improve access on the edge of town is receiving popular support.

4. It gives us the chance to look at what we could provide if certain agendas change.

Thinking 'outside of the box': looking at the network and trying to understand how it could be different, how it could adapt to provide new opportunities and, how it could be improved to address different agendas.

5. It gives us a chance to find out what local people do and what they think, and most importantly, how these desires can be satisfied through improved countryside access.

Again, professionals may tend to make assumptions about the market. In order really to know the market, it is important to seek to understand the motives of the non-user groups i.e. the latent demand, as well as those who we as providers are used to dealing with.

6. Most importantly, it gives us a chance to ask what it is we want out of countryside access and then seek ways of providing it.

This is the crux of the plan. Once all of the hard work is done, it is up to the whole community to say if a quality product is really what is wanted. Are the opportunities presented by Darlington's unique position in the landscape something that can be influenced in order to develop a much higher level of use? What are the costs and benefits of doing this? In the final analysis, is it worth it?

For this purpose, there needs to be a common understanding of what a quality product is, what its key components are, where it already exists, and would it provide the anticipated benefits if it were in place?

7. Integrate countryside access with the wider transport network.

With a whole host of initiatives presently underway, dealing with improving transport networks, in particular those that are seen as sustainable in nature such as urban cycle paths, it is timely that there is a review of how the urban population, in particular, can access the countryside on their doorstep in a convenient and joined up way.

8. Increasing concerns over the importance of climate change and the need for positive action to contribute to its accommodation or rebuttal.

The recent increase in awareness of the importance of climate change and the effects that this process will have on the green environment is now a major driver for changes in how the green infrastructure is protected and enhanced. As easily accessible countryside is the main facility by which the public have the opportunity to witness the biodiversity of an area, how sensitive it is to environmental degradation and change and hence, how we as humans are responsible for its long term survival, it is essential that we make the link between what is suggested in such a document as the Rights of Way Improvement Plan with people's willingness to see resources put into the conservation and enhancement of our natural world.

Section 2

The Vision

The vision for Darlington's Rights of Way network is to create a facility that allows all of the public to have sustainable access to quality countryside. Countryside where they may experience the full richness of an unpolluted and biodiverse environment, as well as one that encourages healthy and safe travel.

Section 3

Aims and Objectives of the Darlington ROWIP

Aims.

This ROWIP aims to provide a strategy that helps to target resources towards achieving Darlington's vision for countryside access. This aim is closely related to the findings of national, regional and local research, which emphasise the importance of a raft of benefits that comes with improved countryside access. These benefits include the value of green exercise to mental and physical health as well as helping increase the public's perception of the value and importance of the natural world. This in turn encourages people's support for action and use of resources to improve the green environment. In addition there is a need to help reverse the process of an increasing gulf between the urban population and the people in the rural areas. (See below for a more comprehensive list of important factors)

The Objectives.

The main objectives for the Darlington Rights of Way Improvement Plan are to:

1. Increase the level of use of the element of semi-natural green infrastructure of Darlington, so that a majority of the Borough's population enjoy this facility and that this percentage should undergo a step change.
2. Understand the reasons why the majority of people do not currently use countryside access in general, and the Rights of Way network in particular, on a regular basis.
3. Provide much-improved access for all people, to semi natural areas and the countryside.
4. Provide an infrastructure that helps achieve these objectives by improving the Rights of Way network in a targeted way, addressing issues that have been raised by the public in the production of this plan. In particular:
 - The need for good quality, accessible routes near to where people live.
 - A more flexible infrastructure on the urban fringe, including more permissive access linking up Rights of Way with new Open Access areas such as community woodlands and local nature reserves.
 - Better access across physical barriers, especially the road network, but also on the ROW network itself.

- A joined-up approach that identifies opportunities presented by changes in land management. For example, the use of agri-environmental schemes can be used to help create new interest in the urban fringe, as well as better quality countryside access.
5. Provide a facility that nurtures a better understanding of nature and natural processes brought about through increased contact with the green environment,
 6. Encourage a stronger sense of identity brought about by an improved understanding of the uniqueness of Darlington through greater contact with the countryside.
 7. Provide better information on how to use the provision of countryside access opportunities.
 8. Help to address the major issues of climate change by improving the public's willingness to adopt more sustainable lifestyles through the provision of a quality environment on their doorstep.

Section 4

The Methodology.

On what basis has the plan been written? What kind of evidence has been used and how does this link to the action plan?

There are four different blocks of evidence on which the plan has been based.

These are:

1. Firstly a trio of attitude surveys. A questionnaire was sent out to over 1000 Darlington residents who form the Citizens Panel and responded to by 650. Further questionnaires were sent out to over 180 landowners and land managers in the Darlington area, and another to over 73 groups who may have reasons to use the ROW network.
2. Secondly, 8 key Focus Groups were assembled. Members were interviewed about their attitudes to the ROW network over a series of 2-3 hour sessions, and their views recorded. In addition there was also a Steering Group made up of key members of interest groups. Members of the Steering Group carried out a series of exercises designed to bring out their ideas about the current ROW network and how it might be developed in the future.
3. Thirdly, 85% of the ROW network was inspected in order to assess the condition, level of use and the quality of the network as it was in 2005 – 2006.
4. Finally, a Telephone Survey took place of people living near parts of the urban fringe Rights of Way network. Respondents were asked about their levels of awareness and use of the network. This was conducted to seek information as to how the condition of the network affected the use and demand amongst the local population. The thesis of this study is that the quality of the countryside that people have on their doorstep is an important factor in influencing how they use it. This survey contrasts areas of high quality countryside, such as the river walks at Low Coniscliffe, with areas blighted by such things as monoculture, litter and dangerous road crossings. In other words, factors that equate with low quality countryside.

These surveys provide evidence of attitude and use. They do not explain how that attitude and use has been formed over time, and consequently how the situation may be improved in the long term. People's attitudes are dynamic. They should not be seen as a mere snapshot. They reflect rational choices based on experience of what they have found when they have ventured out, as well as what they are told by others or seen through the media. They cannot tell us what people would do if their opportunities were different.

The Need to Balance Research Findings with Drivers for Change.

The methodology leads to a process where the views and aspirations of the public need to be weighed against the drivers for change (See section on strategies) that are currently affecting work in this area, as well as an understanding of the existing facility and the opportunities it offers. These discussions then need to be brought together to see if they can deliver something that is perceived as valuable and worth pursuing in the local context.

Section 5

Access to 'Quality Countryside' - Why it is important, and how it can be achieved.

Extracts from the Rural White Paper on Countryside Around Towns.

- *Opportunities to visit and enjoy the countryside (are to be) increased for disadvantaged groups and for town dwellers, for example through better management of the countryside around towns - where the pressures are strongest and the need for green spaces greatest.*
- **The paper highlights particularly the importance of country parks but the same argument applies to the ROW network that provides access for millions of people to the countryside on their doorstep.**
- *The Countryside Agency will be issuing guidance on best practice to revitalise the country parks around our towns and cities. Over 250 **country parks** were established around towns, most in the 1970s. Many are now beginning to show their age. Yet they remain potentially a great asset for urban dwellers, providing 'gateways' between town and country.*

We (The Countryside Agency) want to see country parks better maintained and brought up to date to accommodate the activities and sports that people are now interested in.....

Currently Darlington doesn't have any Country Parks, but it does have some increasingly attractive Local Nature Reserves and Community Woodlands that are becoming popular venues for green exercise in their own right.

THE COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY PLANNING POSITION STATEMENT PLANNING FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE IN AND AROUND TOWNS

The function of the countryside around towns can be summarised thus:

1. A Bridge to the Country – sustainable access corridors, networks, and transport systems providing links to and through the rural urban fringe.
2. A leading venue that offers a sustainable, often free resource for creative informal recreation for all sectors of the population.
3. A Gateway to the Town – an aesthetically high quality landscape that creates a powerful first impression to visitors and potential investors.
4. A Health Centre – providing opportunities for safe outdoor recreation and exercise, for relaxation and escape from the stresses of urban life.
5. A Classroom – an ‘outdoor classroom’ providing opportunities for hands on learning and skills development.
6. A Recycling and Renewable Energy Centre – fostering a sustainable landscape that combines low energy consumption with clean energy production.
7. A Productive Landscape – a well managed landscape, supplying consumers with high quality local produce or materials.
8. A Cultural Legacy – highlighting, recognising and valuing local heritage; increasing our understanding of how the rural urban fringe grew, and informing how it should look in the future.
9. A Place for Sustainable Living – ensuring that where development takes place, it leads to genuinely balanced communities which enhance their surroundings.
10. An engine for regeneration – supporting opportunities for communities to become involved in improving their own neighbourhoods.
11. A Nature Reserve – recognising and enhancing the importance of the rural urban fringe landscape for wildlife and for people to appreciate wildlife.

The countryside in and around towns often coincides with the Green Belt, which covers 13% of England. Many aspects of our vision (The Countryside Agency) apply as much to land within Green Belts as they do to land outside them. Indeed, most of the benefits described, especially environmental and

social ones can be achieved in ways that reinforce the open and largely undeveloped character of Green Belt land. Consequently, not only can the Green Belt be maintained, but also its appearance can be much improved and its value to the community greatly increased. (Darlington doesn't have a 'green belt' but the planning process does effectively protect large areas of agricultural land from development.

The Need for an Understanding of the History of Access to the Countryside

Countryside Access has changed dramatically over the past 50 years, and people's knowledge and understanding of it has also been subject to a dramatic shift over this period. Some of the reasons for this are discussed below. Without basing an analysis of the evidence of use and non-use on an historical understanding of the network, there would be little gained by a simplistic assessment of people's attitude to it, as well as their desires towards it. Similarly, an assessment of how to affect this situation through the development of an action plan would not be well supported if it were only a matter of assessing present usage and attitudes. Also needed is an understanding of these attitudes as a process, both informed by and informing the way countryside around the town, and the Rights of Way network, are best incorporated into people's normal every day lives.

How did the Current Provision of Countryside Access come about?

As with much of the Rights of Way network in lowland Britain, the intensive agricultural use of Darlington's relatively fertile hinterland tends to work against the provision of a quality recreational facility; better suited as it is to the production of food than for the provision of somewhere to walk, run, cycle and ride or to just simply enjoy nature.

This has come about largely since the late 1950's when the well-documented change in policy towards the farming industry led to a rapid process of intensification in agriculture. This process corresponded with a decline in the frequency, as well as ease of use of the Rights of Way network in particular, and countryside access more generally.

For the 40-year period between 1950 and 1990 little was done to redress this situation, with Rights of Way networks, such as the one around Darlington, falling into a very poor state of repair. The only real exceptions to this were the Rights of Way networks in the National Parks, to which a proportion of the population were now attracted in order to satisfy their desire for green recreation.

The effect on the landscape, and to some extent access, was dramatic. A range of initiatives led to widespread drainage, loss of scrubland and long-term leys and the loss of species-rich grassland. There was also an increased proportion of arable farming, the disappearance of large hedgerows and trees,

ploughing and artificial fertilising up to field edges, and many other factors besides.

These were combined with a very rapid decrease in the numbers employed in the farming industry, especially in seasonal work. Hence fewer people in the adjoining communities had an awareness of both the value of countryside access as well as the availability of that countryside for recreational pursuits.

This factor, above all else, has led to a decline in usage; a fact reflected in our research, where over 45% of users said they had learnt about routes from friends or relatives, demonstrating how important local knowledge is. This is compounded by the fact that one of the main reasons for non use was people not knowing where to go, and the feeling of insecurity generated by the fear that they might accidentally stray onto land that they might not have the right to walk over.

Present Day Accessibility of Darlington's Countryside - an Overview.

Darlington is surrounded by a combination of arable farming and intensive stock farming on fertile land that abuts right up to the town's urban fringe. This has produced landscapes in recent years that are often uninteresting and hence uninviting, as well as difficult to access to all but the committed explorer of the countryside. Changes brought about by successive agricultural policies that promoted generalised food production (in contrast to encouraging more specific products that foster local identity) has led to increases in field sizes, (Especially where arable cropping dominates), through hedgerow loss, the narrowing of field margins, the loss of hedgerow trees, and removal of small spinneys, woodlands and wetlands, all of which make the countryside less conducive to quiet recreation and relaxation with footpaths appearing to follow meaningless routes across featureless landscapes. When found adjacent to where people live, these factors deter people from venturing into the countryside on their doorstep.

Many examples of this can be found around Darlington. The land sandwiched between Green Lane and the Skerningham Community Woodland^{*M3:1} falls into this category, as does much of the land to the east of the town between the urban fringe and the A66^{*M10:1}. Much of the land to the south of the town beyond the A66^{*M9:1} and significant amounts of the land to the west beyond the A1 (M) also fits this description.

This combination of depleted landscapes with much reduced levels of habitat and biodiversity, reductions in seasonal labour as well as many other lesser factors discussed in more detail below, make countryside access much less popular than it once was. This is in spite of a great deal of effort over the past decade to work with landowners and farmers to improve stiles and way marking across the network through the "Milestones" process, partly funded by the Countryside Agency. Thanks to this initiative, The Rights of Way network is significantly better than even 10 years ago, but there has continued to be little increase in the levels of use.

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Where big increases in use can be seen however, are in those developments that address a whole series of issues regarding countryside access. Examples around Darlington include, the Skertingham Community Woodland^{*M3:2}, A number of local Nature Reserves, and the permissive walks attached to two of Darlington's farm - based attractions. This suggests that for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan to be successful, it should incorporate these principles and therefore move towards attracting a much greater proportion of the Darlington's public to the delights of the countryside on their own doorstep.

The Urban Fringe as a Deterrent to Countryside Access.

Following the argument through, it is recognised that the degraded landscapes, that have become associated with urban fringe land across Britain, are a major obstacle to encouraging people to use the countryside adjacent to where they live. This comes about through a variety of factors, chief amongst these being the potential development value of the land near existing communities. This works to prevent longer term plans coming into play, where public need for quality countryside access could, if given sufficient weight, play a much bigger part in decision making on how to spend leisure time.

In order to address this situation, Local Authorities are now understood to have a role in helping bring about something that was once taken for granted. i.e. access to quality countryside, where an awareness of the importance of the natural world and the value of this to our quality of life is nurtured.

The acceptance of a role for Local Authorities in countryside management since the early 1990's has resulted in Council's placing access to quality, semi-natural green space, as an important element in the design process.

This progression from the urban to the rural, helping people bridge the transition between town and country, needs to be a key part in Darlington's Right of Way Improvement Plan if it is to fulfil its primary aim of getting more people out into the natural world.

Equating People's Needs and Wishes for Countryside Access with Land Management Policies.

The plan also needs to equate what it is people are saying with what key drivers for change are coming from the policy makers, and how these may impact on the way the local facility develops. Not all of these are in the Local Authority's control, but some are. Others can be influenced by Local Councils, if written into their strategies and plans. For example, the changes in agricultural support, although not something that LA's are involved with directly but can influence through appropriate policies and by working with various partners, will have a long-term effect on the style of management of the land on the urban fringe and beyond. It is vital that the LA's are first in line to work with these changes to ensure that there is public benefit from these new directions and that a fully joined-up approach is forthcoming.

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What is Quality?

If we add up what Darlington's people say they look for when deciding whether or not to visit the countryside, we find something close to what we are trying to define when we talk about *quality countryside*, i.e: a feeling of security, a confidence that access to this part of the countryside is permitted and hence it is fine to be there. It should also be an area free from litter, and a walk or site which has a range of features such as wetlands, trees, hedges and mounds.

It also includes factors such as ease of access, freedom from urban noise, the condition of path furniture and the condition underfoot. Further still, there are other ingredients that influence the quality issue, especially with regards to people's enjoyment of it. Important here is firstly, an awareness in the public that the facility exists, and then secondly, certain cultural aspects, including historical levels of usage which affect public confidence about being welcome in the countryside.

All in all, the picture is a complex one, where every location has a different mix of attractions, distractions and influences.

Where Can Quality be found in Darlington?

Darlington does have some areas of high quality countryside. Typically these are areas that address quite a number of the factors outlined above. For example, the walks along the River Tees are very popular, not surprisingly because they offer high landscape value, high levels of biodiversity, field boundaries are relatively few and, because they are walked regularly they are generally in good condition.

Many of the popular sections are also near communities; especially the section that wraps around the southwest of Darlington itself. The routes are easy to follow as they stay close to the river. They have been walked for many years and so there is a high degree of historical knowledge about them. Finally, being next to the river, urban noise is drowned out by the sound of water flow.

Slightly less obvious are the recently popular paths through the new Community Woodland at Skerningham^{*M3:2}. This area has many of the characteristics of the example given above, but is a new network of paths and consequently is lacking the element described as 'historical knowledge'. What we have seen over the 5 years since the creation of these paths is very telling, with reference to the main thrust of the argument presented here.

This attractive area of open access woodland has seen a rapid increase in its use (numbers assessed through the condition survey) which is unlikely to have happened, if it were simply the case of creating a new path with no additional landscaping and biodiversity improvements to go with it. There are

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many paths on the urban fringe similarly accessible, but they are without these other landscape elements, and as a consequence, they receive very little attention from the public.

Quality and Level of Use.

The majority of the public, although keen on walking, as the surveys in this plan suggest, when choosing countryside recreation, prefer to go to places that are clearly available to them such as amenity green space or honey pots like the facilities at Broken Scar^{*M8:2} or at Darlington's South Park^{*M6:1}. Others prefer to travel longer distances, normally by car to more distant tourist destinations such as the National Parks where access is more clearly promoted. By making these choices, they miss out on much of what the countryside has to offer; namely:

1. the sense of discovering something close to their homes that they learn to value; witnessing the changing seasons, lessons on the interdependence of life, as well as.....
2.the day-to-day benefits of frequent contact with the natural world, such as stress-reduction, awareness of the uniqueness of place and many other issues besides.

The evidence is scant as to what effect, the provision of an improved quality of product, would have on the level of use, but there are hints in the evidence we have gathered for the Darlington ROWIP.

1. From the Condition Survey, it was clear that routes through attractive countryside, such as some of our woodland walks and river edge routes are, by far, the most popular.
2. However, to some extent Point 1 above is counteracted by what people actually say, which suggests that they are by now, used to the countryside on the edge of town, and the lack of accessibility associated with it.
3. What people actually say is that the most off-putting aspect of using the network is 'lack of information of where to go' followed by 'the routes being in a poor state' and 'not going where they would like to go'.
4. People don't say "We don't like walking across wheat fields or fields of rye grass" although the evidence on the ground suggests that they do indeed shy away from such areas. There are exceptions to this with some people having other stronger reasons for using these paths, i.e. that they are close to home and so convenient for short 10 minutes walk with the dog, or else they link with other higher quality parts of the network.

If this is analysed further, people seem to be saying that much of the network is unknown to them, and following the theory outlined in the initial paragraphs

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of this plan, they would not recognise such intensively farmed land as being 'accessible countryside' at all.

1. People look for information on paths that follow areas of more diverse land use where it is obvious they are welcome as walkers.
2. It would seem that simply *having* a Right of Way through an area of countryside does not make it an option for countryside recreation for the people who live there.
3. People need significantly more to alert them to the possibilities of countryside recreation than just a signpost and a couple of way markers.

When Quality is Absent.

The negative factors previously discussed, leave the majority of the public in a town like Darlington, rarely considering the countryside close to their homes as a place where they would want to spend significant amounts of time. This may particularly be the case with groups such as families, the elderly and people with impaired abilities, where they are looking for healthy activities that are affordable. Yet these groups are still not considering green exercise as an option (Specifically mentioned by the Rural White Paper as key target groups).

There are one or two activities on the network, close to the urban fringe that do fulfil a need, such as dog walking, or situations where people have a favourite path that they use repeatedly, but neither of these cater for the bulk of the population by providing a quality experience.

The people who do use the network extensively are a small minority of committed countryside walkers who, accompanied with their maps, are willing to turn a blind eye to what greets them at the beginning of their journey, and so get beyond the urban fringe to something more akin with traditional English countryside. However, even this is still beset with some of the problems outlined above.

There are many examples around Darlington where the countryside fails to deliver this kind of quality for a whole host of reasons, many of which were identified by our consultation groups. These include,

1. The separation of the countryside by busy roads, especially the A66,
2. The extent of the litter problem at the urban fringe,
3. A confusing and messy landscape on the urban fringe leading to a general confusion over what is accessible,
4. Difficult terrain, surfaces and crossing points. (Including stiles, etc)

5. Worries about stock in fields.

These concerns are compounded by what people don't say immediately, but is brought out in more free ranging discussions. It is this cultural element where it becomes quite clear that people do not see the countryside as theirs to explore, expressing concerns over a whole range of things that collectively can be described as.....

***Vulnerability, safety and uncertainty about
what to do when they get there.***

The main reasons for lack of quality.

The main reasons given for a perceived lack of quality and hence unwillingness to venture out are:

1. Firstly, the separation of the countryside from people's sense of their own domain by large busy roads and the associated concern of the difficulty of crossing those roads to the countryside beyond.
2. The second was being unsure of where to go, largely as suggested here, a factor of this prolonged separation and subsequent falling off of use.
3. The third was a combination of factors that made the countryside unattractive as well as inaccessible such as the litter issue, problems with poor stiles and gates and muddy gateways.
4. Way down the list was the issue of the countryside itself and what it had to offer.

If we are to equate this with the other evidence we gathered, this needs putting into context as regards the importance of quality countryside.

The findings suggest that it may well be because most people rarely visit this part of the countryside and so have no knowledge of it borne out by the evidence from the Condition Survey where the countryside beyond the poor quality urban fringe illustrated an extremely low level of usage. In which case, they have little or no experience that allows them to contrast what is quality and what isn't. When they do discover something new that fits the description of quality, it quite quickly picks up in people's minds as a place to go.

It is worth mentioning at this point, that it is access to the countryside, which lies just beyond the immediate urban fringe which is often the kind the farmers in these areas find the most destructive to their businesses; for example, access carried out at night by people

involved, sometimes, in antisocial and destructive activities. This is one of the main reasons farmers are often unsympathetic to the aims of those wishing to increase countryside access.

5. Urban Fringe Design

- One of the main problems associated with the urban fringe, and its detrimental affect on countryside access, is where housing estates have been designed to turn inwards away from the countryside. There has been a long legacy of this approach, coming about for a variety of reasons, the main one being an apparent desire by housing developers to create a sense of security within the estate.
- Secondly, the tendency for developments to maximise the development space, leaves no room for a soft, graduated edge between the urban area and the country. One of the problems is the constant moving of the 'edge' as development proceeds. The solution would be to design into new developments, wedges of green space to enable access to the urban fringe even when the band of development moves forward.
- Where this approach is reversed such as the West Park development in northwest Darlington^{*M6:2} and the estate in Middleton St George facing the Whinnies Local Nature Reserve^{*M10:2}, we see the level of interaction with the countryside showing a marked increase.

Summary: the Importance of Quality

The thesis that high quality leads to greater use has been put to the test in this section of the ROWIP.

The findings are reasonably conclusive, mainly as a consequence of the conditions survey. This showed that by far the most used paths are in areas of high quality countryside such as the River Tees Corridor, the Local Nature Reserves and to some extent the paths near to the River Skerne at Barmpton.

Supporting this is other evidence from the Focus Groups, where people said that they looked for areas in which they feel safe, places where they can be sure they have a right to be and that they will have something to do when they get there, such as feeding ducks, trees for the children to play on, or a river to throw stones into.

The Telephone Survey also backed this up with little difference in the results between those places on the urban fringe, where poor quality countryside is found, with very few people using it for anything other than the most basic access such as a 10-minute walk with the dog.

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Section 6

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

There are many strategies that give guidance on the direction countryside access should be developed in individual local authorities and some of the main ones are discussed in the following section.

Table 1: Short-list of Strategic Documents for Review

Document	Notes
North East Regional Spatial Strategy (RPG1)	The RSS backs up much of the findings in this report, highlighting the importance of the provision of quality green space that is joined up, both physically and culturally.
North East Regional Economic Strategy	
DEFRA The Rural White Paper	Various passages on Agriculture and demand for environmental protection and enhancement.
The Countryside Agency	Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs <u>Ninth Report</u>
Agriculture and the Environment - The view of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food	Extract that refers to the effect of farming policy on the quality aspects of the countryside.
Regional Image Strategy	
Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy	The need to plan for green infrastructure.
North East England Tourism Strategy	Includes activity tourism
Tourism Marketing Plan for North East England	Includes walking and cycling tourism campaigns
North East Cycle Tourism Strategy	
Tees Valley Transport Strategy	Sub regional transport strategy
Tees Valley Cycle Strategy	
Tees Valley Tourism Strategy	To be replaced in 2007
Tees Valley Area Tourism Management Plan	In draft form currently
Tees Forest Plan	Community Forest Plan
Tees Valley Equestrian Strategy	
Darlington Local Plan (Local Development Framework)	Local Plan is being replaced by the LDF which is in preparation
Darlington Gateway	
Darlington Local Transport Plan.	
Darlington Cycling Strategy	
Darlington School Travel Plan Strategy	

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Where Quality Comes to Life: A Community Strategy for the Future of Darlington	
Draft Open Spaces Strategy	
Durham Biodiversity Action Plan	
All Together Now: Social Inclusion Strategy	
Choosing Health	
Improving Health and Well-being	Primary Care Trust Strategy
Darlington Local Culture Strategy	
Events Strategy	

Extracts from the North East Regional Spatial Strategy

The region's countryside in and around towns, in addition to checking the unrestricted sprawl and coalescence of settlements have important roles in sustaining urban communities. These areas can be made readily accessible to most people; contribute to the health, wealth and well being of the city regions and rural communities; underpin more sustainable living and strengthen biodiversity in both town and country. The development of Green Infrastructure - open spaces, woodlands, wildlife habitats, parks and other natural areas will play a key role in the region's competitiveness and economic strength.

The.....RSS recognises that greater emphasis needs to be placed on the positive use of the open areas in and around towns, by creating networks of new and improved parks, woodlands and other green spaces which are linked to the urban centre and the wider countryside by footpaths, bridleways and cycle ways. This will also improve the appearance, accessibility and biodiversity in and around towns. Green Belt and other open areas are important target locations for the delivery of community woodlands and an associated range of sustainable leisure opportunities for urban dwellers and tourists, such as walking, cycling, equestrianism and environmental education. Equestrian activity, for example, is an important activity in the rural-urban fringe that contributes more towards GVA and local economic activity than agriculture. However, the sustainable strategic access infrastructure of the region, in the form of bridleways and the public rights of way system upon which the industry depends, is neglected in some areas. The importance of the strategic network in the context of leisure and tourism should be recognised so that LDFs, Local Action Forums and Public Rights of Way Improvement Plans may deliver improvements at more local levels.

The North East Regional Economic Strategy

There are a number of key themes which recur throughout the strategy and have a distinct resonance with the main theme of the Darlington's ROWIP.

These are:

Seeing the North East as

- culturally vibrant,
- having a more sustainable environment,
- having a more inclusive society,
- being both diverse and welcoming,
- being healthier and safer and
- having cities, towns and rural locations which are working together.

There are many issues within the Darlington ROWIP where the principle of helping people understand their locality is a key theme.

The Department of Community and Local Government.

Presently stressing the importance of 'Place' with regards to achieving economic sustainability in the region, especially in the knowledge economy. DCLG express their concern that the North East is underplaying its main strengths in this respect, relying too much on the very real attractiveness of its wider countryside while undervaluing the importance of the countryside near to where people live.

Increasing the level of knowledge as regards the distinctiveness of Darlington's, 'Place' both, geographically as well as historically. For people to want to know this 'Place' it needs to be safe and attractive, and by doing so, it enriches culture, it provides opportunities for sustainable activities (Close to home), it encourages all people from a locality to join in, (Inclusive) it encourages physical engagement,(People walk or cycle and by doing so, have a reason to get fitter and healthier) and brings the town and country together.

DEFRA , along with the **Countryside Agency** have conducted extensive research into the effects of modern intensive farming methods and its effect on the quality of the countryside and hence its attractiveness as a place to visit. For example,

DEFRA's, Rural White Paper states that,

Agricultural intensification and homogenous development have diluted countryside character, eroding the diversity that makes rural England so special. ...

While the **Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Ninth Report** states, **The Countryside Agency** was one of many organisations to tell us that *"people ... look for food to come from an attractive and accessible countryside with diverse wildlife"*

The Council for the Protection of Rural England

(The House of Commons Select Committee) told us that the problem has been the response of farmers to Government policies since the Second World War. Policies have been intended to increase agricultural productivity and promote self-sufficiency in food.

It argued that a *"chronic inability to reform these policies as conditions changed, or [to] respond to problems as they arose, has resulted in [inter alia] major damage to our landscapes, wildlife and natural resources"*.

It cited the following specific instances of damage:

- the loss of more than half of England's hedgerows since 1947;
- a 40 per cent reduction in the number of farmland birds since the mid 1970s; and
- the loss of an area of permanent grassland the size of Bedfordshire since 1992.[231]

Clearly, these are all factors affecting the attractiveness of the countryside as a place to visit, especially around towns where farming is often at its most intensive.

The view of **The Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food**

"We believe it [the farming and food industry] is also unsustainable environmentally - without substantial change.

"Farming and food production have got to be reconnected with the countryside.

"This may seem like an odd thing to say. Over three-quarters of the landmass of England is still a farmed landscape. The English countryside was largely created by farming".

"But in the last 50 years a lot of that countryside's diversity and character has gone." Two thirds of England's hedgerows were lost between the 1950s and the 1990s.

"Beyond any doubt the main cause of this decay has been the rise of modern, often more intensive farming techniques. Agriculture was once

environmentally benign, and a healthy and attractive countryside was a relatively cost-free by-product. The practices that deliver this benefit for society are often not now economic. Farming practice and the familiar English landscape have diverged".

As has been noted elsewhere in this document, the research findings suggest, in order to affect substantially the numbers identifying the countryside near their homes as a place for green exercise, then the reconnection mentioned above between farming and the countryside needs to take place. However, in addition there needs to be a parallel reconnection between people and the countryside, and people and farming. (The Countryside Agency's Local Food initiative is important here, along with such activities as Farmers' Markets, farms on the urban fringe as tourist venues. etc)

The Council will continue to work with farmers on the urban fringe to encourage the diversification of their business into ones that encourage access as well as benefiting from it.

Regional Image Strategy

The regional image strategy focuses on the profile and perceptions of the North East region. These are stated to be low for both people living here and those visiting.

The aims of the strategy are therefore to:

- Increase awareness of North East England and its many superb assets
- Attract more leisure and business visitors to the North East
- Attract talented people to live and work in the North East.
- Attract investment to the region.
- Update and create positive perceptions of the region.

To achieve these aims, ONE North East has invested in marketing and public relations activity to give long-term promotion to the region. A permanent regional image strategy team has been created and it has developed a strong brand for the region, which concentrates specifically on the wider countryside as unspoilt as apposed to the popular perception, which tends towards seeing the North East landscape as being industrial and degraded. The team will continue to research consumer perceptions of the region to gauge the success of this campaign.

Research shows that people who have actually made a previous visit to the region are more likely to hold positive opinions about it. 4 major themes are to be targeted in order to promote positive perceptions of the region.

These are

- Coast and Countryside
- History and Heritage
- City Culture
- Innovative Business

The main issues for the ROWIP are:

- 1. Providing access to attractive countryside can help Darlington benefit from the regional promotion of ‘..... countryside’***
- 2. Recognise that this ‘image’ needs to be seen as having the potential to start closer to home, and that we cannot rely on the appeal of our proximity to other more scenic countryside elsewhere. (This is particularly relevant to day visits)***

Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy

The strategy is a way to help the process by which open space as a resource is integrated and planned strategically across the Tees Valley.

In this way, green infrastructure should form a part of the investment plans and strategies of those agencies, with a remit for the planning and delivery of growth, sustainable development, and environmental management.

The strategy includes a map showing the key strategic routes for green infrastructure, it contains detailed argument about how important various aspects are including such headings as the importance of the urban fringe, the importance of connectivity of green space and the need for it to be a part of everyday normal life as well as specific things like the challenge of future proofing to protect against climate change.

Implications for the ROWIP:

- 1. That the main principles of improving access to Darlington’s countryside should be planned into the development process at an early stage so that opportunities for improvement when they do arise, form part of the initial design.***
- 2. That schemes needed for the improvement of the network receive priority, when options for funding are considered.***

The North East Regional Tourism Strategy

This sets out several principles for tourism in line with the Regional Economic Strategy. The vision of the strategy is to make the North East a desired destination, which meets both tourist and business visitors' expectations. It lays out a number of principles, which will be used to achieve this.

The most important of these for the ROWIP is:

“We will expand our tourism industry without putting our natural environment and built heritage at risk.”

The strategy aims to add to the sustainable development of the North East. It highlights the importance of the rural environment in attracting visitors to the area and how this must be conserved and managed. There are seven parts to the strategy and overall success depends upon progression across all areas:

- Activities and attractions;
- Accommodation;
- Information provision;
- Infrastructure;
- Marketing, communication and branding;
- Business and workforce development;
- Planning and the environment.

One North East has identified walking and cycling as key niche markets for tourism in the North East. It is delivering marketing campaigns aimed at these markets.

The ROWIP should consider:

- ***How improving the access network in Darlington can enable the Borough to benefit from regional marketing of walking and cycling tourism. Although it is unlikely that Darlington will become a significant destination for these activities, it could benefit from long distance routes and from walking and cycling as a secondary activity pursued by visitors on a trip to the area.***
- ***How this regional strategy can support the improvement, management and promotion of the access network in the Borough***

Tourism Marketing Plan for North East England

The Tourism marketing plan has been prepared in consultation with tourism partners across the North East. Its aim is to help *‘to develop a truly competitive regional tourism product.’*

The main focus of the market strategy is on the unique selling points that the North East has to offer. These include coast and countryside, history and heritage and city culture, as identified in the regional tourism and regional image strategies.

Specifically these are:

- Undiscovered and dramatic landscape
- Unique history and heritage – including the regions Maritime, Christian, Railway and Industrial Heritage
- Vibrant cityscapes/urban culture
- Renowned North East welcome

The North East is attractive to specialist interest groups who can be targeted through themed marketing campaigns.

A number of themed campaigns are being delivered, including:

- Walking: Production of a walking guide, advertising in newspapers, Attendance at ‘The Great Outdoors Exhibition’ and development of the walking micro-site linked to visitnortheastengland.com.
- Cycling: Cycling brochures featuring routes throughout the region and promotion of national cycle routes alongside those above.
- Adventure Tourism: To be included in the cycling campaign with the view of developing a dedicated campaign in the future.

Issues for the ROWIP are:

- 1. Ensure that the Borough benefits from the regional walking tourism marketing campaign.***
- 2. Ensure that the Borough benefits from the regional cycling tourism marketing campaign.***
- 3. Look at the possibilities for the promotion of horse riding under the adventure tourism campaign.***

Gearing Up for Growth: A Cycle Tourism Strategy for the North East

Gearing up for growth highlights the fact that cycle tourism is expected to continue to grow strongly in coming years. Due to the North East’s rural cycling potential and its urban cycle routes the area is able to benefit from the growth in cycle tourism. Marketing has already been produced advertising the

area's cycle tourism offer through promotional literature, websites and the 'Discover Northumbria on 2 Wheels' campaign.

Facilities and services needed for cycling visitors are also being developed, with some having already been put into place and the strategy aims to build on this.

The strategy's objectives are:

- To ensure that the full economic benefits available from cycle tourism are met;
- To help the North East become one of the UK's leading destinations for cycle breaks;
- To encourage visitors to use cycles and to reduce the use of cars;
- To improve cycle provision for local people.

More specifically the strategy hopes to; maximise the potential of any existing or planned routes, develop existing routes to include more circular options to appeal to tourists, to ensure routes and cycling infrastructures are maintained and improved continuously, to ensure there is coordination between current and future cycle tourism products and to establish well coordinated marketing campaigns that aim at specific target markets.

The strategy highlights one of the benefits of the development of cycle tourism as being an environmentally sustainable form of tourism, having a low impact on both the environment and communities. It can also help to reduce the number of cars used by visitors and therefore reduce the problems associated with visitor traffic.

There are three priorities for action, as follows:

- Developing and promoting rural cycling and mountain biking breaks in Northumberland and County Durham
- Developing and promoting recreational cycling day visits in Tyne & Wear, Tees Valley and County Durham
- Developing and promoting cycle touring holidays for overseas visitors

The strategy identifies the main target market for Tees Valley as '*recreational cycling day visits by the local population*'

Issues for Darlington's ROWIP are:

- 1. Should we look at developing the daily cycling routes in the Borough, or jointly with adjoining Boroughs?**
- 2. Do we provide services to cycle tourists using the long distance routes that pass through or close to the Borough?**

Tees Valley Structure Plan

¹The Structure Plan proposes that a network of greenways - largely car-free off-road routes - be developed across the Tees Valley, to complement Rights of Way networks. Policy L4 states "Access to the countryside and coast will be improved by developing a network of greenways, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways, providing links between the towns, the villages, the countryside and the open spaces within the towns."

Policy L7 states that the Teesdale Way and Cleveland Way long distance footpaths will be improved, maintained and protected from development.

Policy L8 states that the potential for recreational development adjacent to the River Tees should be realised, including by improving access and creating new footpaths and cycleways.

Tees Valley Cycle Strategy (1998)

The objective of the strategy is to 'encourage more cycling, as part of an integrated land-use and transport strategy to:

- Improve mobility for people, not movement of vehicles
- Improve road safety
- Improve the environment
- Improve the health of the community

There are five groups of policies, as follows:

- Providing cycle facilities, such as routes and parking
- Incorporating the needs of cyclists into alterations and additions to the highway network
- Promotion, awareness and safety
- Local authorities and their role as major employers – setting a good example
- Monitoring and implementation

Key issues for the Darlington ROWIP are:

- 1. Does D.B.C. continue the process of creating a network of safe and convenient strategic cycle routes in the Borough which link to strategic routes across the Tees Valley?**
- 2. Should D.B.C. ensure that there are minimum standards in place for the maintenance and sweeping of cycle routes?**
- 3. Consequently, is there adequate cycle parking at cyclists' 'destinations'?**
- 4. Are there systems to ensure cyclists' needs are taken into account in new highway and traffic management schemes, and at new junctions?**

- 5. Is there adequate cycle awareness and cycle proficiency training?**
- 6. Is the Council doing all it can to provide facilities for staff who wish to cycle to and during work?**

Tees Forest Plan (2000)

The vision for the Tees Forest is to 'create a well-wooded landscape that is worked and lived in'. The Forest will have a variety of habitats and deliver social, economic and environmental benefits. Community Forests are a long-term project and the Tees Forest could take up to 30 years to establish

A 'Forest Strategy' shows the geographical location of the proposed new woodland and other habitats. Access to the Tees Forest will include a network of 'Greenways' and 'Forest Gateways' and there will be good links direct from urban areas. Recreational activity will focus on these Gateways and Greenways as well as on 'Open Access Areas' providing for a range of outdoor activities and 'Participation Programmes' to involve everyone in the Community Forest.

The Plan has a number of 'Local Management Zones'. Zone 13 'Darlington Rural Fringe' covers Tees Forest activity in Darlington. The strategies for this zone are as follows:

- Focus woodland expansion on brownfield land, adjacent to areas of potential new development, the boundary between town and countryside and major transportation corridors
- Develop the recreational potential of the zone, including green routes and riverside recreation on the rivers Tees and Skerne
- Create a Greenway between Darlington and Stockton
- Progress the development of new Gateway sites, especially a new primary Gateway site
- Encourage planting of larger woodlands with commercial potential between Darlington and Stockton
- Promote the concept of the Tees Forest in this zone

Key issues for the Darlington ROWIP are as follows:

- 1. How can the residents of Darlington gain optimum access to the Tees Forest?***
- 2. Are there systems to ensure that new development includes new access through planning gain?***
- 3. What is the recreation and tourism potential of a Darlington to Stockton Greenway?***
- 4. How could a 'primary Gateway' benefit recreation and tourism?***
- 5. The need for a new area of Community Woodland in the south of the Borough with sustainable links.***

- 6. *The need to increase constantly the tree cover and hence percentage of accessible woodland around Darlington, given that the Borough has ¼ of the average national tree cover percentage, which is in itself, one of the lowest in Europe.***

Durham Biodiversity Action Plan

The Durham Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which was produced in 1999, covers the whole of Darlington Borough.

The plan has habitat action plans for the following habitats:

- Arable land
- Coniferous woodland
- Gardens & allotments
- Hedgerows
- Improved grassland
- Lowland heath
- Lowland meadows & pastures
- Magnesia limestone grassland
- Parks and amenity grassland
- Ponds, lakes and reservoirs
- Reeds, swamp, fen and marsh?
- Rivers & streams
- The built environment
- Transport corridors
- Urban habitats
- Wet woodland

The relevant species action plans (prepared) are as follows:

- Great Crested Newt
- Skylark
- Nightjar
- Linnet
- Reed Bunting
- Corn Bunting
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Tree Sparrow
- Grey Partridge
- Bullfinch
- Song Thrush
- Freshwater white-clawed crayfish
- Water Vole
- Brown Hare
- Otter
- Pipistrelle Bat
- Red Squirrel
- Round-mouthed Whorl Snail

Implications for the Darlington ROWIP:

Management for access, if carried out sensitively, can make way for improved levels of biodiversity. This can occur through the introduction of areas of new access, with the creation of Community Woodland on agricultural land or new wetlands adjacent to new or existing paths. It can also occur through the widening of field margins and improved hedgerow management. These kinds of improvements, together with the creation of new Local Nature Reserves, see the quality of the landscapes improving rapidly, quickly making an area much more popular to the public for informal recreation.

Tees Valley Equestrian Leisure Sector Strategy

The objectives of the strategy are:

- To increase the understanding and raise the profile of the equestrian sector within the Tees Valley sub-region
- To increase awareness amongst Local Authority planning and transport staff about the needs and demands of the equestrian leisure sector
- To highlight the need for greater acknowledgement within the local planning structure of the ability of the equestrian leisure sector to contribute to the social cohesion, well-being and environmental sustainability of rural and urban fringe areas
- To enable more effective targeting and wider publicity for the opportunities afforded through the Single Payments Scheme (Environmental Stewardship) and the Rural Development Scheme

The strategy has twelve recommendations, as follows:

- Work should be set in hand to create a Tees Valley 'Festival of the Horse'
- A 'Tees Valley Trail' should be established which wraps around the Tees Valley conurbation with connections west to Cumbria, north to Durham and south to the North York Moors
- A framework partnership agreement between the key agencies should be developed with one nominated lead agency to provide first point of contact
- A nominated lead agency, with the support of the partnership, should promote a business cluster group
- Supplementary planning documents should be produced to provide a comprehensive and consistent approach to the equestrian sector
- A set of comprehensive, but direct, guidance notes should be published
- Investigating the feasibility of developing an extensive tolled route system
- Consideration should be given to developing a Tees Valley framework
- 1% of LTP resources over a 5-year period should be allocated to a programme of ROW maintenance, improvement and extension

- Debating the issue of horses and road use
- Exploring options for 'safe riding' qualifications
- Exploring opportunities to widen the riding offer in the Tees Valley

The strategy identifies three key concerns, as follows:

- The availability and cost of basic training
- The dearth of off-road riding opportunities
- The absence of a strategy for developing the equine industry

Issues for the Darlington ROWIP are:

- 1. Can the bridleway network in the Borough be improved/extended?***
- 2. Are there opportunities to introduce more people to horse riding, especially young people?***
- 3. How can the ROWIP contribute to the strategic development of the equine industry in Tees Valley?***
- 4. Could the proposed supplementary planning guidance help to manage the proliferation of 'unofficial' livery yards in the Borough?***
- 5. Is there an opportunity to develop a toll route system in the Borough?***
- 6. What are the opportunities for permissive riding agreements across farm boundaries?***

Darlington Local Plan (1997) Incorporating Adopted Alterations 2001 & The Local Development Framework

The Local Development Scheme (LDS) for Darlington sets out how the Council's programme for preparation of the Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDS lists a number of documents and sets out a timetable for their production.

The Darlington Local Development Framework will consist of a number of documents, which will be either Development Policy Documents (DPD), setting out policies and Borough-wide plans, and Area Action Plans (AAP), which deal with issues at a more local scale.

The Core Strategy is the highest-level document and it will guide all of the other documents. This is the most advanced and adoption is anticipated in January 2009. Following this, other plans will be adopted as shown in Table 3, below. Once the initial list of plans has been adopted, further plans will be prepared to address emerging issues and priorities.

*M within text
refers to map number and:
highlighted point in annex

Table 3: Darlington Local Development Scheme

Document	Role	Commence	Adoption
Core Strategy	Sets out a vision, strategy and policy framework for spatial development	Jul 2002	Jan 2009
Tees Valley Minerals & Waste Core Strategy	Provides a strategic approach to mineral and waste development and proposals	May 2007	April 2010
Development Policies	Generic policies against which development proposals will be assessed	Aug 2007	Sep 2010
Tees Valley Minerals and Waste Site Allocation	Identifies potential sites for minerals and wastes sites and facilities	May 2007	April 2010
Darlington Gateway AAP	Provides employment allocations and a detailed framework for areas of regeneration	Aug 2007	Sep 2010
Darlington Town Centre AAP	Provides the planning framework for the future development of the town centre	Feb 2008	Jan 2011

In addition there will be several Supplementary Planning Documents which will provide guidance on specific issues, such as affordable housing, design of new development and planning obligations

In the meantime, the policies of the Local Plan are 'saved' beyond the duration of the current plan (which ends September 2007) and continue to apply until such time as appropriate, new Local Development Documents are in place. Policies relating to recreation are located in Chapter 5 – 'Recreation, Leisure and Community'. The objectives for this area of policy are as follows and the key policies are outlined below:

- To meet the needs of all residents for recreation and community facilities.
- To continue to promote and develop Darlington's role as a sub-regional centre for recreation and leisure provision.
- To protect and improve existing facilities.
- To identify and respond to shortfalls in provision in relation to perceived local needs.
- To create a safe and attractive environment for all members of the community.
- To ensure that the needs of children, the elderly and people with disabilities are satisfied.
- To improve access to the countryside for informal recreation
- To ensure that the environmental impact of recreation, leisure and community provision is sustainable.

*M within text
refers to map number and:
highlighted point in annex

²Key policies are:

- Policy R12 – Access to Open land and Countryside states that public access to open land and countryside will be encouraged by maintaining and extending the PROW and other paths. Recreation routes will be created using parts of the existing network together with new links to improve access from built up areas for pedestrians, people with disabilities, pedal cyclists and/or horse riders.
- Policy R13 – Recreation Routes and New Development includes provision for the inclusion of new routes, linking to the access network, in new development.
- Policy R14 – Recreation Development in the Countryside allows for the development to support countryside sports and activities subject to environmental and other conditions.
- Policy R15 – Horse-Related Development allows development in the countryside of facilities to support equestrian activity subject to environmental and amenity conditions.
- Policy R23 – Off-Road Motorcycle Facility permits the use of land for organised and supervised off-road motorcycling subject to conditions relating to noise, and visual disturbance and impacts on amenity and character in the surrounding area.
- The narrative makes specific reference to the creation of recreation routes along the banks of the River Skerne, in the urban area and along the Barnard Castle railway trackbed, as well as safeguarding of the Stockton-Darlington railway trackbed and improving the Teesdale Way through the Borough.

Main Issues for the ROWIP

Having key aspects of the ROWIP identified in the LDF is very important. It allows future planning for the improvement of the countryside around the town. It identifies the process where not only can countryside access be improved but also opportunities to improve the actual quality of the countryside through such things as environmental mitigation measures.

Darlington Local Transport Plan 2006-2011

The plan focuses on:

- Improving peoples' accessibility, especially for those with a mobility or sensory impairment, and for those who are socially excluded
- Tackling traffic congestion
- Making the transport network safe and secure for all
- Helping people make the best travel choices

It includes a set of actions to improve:

- Travelling to work
- Doing business in Darlington
- Going to school or college
- Shopping for food and goods
- Leisure and recreation
- Access to health services and caring for others

The LTP2 includes the statement of action for the ROWIP as well as section on the Darlington network that sets the scene for much of the work in this plan. It also includes a Cycling Strategy and a School Travel Plan Strategy.

³***Issues for the ROWIP are as follows:***

- 1. The access network is primarily used for leisure and recreation trips, but opportunities should be taken to improve the network in and close to built-up areas to encourage non motorised modes for utility trips, including travel to work and travel to school***
- 2. Linking the urban network with the countryside is of a major importance as a means of creating more sustainable recreational travel.***
- 3. The creation of a set of green venues to encourage the use of the web of green routes across the town and out into the countryside.***

School Travel Plan Strategy 2006-2011

The vision for the plan is:

To ensure that school pupils in Darlington have the opportunity to make a safe, healthy, affordable and enjoyable journey to school with the minimum practicable impact on the local environment

A number of measures are proposed including producing plans for each school in the Borough and involving transport planners earlier in the process of planning new education facilities.

*M within text
refers to map number and:
highlighted point in annex

The key issue for the ROWIP is how improvements to access can support a modal shift away from motorised transport for journeys to school.

Where Quality Comes to Life: A Community Strategy for the Future of Darlington (2003)

The vision for the community strategy has four goals and eight connecting themes, as follows:

- An area creating and sharing prosperity
- Improving the local economy
- Promoting inclusive communities
- A location for learning, achievement and leisure
- Raising educational achievement
- Stimulating leisure activities
- A place for living safely and well
- Promoting community safety
- Improving health and well-being
- A high quality environment with excellent communication links
- Enhancing the environment
- Developing an effective transport system

Effort is to be targeted specifically on the following three groups:

- Children and young people
- Older people
- Those living in the most deprived wards

The consultation exercise identified demand for the following:

- Guided walks, safe cycle paths, circular countryside walks and rides
- Affordable and accessible leisure activities for young people

Key issues for the ROWIP are:

- 1. The need to reduce antisocial behaviour so that people feel safe***
- 2. Promoting physical activity on the access network to improve the health of residents***
- 3. Promoting outdoor activities to give (young) people an alternative to drugs and crime***
- 4. Ensure that the level of littering, tipping, etc (especially in the urban fringe) is reduced to make it a more attractive venue.***
- 5. Promoting the access network as an alternative to making car journeys***

Darlington Draft Open Spaces Strategy (2006-2016)

The strategy recognises that open spaces in and close to Darlington and the three larger villages in the Borough are important and valued by residents. They like having open spaces nearby, ranking them 7th most important factor in making a neighbourhood a good place to live.

The Borough's open spaces include 101 informal recreation sites (140.6 ha), 30 natural and semi-natural green spaces (247.6 ha) and 20 green corridors (109.3 ha). Open space is not evenly distributed through the Borough; it is most plentiful in the south west and northeast and least plentiful in central Darlington.

Over a third (38%) of informal recreation sites were rated as low quality. Most green corridors (20/22) are in the urban area. One (Tees Riverside/Broken Scar) is a strategic link (part of the Teesdale Way) the remainder are local links or doorstep links. Quality varies widely. Villages have less open space, but this is compensated for by better access to the Public Rights of Way Network

The aims of the strategy are:

- To provide a sustainable amount of high quality, accessible open spaces across the Borough to meet the changing needs and expectations of local people, now and for the foreseeable future
- To provide a variety of open spaces and facilities within them that, where appropriate, are equally accessible by all
- To secure improvements in the design and management of open spaces, so that they are attractive and safe for everyone, their biodiversity is enhanced and the Borough's distinctive history and culture is conserved
- To build and sustaining relationships with the local community and other agencies to help shape change on open spaces

Issues for the ROWIP are:

- 1. Understanding and co-ordinating the relationship between open spaces and the rest of the access network***
- 2. The importance of green corridors and their role in encouraging people into the wider countryside***
- 3. Opportunities to increase the access network by providing new woodlands and nature reserves on the urban fringe, and linking these to the wider access network***

Darlington's Climate Change Strategy.

With the publication of Darlington's Climate Change Strategy, a list of actions is called for that will begin to address the issues that face the locality in this period of global warming. The recommendations in the strategy list such factors as reducing car dependence, the use of renewables and increase awareness through education. It identifies the importance of increasing quality of life factors over a simple notion of economic growth, the need for a move to healthier lifestyles and such things as a greater use of local foods.

The implications for the Darlington ROWIP are as follows,

- 1. Planning; to promote the concept of alternatives to car use through good urban design where accessibility to semi natural green space is a key notion.*
- 2. Reduce car use as a result of the above.*
- 3. Promote the purchase of local food by encouraging a more diverse rural hinterland where farming, access and biodiversity are encouraged in equal proportions.*
- 4. Sustainable transport. As above, by encouraging journeys to accessible quality environments.*
- 5. Lifestyles and buildings. A combination of the factors already mentioned.*
- 6. Awareness rising aimed at changing behaviours and attitudes... Work towards the creation of a truly accessible countryside where people visit as a normal part of their lives and as a consequence, learn to value the natural world and our efforts to defend it.*
- 7. Demonstrate the health benefits of exercise. Having quality countryside encourages people to walk and cycle both as individuals and as families.*
- 8. Demonstrate regeneration links. Through improved green sustainable links, in and around town, encourage regeneration in a high quality green environment with green links and hence enhancing the quality of life and contributing to the knowledge economy.*

All Together Now: A Social Inclusion Strategy for Darlington 2005

The aim of the strategy is to 'improve the life chances of those who are experiencing, and those who are at risk of experiencing, discrimination and disadvantage'. It identifies a number of factors which can lead to social exclusion, including:

- Unemployment
- Poor educational attainment
- Ill health
- Low income
- Crime
- Poor housing or local environment

Work to deliver the strategy will focus on:

- Narrowing the inequalities gap
- Building community confidence
- Increasing public awareness and involvement
- Improving access to services

The strategy identifies the following groups as being more likely to suffer from deprivation, discrimination and disadvantage:

- Those over the age of 85 and under the age of 5
- People with long term illness
- Disabled people
- Black and minority ethnic communities
- Faith communities
- People who are unemployed or receiving a low income
- Carers
- People with criminal convictions
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Gypsies and travellers
- Young people leaving care

According to the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, the most deprived wards in the Borough, with their national ranking shown in brackets, are Central (290), Eastbourne South (359), Cockerton West (519), Eastbourne North (559) and Park East (637).

Darlington's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities are concentrated in three wards – Northgate, Central and Park East.

The strategy identifies issues and actions specific to each of the more vulnerable groups. Awareness and transport are recurring issues.

Issues for the ROWIP are:

- 1. Through the implementation of the ROWIP, help tackle the causes of social exclusion (poor local environment, crime, low income) by providing low cost, community building activities in green surroundings of a high quality that people care for.***
- 2. Make the network easily accessible by all groups.***
- 3. Raising awareness of the access network amongst vulnerable groups***

*M within text
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highlighted point in annex

Choosing Health

The vision for Darlington's Healthy Living Strategy is improved health for the population, including:

- Increased life expectancy
- Reduced health inequalities

Priorities to be addressed by the strategy are:

- The health and well being of children
- Smoking
- Diet, exercise and childhood obesity
- Teenage pregnancy
- Sexual health
- Alcohol
- Mental health and well being
- Enhanced targeted approach addressing specific inequalities

Issues arising for the ROWIP are:

- 1. Looking at ways the ROWIP can help encourage people to take part in healthy activities,***
- 2. Develop a network of neighbourhood walks around the urban fringe through quality countryside that links town and country and entices people to want to explore their own back yard.***
- 3. Create a series of venues for people to identify as targets for their walking based activities.***
- 4. Work towards developing a culture of walking and cycling generally by developing a series of hand holding projects. .***
- 5. Work with schools and other interested groups in taking up walking etc as a healthy, enjoyable and easily affordable past time.***

Improving Health and Well-Being 2005-2010 (Darlington NHS Primary Care Trust)

The strategy is underpinned by the premise that 'health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity'.

The key priorities over the next 5 years are:

- Laying the foundations
- High quality and personalised care
- A healthier and a fitter population

Whilst the first two priorities are concerned with improving health services in the Borough, the third is wider and tackles the general health of residents, including:

- Concentrating more of prevention rather than cure
- Improving everyone's health and tackling inequalities in healthcare
- Helping service development in disadvantaged areas

It includes:

- Targeting people at greatest risk ensuring that they have the support and information to enable them to make healthier lifestyle choices
- Developing comprehensive proposals to reduce obesity and smoking with a particular focus on children's health

Issues arising for the ROWIP are:

Identify funding and partnership opportunities in the health sector that can help deliver the programmes identified elsewhere in this document.

Darlington Local Cultural Strategy

The Local Cultural Strategy provides a five-year framework for Darlington and is a clear commitment to match the development of cultural activities to match the aspirations of local residents.

- Strategic Aim 1: Promote and develop Darlington's Market Town image as a focal point in the life of our community and within the region. Consolidate the marketing and development of cultural activities as catalysts for increased participation growth and tourism.

- Strategic Aim 2: Remove barriers and open doors to cultural opportunities for all. Celebrate diversity; promote equality of opportunity for all and champion non-discriminatory practices in cultural provision.
- Strategic Aim 3: Develop the capacity of schools to use culture as a vehicle to raise achievement and support engagement. **Optimise land, which is used for play and recreation.** Encourage people to discover new ways of learning and realizing their full potential.

Darlington Events Strategy 2006

The events strategy was produced to provide a strategic framework for events in the Borough. The key aims of the strategy are:

- To encourage local community and rural events in the borough providing support and assistance where required;
- To deliver an events programme which enhances Darlington's tourism offer, profile and economic impact;
- To develop a co-ordinated approach to the provision of events exploiting all opportunities;
- Attract and host major events of national and regional significance;
- To increase and sustain economic growth from events; and
- To attract town twinning events in the Borough and encourage local schools and colleges to deliver events.

The ROWIP should consider:

Continuing to stage events aimed at raising the profile and use of the access network.

Darlington does not have a separate Tourism Strategy. Like the other Tees Valley Boroughs, the Borough subscribes to the Tees Valley Tourism Strategy. Relevant strategies from this are incorporated into economic development policies for Darlington.

Section 7

The Present Condition of the Network

The condition of the network was assessed by a survey of 85% of Darlington's Rights of Way, alongside ongoing monitoring of other areas of access in the Borough.

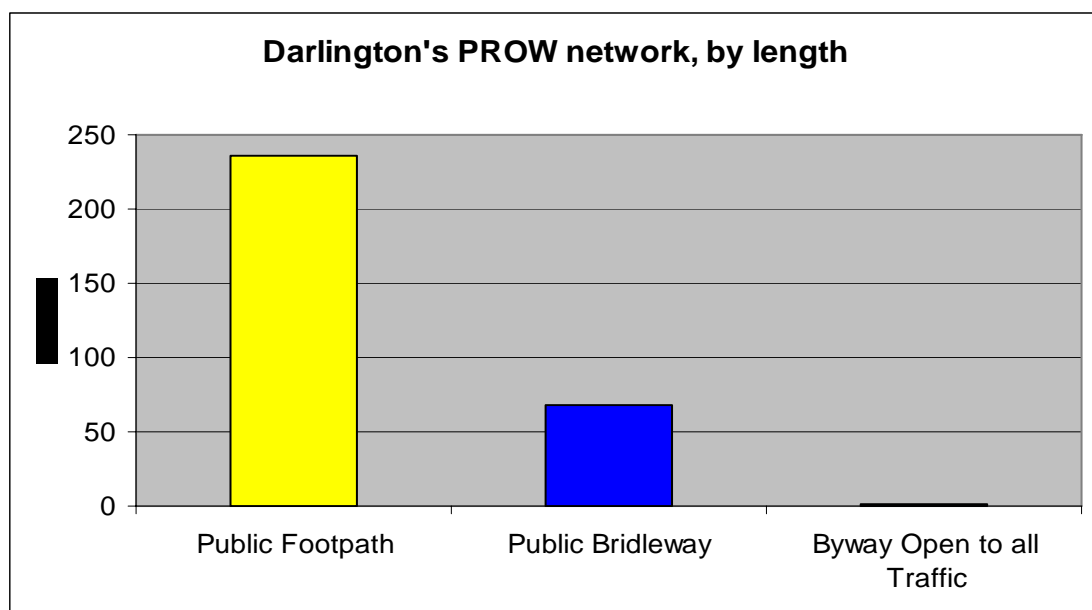
A description of the network and the landscape it occupies.

The Borough of Darlington is located in the west of the Tees Valley. The River Tees marks its southern border with North Yorkshire while to the west, can be found the rolling hills of Teesdale. To the north of the Borough are the coalfields of County Durham while down stream to the east stretches Teesside, which is a highly urbanised and industrial area.

Darlington shares some of the characteristics of all of these, but is distinguished from its neighbouring boroughs further to the east by having a relatively extensive, (80% of the Borough area) rural element (nearly 16,000 hectares). It is also fortunate in having relatively little urban sprawl. Having such a high percentage of rural land allows the Borough the potential to deliver significant amounts of countryside recreational opportunities.

Darlington's Rights of Way Network^{*M1}.

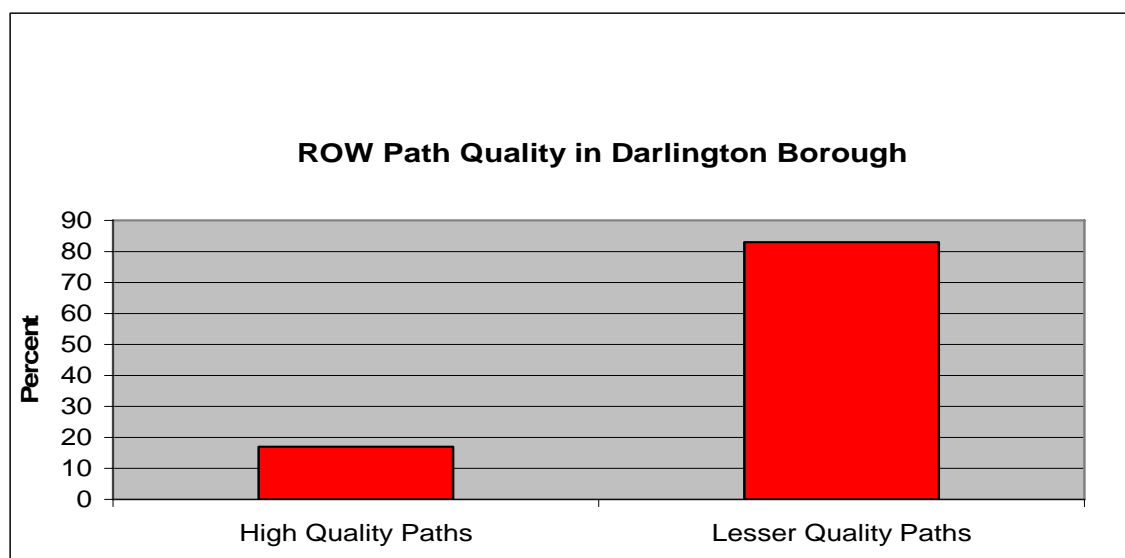
Total length of PROW within the Borough of Darlington = ROW 305 Km



*M within text refers to map number and: highlighted point in annex

The table below is derived from the condition survey. It identifies the percentages of paths that fall into various categories that together give an overview of the quality of the network, as well as the level of use. It was plain to see during the survey that these factors are closely related with quality being a major ingredient in level of use.

Classification of path usage	% of ROW by number
Very highly used “honeypot” paths (Places people are attracted to for family based green exercise where the venue has ‘an attraction’ e.g. Broken Scar or Low Coniscliffe to High Coniscliffe as well as having a degree of open access), this includes high quality high use.	6%
Highly used recreational paths (includes paths used for dog walking and exercise without the added attraction of quality countryside. Often urban or village fringe) (not urban utility routes)	26%
Lightly used paths	26%
Rarely used paths	41%
High quality, high use paths Those which are easy to follow, are inviting to the uninitiated and allow for enjoyable walking in a landscape which is moderately high to very high quality	9%
Paths used in Promoted Routes (100 separate paths)	29%



All the above do not include the paths through the Community Woodlands and Local Nature Reserves. If these are included, the figures increase with high quality paths totalling 15% of the overall combined network.

*M within text refers to map number and: highlighted point in annex

Description of the Network by Area ^{*M2}.

Darlington Borough has just over 300km of Public Rights of Way (PROW) of which approximately 30km are located within the town of Darlington itself. Many of the surrounding villages have good networks of Public Rights of Way both around the villages themselves and linking them with neighbouring settlements and the main urban area of Darlington. There are several important historic routes that run through the Borough including the old Salters' Lane, used for centuries to transport salt from Hartlepool to North Yorkshire, and the original Great North Road stagecoach route. Some of the old railway track bed that was the route of the original 1825 Stockton to Darlington Railway, the first passenger railway in the world is also, now a bridleway, as are other dismantled railways that once served Darlington's rich railway past.

The North ^{*M3} and North East ^{*M4}.

One striking characteristic of the north and north east of the Borough is how well served this area is with Public Bridleways, although they sometimes don't link up as well as they could. With a limited amount of reclassification, and some radical improvements to the surface in places, this aspect of the network has the potential to be a high quality provision. These routes pass through moderately interesting countryside, with opportunities for short and long routes, some along existing surfaced farm tracks. One bridleway traces the route along the edge of the River Skerne, while others are the more standard, sometimes difficult to use field-edge paths crossing varying qualities of stile and gate. Some of these routes have views across the Ketton Country and back over the town of Darlington to the North York Moors. Further north the network, although still providing good coverage, rapidly reverts to type, with paths hugging arable field margins and receiving little use.

The West ^{*M7}

The west of Darlington has the A1 (M) motorway as a major problem to overcome, but for the most part this is not a physical barrier as many crossing points, both under and over the road, allow access onto the ROW network. It does, however detract from the enjoyment of the network at this location, both visually and because of the noise aspect. Once away from the motorway, the network, although comprehensive for the most part, is little used; the exceptions being routes along the Tees and one or two paths associated with the villages of High Coniscliffe and Piercebridge.

The South ^{*M9} and East ^{*M10}

To the south and east of the town of Darlington, the Rights of Way network is dominated by the A66, which severs the network comprehensively. The countryside is, however, well served by Rights of Way mainly with footpaths criss-crossing the locality and linking the major communities of the area, namely Hurworth, Middleton St George and Darlington. The paths

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immediately around these communities are well used, with one or two very popular paths along the river and through woodland. Once these communities' recede into the distance, the quality rapidly fades with exceptions such as the Sockburn Bridleway^{*M9:2} and other bridleways that form one of Darlington's promoted off-road cycle routes. One major factor in the south has been the severing of many paths during the Second World War by the construction of what is now called the Durham Tees Valley Airport^{*M9:3}.

The Deeper Rural^{*M5}.

In the more remote parts of the Borough there is still a good coverage by the Rights of Way network but its use is very low indeed. The network that threads it way around the small villages of Summerhouse, Killerby and Denton^{*M5:2} are hardly ever used despite some fine views across the Vale of the Tees. A similar situation is found to the north at Great and Little Stainton and Bishopton. By way of example, when the milestones process was in full swing a survey of the Little Stainton and Great Stainton areas^{*M5:1} revealed that not a single path was even remotely open for use, with virtually every field boundary obstructed in one way or another. This demonstrated the lack of interest in this part of the network from both potential User Groups and the people who manage the land.



The “Deeper Rural” - Bridleway at Summerhouse

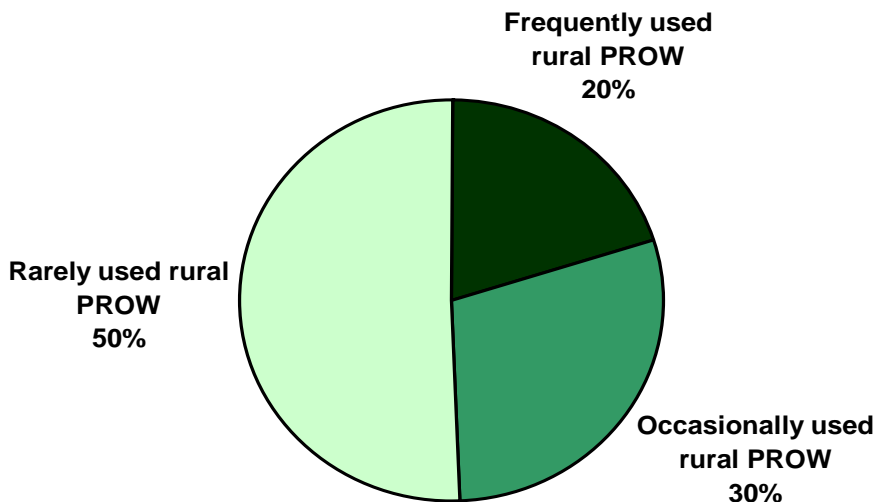
The lack of use of these outlying areas is associated with low population density, with the difficulty of use, the lack of distinct features as well as knowledge of where it is that people may want to go. Since the “Milestones” Initiative, the situation on the ground was much improved for a while, but there are still few signs of use.

Despite recognising that this part of the network is seldom used, it is important to state that sufficient resources will be allocated to ensure that these paths

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are kept open and maintained to an adequate level. There are signs from the Condition Survey that it is these routes that begin to deteriorate first if not monitored regularly. When such a low level of use takes place, some landowners fail to fulfil their own role in the maintenance of them. It is also possibly that the Local Authority, being more involved with promoting countryside access in other areas, exacerbates this.

Usage of Rural PROW in Darlington Borough.



The Council will continue to ensure that all Rights of Way in the borough receive adequate attention in order to maintain the 'open and available status' at a very high level.

The Urban Area.

The urban Rights of Way network is quite comprehensive, with over 60 paths providing some useful links for utilitarian as well as for leisure activities. These are generally well used, and for the most part, the desire for their retention far outweighs the occasional complaint about anti-social behaviour. There are however, a significant number of non-definitive routes that may have obtained public rights through 20 years of continuous use, which are now coming under

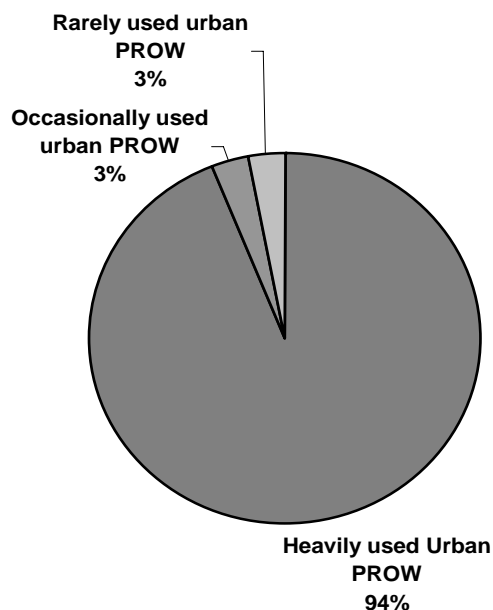
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threat of closure. **It is a duty of the Council to ensure that a fair and open process is conducted, so that all interested parties can be heard prior to any action being taken under the new Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act, 2005**

The urban network is very important for people moving around the town in a sustainable way. There is the very important Darlington initiative; “Local Motion”, which will operate until 2009, aiming to improve the use of sustainable transport, using both hard and soft initiatives. Some of these positively affect the use of green space around the town for exercise as well as for reasons of transport. There have been many significant developments in Darlington recently, where urban green corridors have been improved to accommodate walkers and cyclists alike. This is enabling people to move more easily around the town, as well as to access the urban fringe and other semi - natural areas. This is contributing a great deal to improving people’s confidence and willingness to venture away from the more traditional paved routes or their reliance on private transport.

The Tees valley Green Infrastructure Plan identifies a number of key strategic green corridors extending through the urban area of Darlington and out into the countryside beyond. It is important for this plan that the potential these have for improvements are given a high priority. They are the River Skerne and River Tees Corridors, the route of the Denes and Cocker Beck as well as Black Path and west out to West Park and north up to Faverdale Business Park as well as east along the Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor and beyond towards Stockton between the A66 and the A67.

Usage of Urban PROW in Darlington Borough



*M within text refers to map number and: highlighted point in annex

The Urban Fringe.

As already mentioned, the urban fringe of Darlington has a number of factors that limit access to the wider countryside. The predominant one being the crossing of the A66, not forgetting the problem it and the A1 (M) pose as psychological barriers to quiet enjoyment. This only leaves the northern part of the town as having countryside that can provide venues for quiet enjoyment, without the need to travel beyond the urban rural fringe to the deeper countryside, where the problems of neglect and inappropriate land management also prevent use by the majority.

Unfortunately, although the north of Darlington has probably the best countryside for quiet recreation, it is hidden, to some extent, by the combination of a private golf course and some very low quality monocultivated landscape, on the edge of the residential areas. Because of these combined factors, this area stands out as having a high priority for a more radical level of treatment, i.e., a change in land use, which enables the promotion of the concept of access to quality countryside.

The Council, together with its partners, will investigate the promotion of the area between Darlington and the Community Woodland at Skerningham^{*M3:1} as a major gateway site with additional changes in land management practices to accommodate additional quality countryside access in this area.

Elsewhere on the fringe, the network is hemmed in by road corridors, and suffers from urban fringe dereliction where it is threaded between elements of horse culture, areas subject to unlawful activities (off road motor cycling, fly – tipping) and the more formal areas of amenity grassland and urban fringe nature reserves.



**Patches Lane.
Fly tipping**

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Section 8

Current Use and Demand - the Rights of Way Network.

To recap, several methods have been used to research use of and demand for the access network in Darlington, as follows:

- Review of secondary research on demand for countryside access and activities
- Questionnaire survey distributed to Darlington Borough Council's Citizen's Panel
- A questionnaire survey distributed to User Groups in the Borough
- A questionnaire survey distributed to landowners in the Borough
- A face to face interview survey with people at 10 entry points to the access network in the Borough
- A programme of Focus Groups with user and non - User Groups

The results of this research are summarised in this section of the Plan and conclusions are drawn to inform the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Details of the research are included in the Appendix to this Plan or in accompanying documents as described.

Secondary Research

In 2001, the Countryside Agency commissioned research to understand existing use of Rights of Way and what might encourage increased use in the future. The results of the study (undertaken by Entec, with BRMB), which consisted of face to face interviews with a representative sample of the English public, has been used to inform Rights of Way Improvement Planning.

Although there is variation in levels and in the nature of participation around the country, caused by a variety of factors, primary research undertaken by individual authorities since 2001 has shown that the study findings give a reliable understanding of demand for countryside access. The principal findings are more or less in line with the findings in Darlington.

What people in Darlington said they used.

The Darlington Citizen's Panel survey identified that nearly half (45%) of the population say that they use the network either never or very occasionally. A further 20% say they use the network approximately once per month. This leaves just 35% who say they use the network weekly but this has to be seen in the context of the conditions survey which identified the proportion of the network that was being used as very low, mostly urban utility routes or just a few select paths. So it needs to be said that of these 35% 'regular users',

many visit just a few popular paths or areas of open space, often for quite long periods. A significant proportion of these are people walking their dogs.

This implies that the percentage of the population using the Darlington countryside as a place for quality walking, cycling or riding, where the activity provides the measures of quality discussed earlier, can be shown to be very low; significantly less than 5% of the population. The choice that this percentage has for using the Darlington countryside in order to fulfil this need is also very limited to just a few paths (Only 9km of path are judged to be of a very high quality and have a high level of usage, as reported in the Condition Survey).

As identified in the Condition Survey, these are most likely to be the river walks along the Tees, the Skerne, and one or two paths close to the larger villages. The creation of the new facility known as Skerningham Community Woodland, in the north of Darlington, has added one extra area of quality, and by way of proving the point, without even significant promotion or publicity, is already becoming quite popular.

The network then is fulfilling a set of more limited needs, other than providing a quality countryside experience, such as:-

1. An opportunity for exercise, although this on its own is as easily achieved in the urban area as outside it.
2. An opportunity for young people to get away from adult supervision; something that we find is more and more popular, as semi-natural green space is included in Council's service provision.
3. It is used for dog walking, often undertaken in as convenient way as possible, using the green space that is nearest to people's homes. This is sometimes a Right of Way but it may also be an amenity green space or other area of public open space.
4. As a place for a small number of dedicated walkers who are committed to green exercise to enjoy the countryside wherever or whatever it offers in terms of quality.

In contrast the surveys revealed, mainly through the Focus Groups, that the Darlington Local Nature Reserves, created in the last 7 years are becoming increasingly popular because of their ability to deliver a wide selection of the quality aspects of countryside recreation. For example, these are able to provide short reasonably safe walks through a biodiverse and varied landscape, close to where people live, in distinct contrast with much of the Rights of Way network.

People in the Focus Groups repeatedly said that they looked for opportunities for relaxation and enjoyment of the countryside. They also mentioned, as high in importance, feeling safe, improving personal fitness, educational value for their children and awareness of where they could go, as being the major

factors. These factors influenced their perception of outdoor activities as a realistic choice available to them.

The fact that such activities were free also featured as an influence on decision-making, as well as interesting responses from, for example, parents of young children who valued the quality time it allowed them to have with their children.

These opinions tended to be affected by issues of quality, with areas of quality countryside being singled out more often by the people looking for relaxation, than those looking simply for exercise. Again, the members of the parents with young children group were keen to point out how important specific features at sites were in influencing their keenness to explore them.

This contrasts with the wider countryside, with people who use this part of the network being less concerned with features such as woodland, and more concerned with factors associated with ease of passage. When looking at the responses of Special Interest Groups, other issues come to the fore.

Not surprisingly, nearly 60% of people with a disability or long-term illness were conscious of the need for good surfaces on paths as well as key facilities being suitable for wheel chairs and pushchairs.

From the extensive consultation process, involving user groups, focus groups, and landowners, people repeatedly asked that Countryside Service provide the facilities listed on the following page.

What People Want from the Rights of Way Network

- 1 More riverside walks
- 2 Areas to walk/ride in which feel safe
- 3 Areas which are relaxing to walk/ride in
- 4 Walks with opportunities for improving fitness
- 5 Walks with educational value
- 6 Walks and rides in good quality landscapes
- 7 Walks with good surfaces for wheelchairs and push chairs
- 8 Safe crossings where ROW cross busy roads
- 9 Walks leading to attractions, such as tea rooms
- 10 More printed and on-line information about walking/riding opportunities
- 11 Clear signposting and waymarking
- 12 Path furniture which is easy to use
- 13 Paths free from litter and fly-tipping
- 14 Paths free from dog mess
- 15 More off-road cycle routes
- 16 More walks from villages and the urban fringe
- 17 Education for people about their rights and responsibilities whilst in the countryside
- 18 More facilities, such as toilets and car parking.

Reasons for low usage in the wider countryside are based on the findings from Use and Demand Survey and Focus Group research.

While providing the only means very often for people to explore the wider countryside it has to be accepted that much of the network is seldom used. Identifying which paths these are and why they are unpopular is an important part of compiling a ROWIP. Some of these reasons can be described thus:

Low Level of Use of the Rights of Way Network.

- a) **Low levels of walking, cycling, riding within the rural communities.** Some of the outlying small villages exhibit signs of a very low level of use of the PROW network. People who choose to live in these locations also appear to avoid using the network. In the larger villages this is less of a factor, with signs that, like the urban area, a small number of paths are used a great deal whilst the majority are lightly or seldom used.
- b) **Poorly maintained network with resources concentrating on the more frequently used paths.** This to some extent is inevitable, but with new Cross Compliance legislation, landowners should in future take on more of a role as custodians of the network, without so much need for costly and time-consuming enforcement from the Local Authority. Also, with a more strategic approach to managing the network and with new resources through the Second Local Transport Plan, the best opportunities for improving the network can be exploited.
- c) **Low level of landscape interest.** Much of Darlington is surrounded by intensively farmed land, which is often of little interest to the walking public. This is where a more joined up approach to land management could be beneficial. The use of agri-environmental schemes, aimed at improving both quality and accessibility of the countryside, could deliver very positive results in this respect. This, combined with other biodiversity schemes, could be very effective in providing improved quality access.
- d) **Dangerous road crossings on the urban fringe.** (See above under local use.)



Footpath crossing the A66 By Pass, near Sadberge

- e) **Lack of Car parking and toilets.** Often mentioned by our Focus Groups, as a reason for not accessing the network
- f) **Unsure of where to go.** Mentioned by many people as a factor, but often phrased in a way that suggested that people were not able to identify what was a Public Right of Way. Simply providing a sign post and a stile was not sufficient to satisfy many people's concern over whether they were allowed to go onto an area of land.



Public Footpath at Low Dinsdale.

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- g) **Not feeling safe.** Similar to the above; the main issues over safety were issues relating to feeling vulnerable to being told off, as well as general concerns over cattle and stock. There were perceived fears of personal injury and being too far from the availability of help.
- h) **No one to go with.** Creating a higher level of interest has important knock on effects with people finding an increase in the opportunities for a walk of a social nature.
- i) **Nothing to do when you get there,** especially relevant for children and young people.

In summary: the wider countryside network receives only a tiny proportion of the usage of the network as a whole, for all of the above reasons in varying proportions, depending on the location.

Areas Where Very High Usage Occurs.

The area according to the Condition Survey which receives by far and away, the highest levels of use are the popular routes along the river corridors, especially the River Tees, but to some extent, the River Skerne, too. The evidence for this has been gleaned mainly from the Condition Survey, but is also based on continued observation of these well-used paths over many years.

The high usage rates of these paths illustrate how the hierarchy of factors affecting people's willingness to access the countryside combine to put these paths at the top of the popularity list. In particular, the river route at Low Coniscliffe^{*M8:1} has most of these favourable factors. It is well entrenched in local knowledge as a place that people can lawfully walk, it is a wide and easy path to negotiate, it is highly scenic (being both high in biodiversity levels as well as being an interesting landscape) where the path is allowed to meander through an area of more generally accessible riverside woodland.

Other Popular Areas of the Network and Associated Countryside Access.

There are other areas of land, such as the riverside path from Blackwell to Broken Scar^{*M8:3}, which are also popular for similar reasons to the Coniscliffe path. Where this differs, however, is that there is often stock in the field and there is little woodland along most of the middle section of the path. This is counterbalanced by the ease of access that this section provides to the people of Darlington. It is close to the town and has a large car park at one end, with a play area, as well as an interesting feature area around the river Tees itself.

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This illustrates that it not necessarily the case that all of the above mentioned features need to be present in order to attract people to a place. However, it does show that a range of elements is necessary to overcome people's antipathy to accessing the countryside.

Paths Next to Villages.

Other popular areas of the network include paths around some of the villages, especially for example, some of the Rights of Way next to Middleton St. George. These paths have been used for a long time, and serve to link parts of the village, as well as extend out from the water park^{*M10:3}.

In this sense these ROW form the fabric of the village in the same way that some of Darlington's urban Rights of Way link up the town. Examples of these are Cemetery Lane^{*M6:3}, the soon to be developed Stockton to Darlington Track Bed^{*M6:7} and the Skerne Restoration path^{*M6:4}.

These paths cannot be considered as attracting people into the countryside, although, in some respects, they do perform the same function. In this sense they are an example of how introducing green routes to a townscape and linking town and country with sustainable routes of this description, can be a desirable way forward. It is likely to be a popular and well-supported approach as a part of future urban design, especially through the green infrastructure process.

Skerningham Community Woodland^{*M3:2}

Also in the same vein, and steadily becoming popular too, is the new Community Woodland at Skerningham. This was mentioned earlier in the report as a good example of how the Local Authority can work with other organisations to bring about big improvements in the countryside, creating high quality access as well as enhanced landscapes and biodiversity. In other words, the countryside is not a fixed item, but can be made much more desirable for informal recreation over time.

Skerningham Community Woodland, despite having had minimal publicity, is beginning the process of becoming a part of the cultural landscape of Darlington, as well as being a desirable physical feature, loved by a few at present, but soon to be a very popular location. Its endearing features can be listed.

1. It is an area of Open Access.
2. The paths that run through it provide a clear sense of direction, but not by simply providing a single route through; once in Skerningham, people can wander through the woodlands following a whole selection of different paths.
3. It is a large expanse of Open Access land (Nearly 100 acres in total)
4. People have a sense of confidence in knowing that they are allowed to be there.

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5. This woodland is an area important for landscape and biodiversity reasons.

As a recently planted woodland, close to two older areas of woodland, and being near to the banks of the Skerne, this new area of Open Access land is fundamentally attractive, giving people a sense of tranquillity. This recently created area of public open space is only a ten-minute walk from housing on Darlington's northern fringe!



*Permissive and
Definitive Access
at Skerningham*

How good and accessible the countryside is, clearly affects the way people use it. The following section looks at this usage in more detail, in an attempt to assess how best to match need with provision, and so devise an action plan.

In its present form, Darlington's ROW network offers facilities to a variety of User Groups. These can be categorised as following:

1. The ROW network is predominantly a network of routes for **recreational pursuits** for local people. The groups to whom the network appeals varies from location to location.
2. A very small minority of committed users use the ROW network in the **deeper countryside**. This amounts to about one or two percent of the public. This is proven by evidence on the ground, as well as information gleaned from the Focus Groups.
3. There are those who use **one small part of the network**, regardless of its quality, for frequently repeated activities, such as dog walking.
4. There are those people who visit the **10 km of high quality countryside** walks along the rivers Tees and the Skerne. Typically, these people drive to the start of the walk, or in the case of a tiny minority, walk, as they might be lucky enough to live next to this attractive facility.

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5. According to feedback from the Telephone Survey, many people **don't see the Darlington's countryside as a place for recreation**. Many people said that if they were going to go to the trouble of going for a walk, then they would prefer to make more effort and travel to what they felt to be a 'genuine countryside location'.
6. There is a significant minority of local users who use a mixture of public open space and urban fringe Rights of Way. **This can be for green exercise reasons, or again for reasons of exercising dogs**.
7. There are an increasing number of people using urban and urban fringe **nature reserves**. There is a body of evidence that suggests these people are often discovering, for the first time, the possibilities of the countryside. These are people who really value an opportunity to introduce their children, or their friends, to something more natural, but who would shy away from the Rights of Way network for many of the reasons mentioned earlier in this document.
8. Darlington's Public Rights of Way network, within the urban area, links well with other non-definitive routes, allowing for a significant contribution to walking and cycling levels around the town for **transport purposes**. Twenty five percent of all trips undertaken by Darlington residents (living in the urban area) are on foot, and a further 1% are by bike and, whilst only a small amount of these are on Public Rights of Way, it is felt that by maintaining and improving the Public Rights of Way network this will help this figure to grow.
9. In its present form, the Darlington ROW network also provides some degree of infrastructure that serves as a venue for **tourism**, both for day visits and for longer stays. This is predominantly in the villages, away from the main Darlington area, and is limited in scope, being unable to compete with the far more impressive countryside within easy reach of the Borough. In terms of opportunities for change, the Council is looking to improving some of these Darlington paths, which are close to other rural diversification projects, such as farm tourism initiatives, existing small-scale attractions and improving self-guided routes close to the main urban area.
10. The current ROW network also provides for a small amount of **long distance walking**, cycling and horse riding. The most obvious of these is the Teesdale Way, whilst other routes include four promoted off - road mountain bike circular rides, and a number of circular walks promoted by the Ramblers Association. In the case of the latter however, these suffer from a profound lack of maintenance on some of the most attractive footpath and bridleways, which if improved could make the walks and rides much more popular. Concentrating on improving the wider ROW network on these targeted routes would be the most effective use of resources, although there is a danger of allowing maintenance on the rest of the network to fall by the wayside. The action plan therefore ensures that sufficient staff time

and resources are retained in order to maintain the whole network to a standard necessary for continuing access.

11. The amount of use of the Darlington ROW network for **off-road cycling** is very small, despite the production of promotional leaflet some 8 years ago. This leaflet is still used by a set of committed enthusiasts and will continue to be available. However, there is unlikely to be a big increase in the popularity of off road cycling in the area unless significant improvements in the surfaces of the longer distance, outlying path network are achieved. In other words, cycling these routes can be rather hard work and is off putting for the average cyclist.
12. On the other hand, providing an increasing number of links, to give people **cycle access to the wider countryside**, has been boosted recently, with the introduction of several kilometres of new urban, green routes, capitalizing on Darlington's railway heritage. The routes include the section of old rail track bed out to West Park ^{*M6:5}, and beyond, the section leading up to this along the Black Path ^{*M6:6}. In addition, there is the soon to be completed section along the former Stockton – Darlington Railway track bed, and over the A66 to Middleton St George, passing the new community woodland at South Burdon ^{*M10:4}. This new set of facilities is beginning to address the issue of over reliance on car transport as the means to access the countryside from the town centre. Cycling out of Darlington, from its centre takes only 10 minutes along one of these green routes, separated from roads.
13. Similarly, the level of use of the ROW network for **equestrian use** is generally low, but in one or two very specific areas, the opposite is true and the level is high. Making greater use of Rights of Way for equestrian use, either by promoting the network, or through improving links, is an important challenge to be addressed in the future.
14. There is a growing awareness that the countryside and the natural world is a facility that all people should have the right to enjoy. There are increasing numbers of people with **impaired mobility and sensory difficulties** using Darlington Borough Council's local nature reserves. Some of these people use the few Rights of Way which are suitable for wheelchairs, and other urban fringe paths from which difficult to use stiles and gates have been replaced with less obstructive furniture. This programme will continue, but successes to date, such as the development of the former Barnard Castle railway track bed, together with its links with West Park, show how important these developments can be for user groups.
15. The Council's work with the **visually impaired** also brings to the fore the importance of providing areas for recreation away from the distractions of urban noise. Again, Skerningham Community Woodland is just such a facility and could become increasingly important as a venue for this particular User Group.

16. There has been a significant amount of research nationally that shows how **ethnic minority groups** are seriously disadvantaged when it comes to issues of access to the countryside and hence are probably very low users of the Darlington countryside, preferring to stick to the urban parks. The findings highlight how ethnic minorities have little knowledge of the British countryside. It identifies how they find the countryside threatening and consequently, seldom venture beyond the built environment. In order to address this, it is intended to devise an events programme that focuses on the often small but distinct ethnic groups that reside in the Darlington area and who are quite likely, unaware of the opportunities that exist for exploring the green environment (Other than the formal parks) close to where they live.

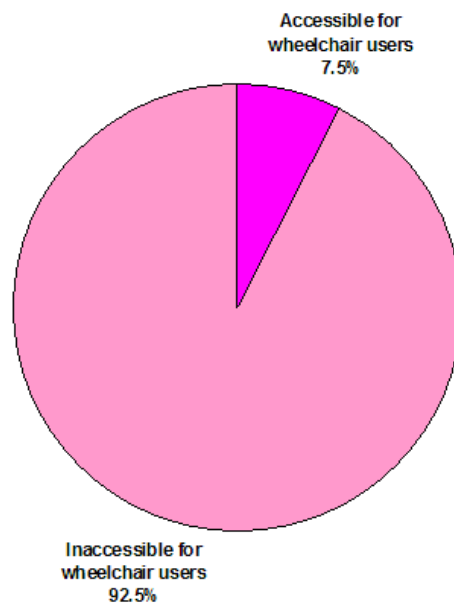
Paths Fully Accessible for Wheelchair Users

Total length of paths that are wheelchair-friendly:

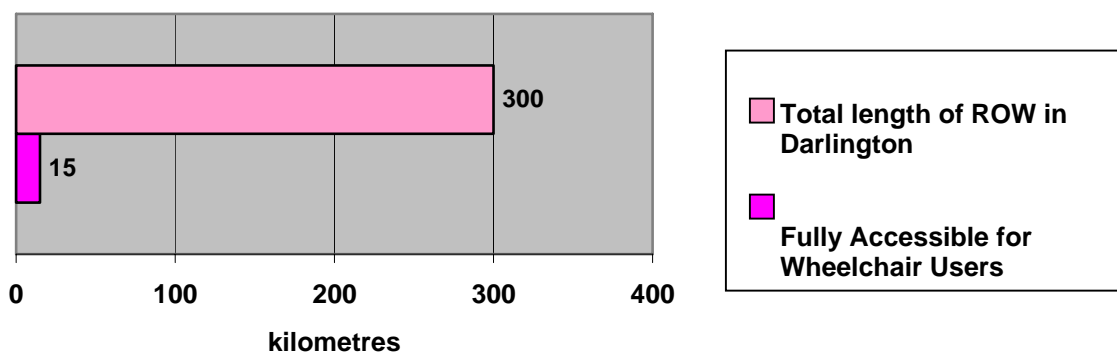
12.5 km (non definitive) In nature reserves

5 km (definitive) Rights of Way.

Wheelchair access to PROW in Darlington Borough



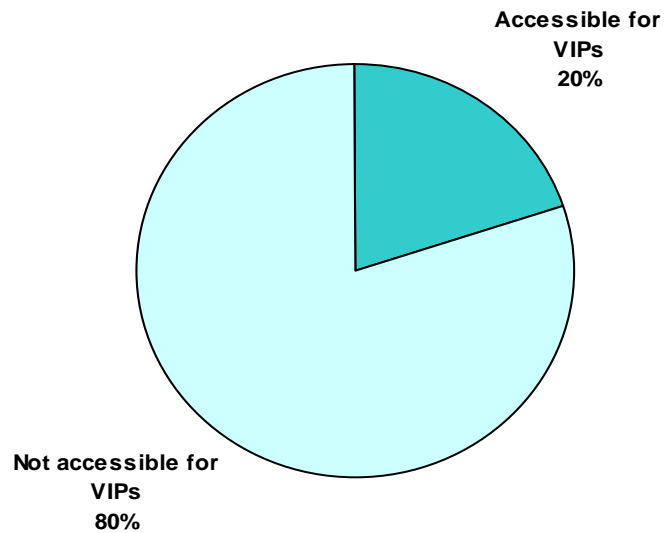
Total Length of PROW Fully Accessible to Wheelchair Users



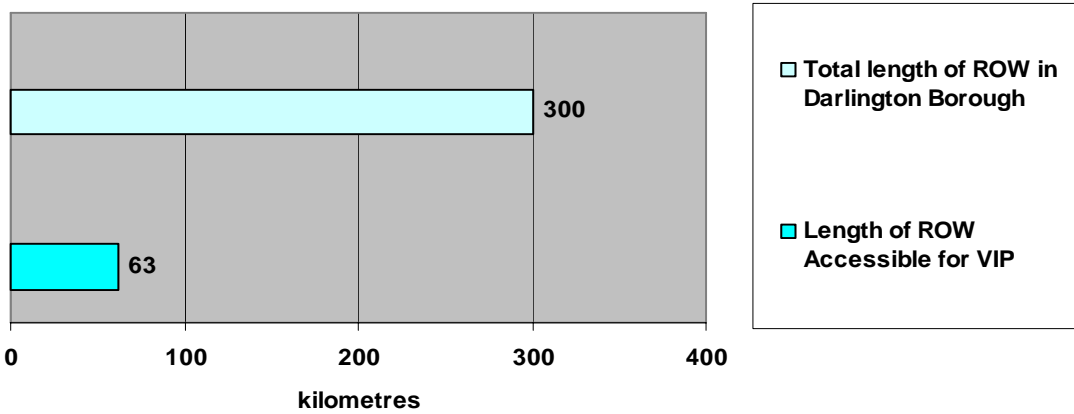
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Paths with excellent access for Visually impaired people In Darlington Borough

PROW access for VIP in Darlington Borough

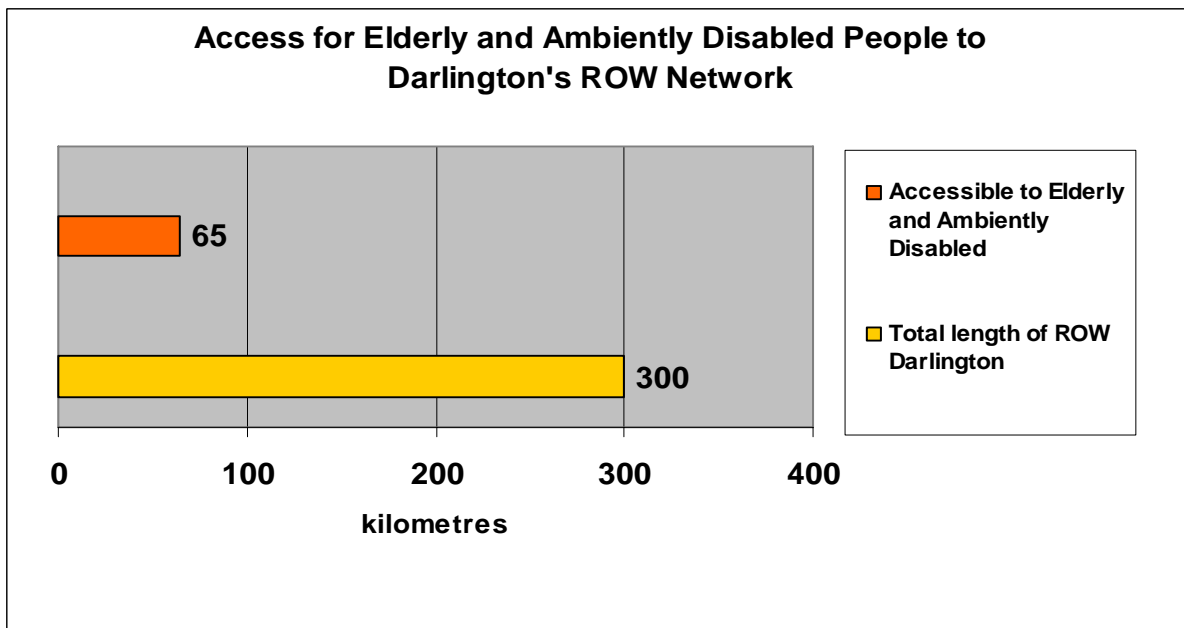
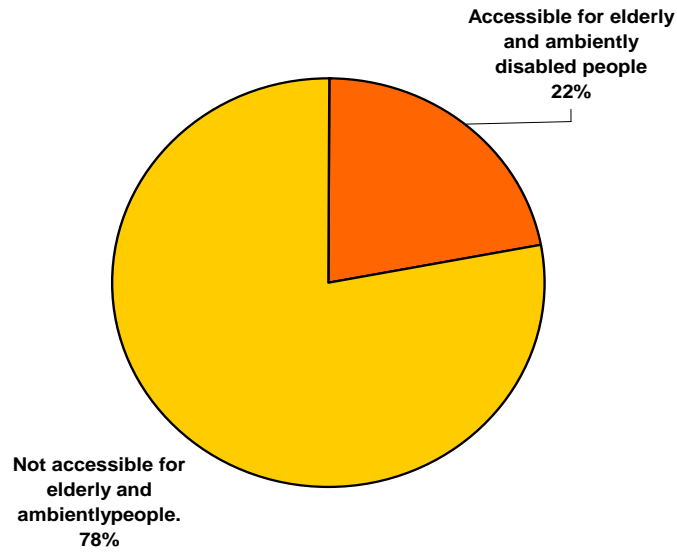


**Access, in Kilometres, for Visually Impaired People
Darlington's ROW Network**



*M within text refers to map number and: highlighted point in annex

**Access to PROW for Elderly and Ambient Disabled.
Darlington Borough**



*M within text refers to map number and: highlighted point in annex

Section 9

Opportunities for Improvements to the Rights of Way Network in Particular and Countryside Access in General.

There is nowhere in the country where there are no opportunities to create some element of access to quality countryside, if the commitment to that principle was felt to be desirable, and a strategy adopted for its implementation. In Darlington's case, the argument for this to be prioritised is very strong indeed. There is much evidence to suggest that this would have far reaching benefits for a wide cross section of the population.

Some of the effects of committing an area like Darlington to a programme where such a concept is championed are likely to be,

1. A big increase in fitness levels
2. A considerable drop in car leisure miles and increases in walking & cycling.
3. A greater sense of local identity and distinctiveness.
4. A greater sense of pride in the area.
5. An increase in young people's involvement in healthy outdoor activities.
6. A positive impact on mental health

On the economic side, having a much better, greener hinterland with access to quality countryside:

1. Increases property values.
2. Encourages prestige businesses to locate in the area.
3. Keeps people employed in the professions, especially the young, living in the town and the surrounding area.

The opportunities for physical improvements are real and within our grasp, whilst the scarcity of the main ingredient of quality countryside access should not be seen as off putting, but rather a temporary loss waiting to be restored.

The opportunities are identified in the Action Plan, and the argument that supports their implementation have been made earlier in this document. Nevertheless, it is useful to strengthen the case by tying the demonstrated needs, as voiced through the Focus Groups; the Citizens' Panel findings with the situation found on the ground, and show how the Action Plan can be prioritised in a logical manner.

Opportunities for better countryside access within the road corridors of the A66 and A1(M).

The opportunities for improved access inside the restrictive road network, which partly encircles the town to the west, south and east, can be identified in pockets and segments both inside the town and around the urban fringe.

Possibilities are offered by land west of West Park^{*M6:2} and inside the A1 (M) corridor. Additionally, land to the west and north of the Faverdale Industrial site^{*M6:8}, and just south of Haughton Village offer some small opportunities. Some narrow strips of land to the south of the town, next to Maidendale Local Nature Reserve^{*M9:7} could also provide some benefits, if integrated into the green infrastructure of future development. Finally, further west near Geneva Woods Local Nature Reserve^{*M9:6} and Skerne Park residential area, there are some areas of undeveloped land. Much of the land here has, or one day will have, development potential and the design of the green infrastructure that will accompany the applications needs to be done in such a way that fits in with the needs of countryside access. Some of the details of this could be outlined in the following way:

The Urban Area

Identifying ways of continuing the process, given great momentum by the Local Motion initiative and aspects of the Local Transport Plan, is a priority in the ROWIP. The interconnectedness of the urban area, together with the Rights of Way network are seen as crucial elements in delivering quality countryside access. ⁴By way of example, the work currently being carried out to continue the access alongside the River Skerne as far as Haughton Road is a good example, whilst the route past West Park and out to Archdeacon Newton is another. ⁵A further example is the route, scheduled to be completed by 2008, over the A66 to Middleton St. George. (Part of Sustrans, National Cycle Route 14) Additionally, a new route south to Hurworth would also be important in this process of creating sustainable transport routes, connecting the urban area with the wider countryside and the urban/rural fringe as would be a ⁶continuation of the bridleway westwards towards Staindrop Road and on towards Piercebridge. (Also, a regional Sustrans cycle route, No. 53 has been identified potentially running from Blackwell through to the town centre)

Some of the areas in the centre of Darlington are doubly deprived when it comes to access to the countryside, being both geographically distant from the countryside as well as economically (Not to mention culturally) disadvantaged. ⁷There are currently a number of green corridors identified for potential improvement that will allow greater walking and cycle access to the urban fringe and beyond so linking these communities with the countryside. In order to address this issue, it is also important to identify ways that public transport can be integrated in order to fit in with the opportunities created for the use of the countryside access provision. ⁸This can be done by providing bus information on publicity, by identifying routes that coincide with existing bus routes and linking guided walks with bus services. It is also important to put extra effort into crossing cultural and disability divides through a combination of publicity material and the careful targeting of events such as guided walks and our comprehensive programme of events in local nature reserves.

⁹The Council will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to explore how walking in the urban area as well as links to the countryside can be improved through better design in new developments and new initiatives for the creation of green multi user routes.

The Council will continue to explore new ways of helping improve the opportunities for the most physically and culturally disadvantaged in respect of access to the countryside.

West of West Park

¹⁰There remains some undeveloped land to the west of West Park, which forms a green corridor between the West Park estate and the A1(M). Some of this could be integrated into plan for green infrastructure, incorporating a mixture of farming, woodland and other new developments, with elements of quality countryside access throughout.

Across the A68 (West Auckland Road) the principles that have already been tested at Faverdale Industrial Park^{*M6:8}, of providing green infrastructure around new development, are likely to be advanced further if this area is to be developed in the future. Improved countryside access would need to be planned at an early stage; although, given the higher population levels of High Grange and Faverdale just to the south, a higher level of quality access would be anticipated, than occurred at the Industrial Park.

Finally, for this area of Darlington, a new green corridor has been created which links Brinkburn Local Nature Reserve^{*M6:6} with the countryside to the north including the Faverdale Whin. This green corridor has no access within it at present, but with the potential for development adjacent to it, the creation of such a corridor could be achieved.

The Council will investigate the feasibility of creating this northern green corridor including an access route if future development of land adjacent to the existing corridor is pursued.

North-East Darlington.

Just to the north and east of Haughton Village steps are already being made, with the extension of the Skerne Cycle Route,¹¹ to extend quality countryside access along the River Skerne. There is a small area of semi - natural green space next to the river, which provides people with some pleasant walking. The cycle route will extend this usage to more of the public, as well as for cyclists. It also provides a green access route that allows people to gain entrance to Barmpton Lane, which in turn provides access to the east side of Skerningham Community Woodland. This green route does have the long term potential for improvement to increase further accessibility to this woodland.

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On the opposite bank of the river, at Great Burdon, is a large area of undeveloped farmland positioned between two major trunk roads^{*M4:1}. Although not in the Local Development Plan, this could be land, which may in the near future, be earmarked for development. However, a significant part of this is flood plain, and there could be considerable constraints on the scale of development. This area has a great potential for major biodiversity enhancement, as well as improved access to quality countryside. Currently, it has a bridleway passing through it, although at present it is obstructed and awaiting a more suitable route to be created. At present, the ROW can only be traversed on foot because of two stiles and a footbridge as the only means to negotiate three of the field boundaries.

The Council will continue to explore a wide range of opportunities to make the area of land to the north and east of Darlington, a key area for providing improved facilities for access to quality countryside, especially with reference to the existing facility at Skerningham. (See below)

Eastern Darlington.

The main Public Right of Way east of Darlington is the bridleway that runs along the old Stockton to Darlington railway track bed.¹² The old track bed is soon to be improved by building an essential bridge^{*M10:7} to cross the potentially dangerous three-lane section of the A66. Until now, this has been an almost impenetrable barrier, but the new bridge will change this and provide the whole of east Darlington with the potential for access to a large new area of Community Woodland. This is the 100-hectare South Burdon Community Woodland^{*M10:4}, purchased and planted by the Forestry Commission, in partnership with the Tees Forest between 2002 and 2006. Beyond this impressive new facility for countryside access, this green route extends to the village of Middleton St George, with a good saturation of Public Rights of Way linked to the village, as well as to the Whinnies Local Nature Reserve.^{*M10:2}

Southern Darlington.

The A66 hugs the southern perimeter of the town, although there is a narrow green area between the railway and the road, which provides some countryside access. At present this is sometimes used for unlawful motorcycling, but there is some pedestrian traffic, particularly at weekends and on summer evenings. The area is typical of the urban fringe, with no history of management for green recreation, with the exception of the two Local Nature Reserves at Brankin Moor (A converted old allotment site)^{*M9:5}, and at Geneva Woods^{*M9:6}, where some old railway sidings were planted up as a part of a rail side revival scheme. This is a reasonably sized, Local Nature Reserve, which is linked to the Rights of Way network, within this tight corner of the urban fringe. Other than this, the countryside is again cut off

from the residents of the town by the A66, and the suggestion in the ROWIP is to look for opportunities to construct one or more bridges to access the wider countryside from this part of Darlington.

The Council will continue to investigate the feasibility of providing additional safe crossing points to access the countryside beyond the A66 towards the villages of Hurworth and Hurworth Place.

South West Darlington.

Access to the countryside from this part of Darlington, like so much of the town, is restricted by the road network (The A66) as well as by intensive farming, a major golf course and inadequacies in the network. There is no Right of Way adjacent to the river, so the Teesdale Way has to leave the river for several kilometres at this point^{*M8:4}.

The Council will look for opportunities to re-route the Teesdale Way along the bank of the River Tees, south of Blackwell towards Hurworth Place.

Further round, are located the most popular routes in Darlington; those which follow the River Tees. The Teesdale Way runs along the riverbank in this part of Darlington, including the area directly south of the town. The most popular countryside site in the Borough, Broken Scar Picnic Site^{*M8:2} and play area, is located here. On a summer's day, this attracts hundreds of people. Given its popularity, there is still much that can be done to improve it.

1. For example, the route that continues from Broken Scar to Blackwell is difficult to walk for the elderly, as the surface is very rough in places.
2. The river is extremely attractive, but animals quite heavily graze the banks of the river. The banks themselves, very popular for fishing.

Farming and fishing can cause conflict with other members of the public using this site. Many people feel vulnerable and unsafe when confronted by stock, whilst people fishing are often resentful about disturbance from other users. A change in management of the land, by working with the tenant farmer, could help to reduce some of this friction by creating with designated areas for fishing, improving bank side vegetation and providing more clearly marked walking routes and resting places.

¹³The Council will investigate the feasibility of creating improvement to the Right of Way between Blackwell and Broken Scar^{*M8:3} as a high use path, suitable for all abilities, and the river bank as an area better suited for general countryside recreation.

Further west is Darlington's most popular Right of Way in a more traditional countryside setting. Again, a part of the Teesdale Way^{*M8:1}, this is the public footpath that follows the river upstream in a westerly direction, providing a quality walk in every sense. It is extremely biodiverse, with mature river edge woodland and a rich under storey. In addition, it has a selection of attractions on route, including areas of gravel banks and trees which add variety, a well used and clearly marked path with an area for car parking, as well as the possibility of doing a circular walk.

The Council will investigate the possibility of upgrading the footpath along the river at this point to a bridleway which will bring it in line with other parts of the Teesdale Way as well as allow for cycling and equestrian use.

Western Darlington

Western Darlington is dominated by the A1(M) motorway, but apart from the noise from the road, there are quite a number of bridges and underpasses that allow access to the wider countryside. However, the countryside here, and the Rights of Way network are not particularly encouraging for countryside access. The Condition Survey illustrates this, with generally a low level of usage recorded for these areas.

There are exceptions: the circular walk that travels up from the Baydale Beck public house to the Staindrop Road and back to Baydale^{*M7:3}, and the route along the old Barnard Castle track bed^{*M7:4} towards Archdeacon Newton. These are popular with dog walkers, but are not particularly exciting for family groups, despite the social makeup of this side of town. It is likely that many of the inhabitants of this area either travel elsewhere, or use the river walks mentioned above.

¹⁴A new possibility for encouraging greater use is the recent creation of new Community Woodland at Merrybent^{*M7:2}. There is a possibility for connecting a small piece of private land with the bridleway and the new woodland. This would also give people living in the new estate a green route into the main body of the town, to Hummersknott School and the shops at Mowden. This is a top priority for the Action Plan as it is relatively achievable as well as hitting many of the priorities in the ROWIP.

The Council will investigate opportunities to create a new green route linking the new housing estate at the old Co-Op site with the existing green route at Mowden, via the Broken Scar water treatment works.

Further north, but still on the western fringe of the town, we enter the Cocker Beck corridor next to Staindrop road. This area has been designated as a future Local Nature Reserve and has a variety of works scheduled to improve its viability as quality countryside. Extending this principle further out, as well

as improving the access that could go with it, could be achieved in a variety of ways. ¹⁵One way already explored, is to extend the route along the old railway track bed outwards, to link up with the Staindrop Road and possibly further on towards Teesdale where a partnership approach with Sustrans and Teesdale District Council may release some national funding. This possibility is at the initial discussion stage, but we are hopeful that this could form a vital link in the process of improving access for all to this part of the urban fringe.

The Council will continue to investigate the feasibility of extending public access further out along the old Barnard Castle railway track bed.

Northern Darlington,

The opportunities north of the northern fringe of Darlington have already been mentioned. This area has the potential to be the jewel in the crown of Darlington's countryside provision, having most of the elements necessary to fulfil a majority of the aims central to the vision of this ROWIP.

¹⁶This could be brought about through an element of change in land management, especially on the land that lies between Green Lane and the Skertingham Community Woodland, away from the current practices of single crop agriculture towards more mixed farming and improved access opportunities. This would come from additional tree planting, as well as through additional permissive agreements along wide field margins, and next, to new features designed for biodiversity as well as for landscaping reasons.

One process, which could facilitate the creation of this desirable feature, could be for a small element of appropriate development to be allowed in this area. This would, in turn, help enable the delivery of a big improvement to quality countryside access on people's doorsteps.

Out beyond the Skertingham Community Woodland lies the Ketton country^{*M3:3}, with its extensive bridleway network. There are significant opportunities here for quality recreational routes which have recently been explored by Darlington's hosting of the Great North Walk in both 2006 and 2007. However, there has been a varied response from landowners to this highly successful event, ranging from incredibly supportive to the extremely hostile.

As a part of the case study process, examples of where access improvements could be made in this part of Darlington's urban fringe were considered, especially for equestrian use, as well as for safe off road cycling.

The landscape of the Ketton Country is interesting, and while it is all intensively farmed, agri-environment schemes could be utilised to create wider field margins and better management of the footpath and bridleway surfaces. Following this, a quality provision could quite easily be created.

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Such an enhanced ROW network would work well in conjunction with the more urban fringe facility of Skertingham Woodland, which already acts as a cultural as well as physical gateway to the countryside.



Ketton Pack Horse Bridge.

The Ketton Country is an area with a long and illustrious history with the potential to provide a great resource from which Darlington can define its local distinctiveness.

As with all of this section of the ROWIP, this project as well as costings for it, feature in the statement of action, which follows.

Enhancing Countryside Access in the design process of new development.

This process of bringing the town and the countryside closer to each other is a continuous one, and opportunities should be sought, whenever they arise, to improve the present situation where the norm is most often for stark physical and cultural barriers.

One of the most frequent ways in which opportunities for ROW improvements arise is through the development process. Recognition of the role of countryside access in improving the quality of life is very important when discussing the layout and design of new developments with reference to the countryside that lies just beyond their boundaries.

Darlington Borough Council has played a significant part in influencing the design process in positive ways, but matters could be further improved if this

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policy were more thoroughly understood and adopted when considering new developments. It is important that access to quality countryside be a significant factor when giving advice to developers on matters of design and layout, as well as when considering planning applications.

The Council will consider, as a major priority, the opportunity to enhance countryside access when discussing new developments on the urban fringe, as well as opportunities to improve the urban green transport network that links town and country.

Opportunities Beyond the Road Corridors.

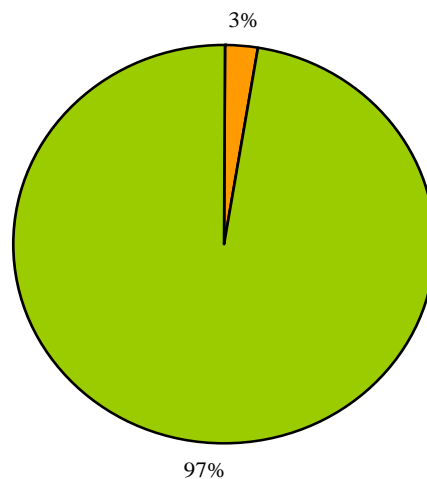
This opening section has dealt with identifying the issues that would help to improve access to quality countryside for the majority of Darlington's population who live in the urban area. Nearly 100,000 people are living in the town and only a small minority use anything other than a few kilometres of the ROW network, most preferring to keep to the one path they already know or just using the more urban green open spaces.

Further out from the urban area, it is more difficult to justify expenditure and time on the wider ROW network. Generally, the level of use, (except for around some of the larger villages (e.g., Hurworth, Middleton St George and Heighington) is extremely low. In recent years it has been a matter of carrying out the statutory minimum of maintenance required to keep the routes open and available for use. The exceptions are some of the long distance routes identified by The Ramblers' leaflets and the long distance circular cycle rides, promoted by the Council, and using some of the longer bridleways (Catkill Lane^{*M3:4} and Patches Lane^{*M3:5}) which are important for historical reasons as well as for countryside access.

Dead end (cul-de-sac) Paths

Nevertheless, there are cases where, partly because of the process in the past where the Rights of Way network was surveyed and recorded by the Parish Councils, there are anomalies which need to be addressed, especially regarding dead end, or cul de sac, paths. These occur where, for some time-obscured reason, the rights historically recorded in one parish were not recorded in one adjacent to it. Map evidence would suggest that these rights must have existed at some time in the past. ¹⁷Within the Borough of Darlington there are 7 such dead end paths, which need to be investigated and possibly reconnected.

% Cul de sac ROW Darlington Borough



Discovering lost Ways

Across the Rights of Way network of the country are numerous routes that for one reason or another have been lost to local knowledge but still exist in legal terms and could be reclaimed. Under provisions laid down in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, a deadline of the 1st January 2026 has been set, after which it will not be possible to apply for footpaths and bridleways, or higher rights, to be included on to the definitive map based on historical documentary evidence (historical is classed as pre-1949). The Government asked the Countryside Agency, now Natural England to coordinate the work necessary to research Rights of Way not currently shown on the Definitive Map & Statement (DM&S), and submit those with sufficient evidence to the relevant Highway and Surveying Authority, before this cut-off date.

The aim of the cut-off date is to bring a degree of certainty to users of the network as well as landowners and managers, about what actually exists. The DLW Project will not create any new rights; it is simply gathering historical

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evidence for what already exists in law, but for historical reasons, is not shown or recorded on the DM&S.

¹⁸Darlington Borough Council's Countryside Team will decide on the merits of each formal application to the DM&S, based on existing procedures.

The DLW Project might not submit any applications to Darlington Borough Council within the next few years, because they are looking at other areas of the country in turn. However, once they do arrive in this part of the world, there is likely to be a number of new routes or higher rights across the Borough, adding to the network of rights of way across Darlington..

Rights of way in the deeper countryside provide the only method to access a number of important local historical landscape features.

The main examples are:

- The Sockburn Loop^{*M9:8},
- The tumulus at High Coniscliffe^{*M7:5},
- Medieval Villages at Faverdale^{*M3:6}, Ulnaby^{*M7:6}, Walworth^{*M5:3}, West Hartburn^{*M10:6}.
- The motte and Bailey Castle at Bishopton^{*M5:4}.

The Teesdale Way

The Teesdale Way is the one regional trail that passes through the Borough, following so far as it can, the winding path of the river Tees. The route is promoted by a leaflet that was produced by the five Local Authorities through which the route passes, as well as a book about the route, produced by a private publisher.

There are no figures on the level of use of this route, but it is thought that several hundred people do indeed walk the route in full, or a significant part of it, every year as well as several thousand enjoying a number of key sections.



***Piercebridge.
The Teesdale Way***

¹⁹The Main Focus for Improvements to the Teesdale Way are-

1. For it to follow the river more closely. Already, a new section in Darlington has been agreed with the landowner where the Teesdale Way will now be able to follow the river around the Rockcliffe loop^{*M9:9}, just south of Hurworth. Other areas for attention within the Borough are the section from Blackwell to Hurworth Place^{*M8:5}, the Newbus Loop^{*M9:10} and the Sockburn Loop^{*M9:8}.
2. Consider particular sections in need of physical improvements. (Middleton-one-Row^{*M9:11}, and from Low to High Coniscliffe).
3. Treat areas of giant hogweed, to remove risk of injury to the public.
4. Identify options for loops that will allow quality circular walks, using the Tees as the focus.
5. Identify the potential for new crossing points.
6. Identify where upgrades to the existing designation would promote use.

The Needs of User Groups and Landowners - an in-depth view.

ROWIP Focus Groups summaries:

Engaging those who are non-users or are non-specific users.

Much of this document is aimed at looking at how to address the latent demand that exists in the wider community for access to quality countryside that has partly been demonstrated in the research phase of this ROWIP as well as elsewhere in national and regional research. It looks at ways of reengaging at least a proportion of this very large section of the community in countryside access related activities, who would otherwise not choose to see countryside recreation as an important part of their lifestyle.

Proposed Schemes:

1. In order to satisfy the repeated request from all User Groups for better quality access near to their homes, the Council will be looking at the introduction of a new suite of short and medium length ²⁰**neighbourhood walks** close to where people live. These will be well waymarked, have easily negotiable Rights of Way furniture and will run through land that is managed in a way more conducive to quality countryside access. This would start with a number of pilot schemes on the urban fringe. (See the action plan). We will follow this up with other partners, as well as with a new tranche of similar initiatives around Darlington and the larger villages. The new potential areas of accessible countryside are to be publicised with a series of new leaflets, as well as work with the local primary schools in the neighbourhoods.
2. **Much improved road crossings.** A repeated concern of all the User Groups was the locked-in nature of the town of Darlington. This will be overcome in part by the construction of several proposed new bridges over the increasingly busy roads on the urban fringe. Firstly a bridge over the A66 on the Stockton to Darlington railway track bed is due to be built in 2008^{*M10:7}. Secondly, the Council is looking towards a way of providing access over/under the A66 to gain access to the south of Firth Skerne Park and eventually on to Hurworth along a green route, possibly along the route of the old railway line.
3. An increase in the number of paths, not as yet part of the Rights of Way network, through new ²¹**Open Access land**, either through Community Woodland or the Local Nature Reserve process. This includes the path network in the new woodland at South Burdon, the new paths in the new local nature Reserves at Red Hall^{*M6:11} and Cocker Beck^{*M6:10}. In addition, the consolidation of the path network at the Skertingham Community Woodland and the Merrybent Community Woodland^{*M7:2}, together with new permissive access that may be

achieved as part of new agri- environment schemes carried out in conjunction with DEFRA and local landowners.

4. **Much improved access and boundary furniture as well as top quality waymarking and signposting.** ²²This addresses the many concerns the public have towards a whole raft of issues expressed in the focus groups about such things as safety, where to go, knowing that they are allowed to be there, and other related factors.
5. **Countryside centres from which walks can start.** ²³One of the concerns of the focus groups was the lack of car parking and toilet facilities. This can be addressed by looking into the possibility of locating Countryside Centres on the urban fringe from where people can start their walks.

The Council will continue to investigate the feasibility of creating at least one strategic countryside facility where a fully equipped and staffed countryside centre will be established.

Walkers' Groups.

Walkers' group representatives featured on the Steering Group, as well as having their own Focus Group. In addition, the Walkers' Group was included as a separate group within the User Group questionnaires. Their principal concerns were

1. The problem caused by the A66 and other busy roads around Darlington restricting access to the wider network.
2. The problem of unlawful motorcycling on urban fringe Rights of Way.
3. Concern over inadequate vegetation management by the highway authority, especially in the more remote parts of the network where it makes it very difficult to walk at certain times of the year.
4. Ongoing concern over conflict of use between users, especially equestrians and walkers, and the damage done to the surface of the Rights of Way.
5. The lack of quick and effective enforcement on certain ROW issues.
6. Poor stiles, especially ones that were too high and therefore difficult to negotiate for all, except for the most agile.
7. They are keen to work with all Highway Authorities to increase participation in countryside walking. (The Ramblers Association is working with Darlington Borough Council on a new walking initiative.)

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8. Concern over poor waymarking in places. People should be able to follow the routes without a map. Maps are to tell you whereabouts in the borough to go, not where the actual ROW are.
9. A feeling that more short circular walks should be created echoing the view expressed elsewhere in this report.
10. The need to have enjoyable, pleasant walks in the urban area that link quality green space with safe linear walking and the built environment.

Equestrians.

The Equestrian Focus Group that was consulted during this plan brought up many issues of concern that added to the comprehensive Tees Valley Equestrian Strategy study that was conducted in 2004- 05.

The main issues for the group included:

1. The need for considerably more off-road riding than is currently available for this activity. There is a concern that on-road riding is becoming increasingly dangerous, and that the bridleway network is not comprehensive enough to help alleviate the situation.
2. A suggestion for the Council to work with landowners to provide more permissive routes, especially where there is increasing pressure brought about through planning permission being granted for new equestrian facilities, with a view to perhaps, linking together private access that could generate income for the individual landowners concerned. It may be that such an approach could form part of the requirement when considering applications for new equestrian based developments, as a way of encouraging the process of identifying better quality and, above all, safer riding facilities.
3. Alongside greater provision of off road riding for people based at equestrian centres there was also a concern from the Long Distance Pony Riders' Association that there was a similar need for more joined up routes that would allow for improved long distance riding. This could be better accommodated if a number of the gaps in the bridleway network, particularly in the north of the Borough were closed. This group were also interested in the possibility, also identified in the Tees Valley equestrian strategy, that a Tees Valley long distance ride could be researched and developed.

The growth in equestrian facilities is profound, and the need for quality riding facilities is also increasing. The attached reference to the Tees Valley Equestrian Strategy, and its associated suggestions are to be welcomed by this ROWIP, and a programme of initiatives is feature in the action plan, aimed at addressing some of these issues. ²⁴It is considered

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that the best role the Council can provide, in this regard, is to encourage landowners to work together to provide better permissive off - road riding, giving riders an opportunity to avoid increasingly busy roads. It may be that once routes of sufficiently high standard are available, riders may be willing to pay for this facility, so providing landowners with an extra source of income, as well as riders a much needed quality facility. It is possible that the planning process can help here, as there are increasing numbers of planning applications for equestrian establishments, but with no where for people using these facilities to ride, other than at the centres themselves.



Equestrian use of ROW at Ketton.

Landowners.

The research into landowners' involvement with the Rights of Way network was very interesting, and a sincere thanks needs to be extended to those farmers and landowners who gave up their time to attend the Steering Group meetings on a subject that is normally associated with negative experiences in regards to running their businesses. The results of these discussions were far ranging, covering a wide selection of viewpoints.

1. The first main area of concern was the limited appeal the concept of access has to most landowners and farmers. Members of the public accessing land are generally thought of as being a problem to manage, because of concerns over security and vandalism, rather than as potential customers for farm diversification projects.

2. There were exceptions to this. Some farmers who have diversified into local food provision and have on farm outlets actively invite the public into their premises. Even here there is reluctance, in some quarters, to embrace the idea of wider public access beyond the occasional Right of Way, as it impedes normal farm routines. One way round this is for land to be demarcated, with paths actually fenced off from stock. This results in some loss of land but allows normal movements of stock and machinery.
3. Landowners who attended the Steering Group meetings were very interested in the case studies that the Rights of Way team produced on possible ways of improving access in a more radical way, especially around the urban fringe.
4. For example, there was an encouragingly positive attitude to suggestions of paths being diverted from the middle of fields and made to run through wide wildlife corridors and wide, biodiverse, field margins, providing there were payments for the provision and management of these new landscape and access elements.
5. This was very positive in terms of what is being suggested by much of the ROWIP. It demonstrates that some of the farming community would be willing to endorse ROW improvements, given suitable provisos. With grant aid, the kind of mosaic landscape on the urban fringe, that would provide food locally, provide a degree of employment, as well as providing quality countryside access for all, could be achieved.
6. There was general acceptance that altering the network to provide short circular walks near to where people live, would give people a better facility for countryside access, and that this could be accommodated within a relatively minor change in their approach to land use.
7. The case studies looked at land management issues such as how to balance running a farming business where the production of food still remained the core element, but with the addition of a raft of improvements that were aimed at encouraging the recreational use of the land.
8. The group looked at such things as changes in field margin management providing increased habitat with landscape changes such as new wetlands and woodlands adjacent to new public access. They generally understood how such elements might contribute to helping farms with a high retail profile, develop this side of their business.
9. The obvious example of this is where farms have diversified from their main business into equestrian facilities, farm shops and teashops. They were however, sceptical about how big the market for this sort of thing would be and felt that it was not feasible for the majority of the farmers around the town.

10. More specifically, farmers were keen on the idea that this may be accompanied by the removal of paths from farmyards, to improve farm security as well as for reasons of public safety.

Summary of landowner issues.

In the vast majority of cases, landowners find it difficult to see how greater access can help serve their business. This is not surprising. Since the Second World War, intensive farming, superimposed on a landscape based on ancient field systems, makes the business of farming difficult to reconcile with easy countryside access.

Our findings suggest that only through fairly radical changes in land management, such as Community Forestry or a whole farm agreement where access is treated as a priority issue, can these problems be overcome to a degree that will encourage a majority to enjoy their countryside on their doorstep.

There are examples around the country where the access issue has been put at the centre of a new approach to farming but rarely on the urban fringe. (To some extent this has been done at Redcar and Cleveland through an attempt to address the issues raised by the Equestrian Strategy) Instead, the approach to access typically contained within the countries Farm Stewardship schemes have been where increased access is not particularly in places where there is a high demand.

The fine balancing act needed to allow for the effective running of a business, alongside providing the public with a premier facility of access to quality countryside, is waiting to be explored fully on the urban fringe.

The Council will seek to work with partners including farmers and landowners to explore the opportunities presented for improved access to quality countryside through agri – environment schemes and community forestry and other appropriate methods.

Young Families Group

1. Consultation with parents of young children from Sure Start revealed a general interest in the countryside and a strong desire to make a more full use of opportunities available on the 'door step'. However, a number of barriers were highlighted that were specific to this type of user, together with insight into how countryside access can be enhanced to provide a quality experience for this group.
2. One of the main themes arising was based around vulnerability and security, with parents feeling unable to access certain areas due to concerns for the safety of their families. Fears of possible incidents from threats of violence, or accidents relating to environmental

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conditions are amplified in more secluded locations where assistance appears further away. These fears were particularly marked for the urban fringe areas, with problems such as litter and enclosed paths or access via busy roads.

3. Many practical considerations were raised as factors in a successful outing, with parents finding it easier to visit areas where they know their needs will be met rather than venturing into the unknown. Honey pot sites with toilets, pushchair friendly paths, accessible furniture and good way marking were popular. It was also important that the sites could be reached easily by car or public transport. Wishes were expressed to have more such areas and walk routes, designed with safe family friendly features and good information and publicity to go with them.

Young People's Group

1. The consultation undertaken with the young people showed that they are using the countryside, but in a very informal way, and rarely use the more rural Rights of Way network. It was clear that there is a lack of knowledge about countryside access in general and the young people were unaware of their rights in respect to using Public Rights of Way.
2. As with other groups, one of the main requests was for information on where to go and what to do in specific areas. This was tied up with concerns regarding how welcome they are in the countryside.
3. While the young people were not particularly enthused by the idea of traditional countryside access for walking, they did express interest in informal areas where they can meet friends in a high quality outdoor environment, close to home where they feel safe and where parents can confidently allow them to go. Most of the young people expressed an interest in cycling and felt that an increase in bridleways and cycle paths would be beneficial.
4. It appears that young people are very reliant on parents for most access to the countryside at the moment. Most outdoor activity taking place was facilitated by parents - either on holidays or taking the young people to sites for specific activities. In addition the costs for activities that may be more inviting such a horse riding, rock climbing or quad biking were restrictive. It was felt that public transport links were particularly important in helping them to access the countryside independently.

The Rights of Way Section will endeavour to establish relationships with local primary and secondary schools. The production of education packs, and enhanced publicity for Countryside Events should help to educate the young citizens of Darlington about the opportunities that the countryside offers, as well as their rights and responsibilities.

Senior Citizens' Group

1. The group consulted were enthusiastic about access to quality countryside and were to some extent, using countryside sites and the Rights of Way network. However, with the exception of a small number of experienced walkers, the majority are using the network in a very limited manner.
2. Current use is mainly trips to parks or honey pot sites that have been visited frequently over many years. These sites were perceived to be safe and welcoming, being well maintained with only gentle gradients and well-surfaced paths.
3. Security and vulnerability were major concerns; none of the consultees were comfortable walking alone due to fear of accident, illness or attack, and an inability to summon help.
4. There was a strong desire to have increased access and for routes to be improved to make this possible. It was felt that the network currently holds many physical barriers such as poorly designed furniture, uneven or slippery surfacing and obstruction by vegetation.
5. Wider rural access was thought to be somewhat daunting, with a strong preference expressed for shorter, particularly circular routes with well-designed features to encourage use. Seating, access to public conveniences and removal of litter were desirable, while good links to public transport were essential.
6. A strong theme was the need for more information on the network and publicity on access opportunities.
7. Older walkers when asked demonstrate an acute awareness of the changes in the quality of the countryside over the years. They often remember a time when the countryside was a part of their daily or weekly experience, recalling a time when family walks or spending time with their mates in the countryside on the urban fringe was seen as a normal part of life.

Visually & Mobility Impaired Group

1. Despite difficulties with access in certain areas, the majority of the members of the group consulted reported that they are using the countryside and Rights of Way network and can accept certain levels of challenge such as use of furniture and uneven surfacing provided that they have good information on what to expect. This is however, dependent on the severity of the disability experienced.
2. Practical considerations were a major issue. The majority of the network is difficult to access, through poorly designed furniture and slippery or uneven surfacing. Paths also need to be wide enough for sighted guides to walk alongside visually impaired users or for wheelchairs and mobility vehicles. Signage was a consideration, with large, visible way-marking helping to increase confidence in the use of routes. Traffic was a major safety concern in accessing sites; users

with visual and mobility impairments may feel vulnerable in busy areas or where crossing roads is necessary to link footpaths.

3. Noise levels were a factor in the safe enjoyment of the countryside by visually impaired users. Enjoyment is hampered by walks near to busy roads or other sources of loud noise, but enhanced by sensory stimuli such as bird song or the sound of running water.
4. To encourage access, publicity was seen as a key issue. Users would be more inclined to use areas where they know exactly what to expect from the paths in a particular area. It was felt that promotional material in a range of formats would be helpful e.g. large print or Internet based information so that routes could be researched in advance.

Darlington Primary Care Trust and other bodies

Consultation with the Darlington PCT has been ongoing in recent years. The Council has worked in close partnership with the PCT and other groups closely associated, aimed at pursuing the 'Green Exercise' agenda. A 'Break Free' pack of walks descriptions was produced in 2005 that identifies a number of high quality walks of varying difficulty, aimed at people with different abilities. The Council has also worked with other groups; leading walks and helping set up walk programmes, encouraging people to see exercise in the countryside as a part of their life style.

Anglers' Group

1. The anglers consulted were regular users of the Rights of Way network, using it mainly to access fishing sites. The issues that they had were different from those of other user groups in that they were more concerned about inappropriate use of the Rights of Way and conflict with other users than access issues.
2. They expressed concerns that members of the public in general show a lack of awareness of Public Rights of Way law and countryside code and little knowledge of where to walk. The group felt that these factors sometimes led to conflict between different path users. Suggestions made to alleviate some of these issues include better publicity for walking in general as well as specific routes, along with educational programmes to encourage responsible use and increased uptake of pastimes such as fishing.
3. Measures to encourage correct use of the path network were felt important, such as good way marking and use of rangers or wardens.

Sports groups

1. People who use countryside access provision for sporting activities such as running and orienteering were consulted and the following issues were mentioned that are important for the ROWIP.
2. Running in the countryside is a popular activity for a minority of runners. The main reason for choosing the countryside over roads and pavement for this section of the running community was the variety of the terrain encountered as well as the enjoyable surroundings and the healthy environment.
3. The main concern for these people was that the surface should not deteriorate too much, that horse damage should be repaired if possible, and that a number of specific routes of varying length should be made available for this activity. Especially popular for running is the low Coniscliffe to High Coniscliffe section, the Barmpton river walk and Skerningham Community Woodland combined, the Ketton bridleways and the Coniscliffe Grange bridleway and footpath.
4. Orienteering is restricted to areas of general access and already takes place on fixed courses at West Park and at the Rockwell Local Nature Reserve. There is potential for further development at the three existing Community Woodlands.
5. Sports cycling takes place to a small extent (See cycling)

Dog Walkers.

1. The dog walking public is a category of people hard to define. People with dogs walk for all manner of reasons, but there is a group of people who walk because they need to exercise the dog, rather than the dog accompanying them on a walk for their own pleasure.
2. This group of dog walkers need areas of green space near to where they live. If this happens to be a Right of Way then this is the green space that they will use. Although many dog walkers are responsible there are those that are not and allow their dogs to leave mess on the surface that people walk on which is very off putting to those wishing to use the paths. This may be the case in part due to dog owners being unaware of their responsibility to remove this 'mess' in an area they consider as semi wild. This also applies to the Local Nature Reserve paths where the same issue is a major problem. Better signage may improve this situation.
3. It is a major problem as regards encouraging greater use of the urban fringe countryside and steps need to be taken to help educate the public that just because an area is wild, it is not responsible to leave dog mess on paths where people walk.

²⁵The Council will take steps to improve behaviour of certain dog owners with regards to reducing the fouling of urban and urban fringe Rights of Way by dogs through appropriate signage and fines when necessary.

Section 10

Existing Resources for the Management of the Network and the Promotion of General Countryside Access.

Darlington Borough Council currently allocates over £280,000 pa into its combined Countryside and Rights of Way services, which provides funding for four full time staff, one part time and annual payments to partner organisations who also help deliver the service. In terms of countryside access, roughly 50% of this is spent on the Rights of Way network, while the rest helps look after the 7 Local Nature Reserves and 3 Community Woodlands that we presently manage for access and biodiversity, although other funding is brought in from external organisations when bids for various schemes are successful.

Managing the network of 300+ kilometres of Rights of Way and 200 hectares of semi-natural open space accessible to the public, takes much of the Countryside Team's time and resources. The two Rights of Way Officers are able to spend a total of four days per week carrying out site inspections, following up complaints, and dealing with problems. They follow this up with two further days each in the office, recording and addressing the issues they have encountered during their days out, including taking enforcement procedures against persistent offenders, answering letters sent by concerned members of the public, and ensuring our records of the state of the network and sites are kept up to date.

This leaves a small amount of time for the team to pursue improvement issues, many of which have been identified by the ROWIP.

The ROW team work closely with the two full-time and one part member of the Countryside Team on issues concerned with general access to the countryside. This ranges from the many issues generated by the development process, either protecting existing access to the countryside as well as identifying new opportunities for improvements to this access.

Asset Management

The process to improve access to the countryside has inevitably led to the creation of a number of assets that through the process of time, deteriorate and need maintenance to bring them back to the standard needed to function at an acceptable level. These mainly consist of the network of unsealed surfaced paths throughout the Local Nature Reserves as well as the entrance features, motorbike barriers and interpretation boards. It also includes the publicity material that has been produced and can quickly go out of date.

In order to keep the facility up to date as well as safe and enjoyable to use, the Council has increased its budget for maintenance of these facilities as well as receiving help from the Local Area Agreement within its 'Safer, Stronger, Greener', programme.

Volunteers.

The Council, over the years has had a very active Volunteers programme with local people who like to be in the out doors, volunteering to carry out a variety of tasks in Darlington's accessible countryside. These include, carrying out path monitoring duties as well as becoming Darlington Volunteer Countryside Rangers. A big thank you is extended to these people who help to make both the established Rights of Way network and the new and developing green attractions, better places to enjoy. Their main functions are carrying out site inspections, doing health and safety checks, talking to users on site and sending in reports to the Countryside Team.

Partners

In addition, the Borough Council works closely with its partner organisation on countryside and access issues. Most importantly, the North East Community Forest has had a great deal of success in recent years in adding large areas of countryside access for the people of Darlington. The three big successes so far are the 90 hectares of Community Woodlands at South Burdon, 40 hectares at Skertingham, and 40 hectares at Merrybent. The Countryside Agency was also very important in this process, in helping with the funding of Rights of Way staff in the early years as well as help with individual access projects through their 'Countryside Around Towns ' initiative and with funding the Community Forest programme.

More recently, the Groundwork organisation has become an important partner in this process, with the Countryside Agency and Groundwork now working together on a number of initiatives targeted at the countryside around towns. The Council's Countryside and ROW teams are already working closely with Groundwork to further improve access to quality countryside and this partnership is likely to lead to an increasing number of opportunities as the projects identified in the action plan unfold. (Groundwork, as well as their more urban based activities, working with communities on landscaping issues and the more formal areas of green space have also had a great deal of success in recent years with popularising urban fringe walks in parts of West Durham)

Key to this task is the work the team carries out in conjunction with other Council services to identify opportunities for improved countryside access through the development process. Working closely with developers on the design and layout of new schemes and the way such developments inter-phase with the wider countryside is crucial, if the mistakes of the past are not to be repeated, and the many advantages for the public, outlined in this Rights of Way Improvement Plan, of good quality countryside access can be realised.

This Council will continue to work closely with developers to identify new ways of improving access to quality countryside.

The Council will build into the relevant plans and strategies that influence the development process, key policies that will further the cause of a much improved provision for access to quality countryside.

The Council will continue to work with partners to ensure the maximum benefits for the Darlington public of a quality provision.

Maintaining the definitive map and statement

Darlington Borough Council as Highway and Surveying Authority holds and maintains the Definitive map and Statement for the Borough. The Definitive Map and Statement are the legal record of all known/registered Public Rights of Way.

These documents are a useful tool for a myriad of people and businesses, from walkers, cyclists and horse riders, to landowners, planners and solicitors.

The Definitive Map and Statement for Darlington comprises of 17 Map sheets at a scale of 1:10,000 and a file containing a written description of each path.

The Definitive map and Statement are evolving documents, in that they are subject to constant and on-going change as routes are added, changed or deleted. The Borough Council will continue to receive applications from the public/businesses to make changes to the DM&S for some considerable time to come.

Legal Effects of the DMMO's

The placing of a path on the Definitive Map, and the recording of its details within the Statement, are conclusive proof of the minimum status of the Public's Rights on that path.

Where the map shows a **Footpath**, there is a right of way on foot only, but without prejudice to the question of the existence of other rights.

Where the map shows a **Bridleway**, there is a right of way on foot or horseback, there may be an additional right to drive animals, and since 1968 there is an additional right to ride a bicycle, again without prejudice to possible other rights.

Where the map shows a **Restricted Byway**, there is – (a) a right of way on foot, (b) a right of way on horseback or leading a horse, and (c) a right of way for vehicles other than mechanically propelled vehicles; and with or without a right to drive animals of any description along the highway, but no other Rights of Way.

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Where the map shows a **Byway open to all Traffic**, there is a right of way used mainly for the purposes for which bridleways and footpaths are used but also a right for vehicular traffic.

The DM&S is conclusive evidence only in what it shows, and it must be remembered that there may be additional or higher rights which exist, but which are not yet recorded. The DM&S is **NOT** concerned with **Private Rights**.

Definitive Map and Statement Review.

Every Highway and Surveying Authority has a Duty, under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, to keep the DM&S for its area under continuous review.

Darlington Borough Councils DM&S has a relevant date of 01-04-1998, and nine of the seventeen map sheets had a further revision on 01-02-1999.

As from October 2007, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Section 53a is to be amended by Schedule 5 Paragraph 2 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which will remove the need to make a separate Legal Event Order to add or make changes to the DM&S, once a Public Path Diversion/Extinguishment Order comes into operation. The Surveying Authorities will be able to make changes to the DM&S without further Orders being made.

It is envisaged that a review of the DM&S will take place on an annual basis and that any map sheets which need modifying will be done at this time, a full revision of the DM&S will take place on a five year cycle, when a full reprint of all copies of the map will be made. As well as the Sealed Copy of the Definitive Map, there are three other copies; one of which is kept by the Main Library, one is used as a working copy and one set held in reserve. Other copies are sent to the Statutory Consultation Groups such as Ramblers Association and each of the 27 Parish Councils/Meetings are sent the relevant sheets for their area.

Definitive Map Modification Orders

As Highway and Surveying Authority, Darlington Borough Council receives applications to make changes to the DM&S by either adding a new PRoW to the DM&S, changing the status of a ProW, which is already on the DM&S or deleting a PRoW from the DM&S. These applications are called Definitive Map Modification Orders, and are carried out under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

DBC only receives approximately one or two applications each year for DMMO's, and currently only has two outstanding Orders to finalise.

Since the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and its provision to close the DM&S to any applications for DMMO's based on historic evidence by 2026, Natural England have embarked on a 'Discovering Lost Ways Project' to identify unrecorded public Rights of Way, and have them placed onto the DM&S before that cut-off date. There is a possibility that the DLWP's findings will increase the number of applications made to this Authority. This might add to the work of the ROW Team, as well as the time for processing future DMMO's.

Section 11

The Statement of Action aimed at investigating bridging the gap between the Urban and the Rural.

The Statement of Action was first printed in the Local Transport Plan of 2005-2006. In its revised form it is designed to address the expressed wishes of the Focus Groups as well as those needs, uncovered as a part of the combined consultation exercises described in this Plan. The programme, if delivered in full, would go a long way towards addressing the issues of concern raised in the Plan about how separated people say they are from the countryside near to their homes. However, the cost of such an exercise is considerable, and it would only be through a substantial buy-in from other parties, that such comprehensive programme could be delivered. The Statement of Action then is the basis for a work programme that begins the process for the reversal of this separation of people from the countryside. Each element plays its part and it should therefore not be an expectation that the full programme as described comes into reality. This is not the purpose of the plan. Rather, it is a statement of intent to work to introduce

these elements into the future design process of an expanding Darlington.

Statement of Action to be Investigated

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
1. PUBLIC PATH ORDERS							
1.1 There are a number of outstanding Public Path Orders.	Process all current and outstanding Public Path Orders.	a) Pursue all outstanding Public Path Orders, of which there are currently 7 diversions + 1 modification as well as pursue new orders as and when they occur. b) Establish realistic timescales for the completion of each diversion. c) Work through each systematically.	£8,000 (C)	2010	DBC (Countryside, Legal) Landowners Utilities Disability groups Walking groups, Cycling groups Horse riders Other User Groups	DBC	This will improve the ROW network thus improve access (Accessibility) in the Borough, encourage people to be active (Quality of life), take horses off the roads (Road safety).
1.2 Public Path Order requests come in at regular intervals.	Process Public Path Orders as and when they are requested.	a) Establish a process to ensure Public Path Orders are processed within a set timescale.	£2,000 per annum (C)	On going	DBC (Countryside, Legal) Landowners Utilities User Groups	DBC	

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
2. PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK (General)							
2.1 There is a general lack of knowledge as to who can use the various Rights of Way.	Produce a ROW information leaflet explaining users rights and ensure the distribution of this and existing publications aimed at the same purpose.	Consult with Transport Section regarding content. a) Work with partners such as the CLBA and the Ramblers. b) Distribute literature	£2,000 (U)	2010	DBC (Countryside, Transport, Leisure Services) Tourism CLBA Landowners Ramblers	Tourism PCT Leisure	This will improve people's awareness (Accessibility) of ROWs thus encourage more people to take up activities (Quality of life), reduce no. of cars on road (Road safety, Congestion, Air pollution)
2.2 There is a strong feeling people would use the ROW network if there were more info about them and their location.	ROW Publicity Leaflets – "Independent Walking Pack" Other leaflets e.g. "Bridleways and Back Lanes in Darlington" (Off road cycling)	c) Sustain existing info completed in partnership with other organisations. e) Reprint existing leaflets + Development of new literature	£1,500 per annum (U) £1,000 per annum (U)	2007-2011 (On going)	DBC (Countryside) Darlington PCT User Groups	Darlington PCT Cycling England	Above comments apply
2.3 There is a good knowledge of but limited uptake of promoted routes.	Investigate the need for increased RoW Publicity Events – And an "Annual Walking Festival"	d) Organise walks including a major annual event with User Groups. e) Organise extra activities and	£1,000 per annum (U)	2006-2011 (Annual event)	DBC (Countryside, Transport, Leisure Services) Tourism User Groups Darlington PCT Darlington walking groups	DBC (Countryside) Darlington PCT	Above comments apply

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
		requirements e.g. marquees, stalls. f) Publicity.	£1,000 per annum (U)		Cycling groups Equestrian groups		
2.4 A number of successful leaflets are now out of print	Investigate the need to reprint and update "out of stock leaflets" Such as,	"Brafferton Village Walks" "Piercebridge to Hurworth Place – Teesdale Way" "Hurworth to Low Middleton Teesdale Way"	Estimated £1,000 per annum (U)	On going, with increase in number of leaflets being produced to keep stocked.	DBC (Countryside) User Groups Previous funders	Previous funders	Above comments apply.
3. NETWORK IMPROVEMENTS							
3.1 There is a demand for short circular walks in the Borough concentrating on the urban fringe.	Investigate the possibility of creating a range of Community circular walks Investigate the possibility of developing areas for walking that utilise countryside access facilities other than	a) Look at the possibility of establishing new walks at suitable villages and urban fringe e.g. Middleton St George Neasham Hurworth Heighington Various Darlington wards b) Once identified, produce corresponding leaflets and publicity.	Estimated £2,500 per annum, to improve the paths affected. (U) Estimated £1,000 per annum, to produce one community walks leaflet, with promotion, per year (U)	2006-2011 (One community per annum) Possible focus would be Darlington's industrial past. Ongoing	DBC (Countryside, Transport, Leisure Services) Tourism Landowners User Groups Parish Councils As above	Town on the Move Landowner Parish Councils Darlington PCT North East Community Woodland	Above comments apply

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
	definitive rights of way	<p>c) Continue the process of investigating opportunities to provide new areas for quality countryside access.</p> <p>d) Investigate the possibility of establishing these new areas of Local Nature Reserve, Community Woodland and other areas of quality countryside such as wider field margins, areas of set aside with access and farm based capital schemes in partnership with DBC and / or our partner organisations.</p>	<p>£<10,000pa (This is made up of existing staff costs and contributions to partners, as well as external funding received by partners.) (U)</p> <p>Very difficult to cost. Community woodlands often involve land purchase as the top end of agricultural values, currently standing at around £4,000 per acre. Improvement can come about as planning gain through S106 agreements. It may be possible that other schemes could be funded through an annual payment basis from DEFRA (U)</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>As above</p> <p>As above</p>	<p>The Tees Forest, DEFRA, Developer contribution, DBC.</p>	

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
	Investigate the need for the renewal and installation of village information maps located on site	<p>e) Continue with the process of Identifying villages with maps in need of renewal and those with no maps at present.</p> <p>f) Identify local info needing to be displayed.</p> <p>g) Consult with local groups.</p> <p>h) Publicise.</p>	£600 per annum (U)	On going	<p>DBC (Countryside) Parish Councils User Groups Local residents Landowners Tourism</p>	<p>LTP DBC Countryside Parish Councils Landowners</p>	Above comments apply
3. NETWORK IMPROVEMENTS (CONT)							
3.2 Rights of Way users enjoy quality landscape walks through woodlands.	Geneva Wood Drinkfield Marsh The Whinnies	<p>a) Identify possible links within the sites and install network.</p> <p>b) Where possible, carry out creation orders.</p>	<p>£3,000 per annum (U)</p> <p>Uncertain as to cost, but normally unrealistically high. Need to demonstrate public need.</p>	2007	<p>DBC (Countryside, Estates, Planning) Local Nature Reserves Officer Landowners North East Community Forest</p>	<p>LTP (Walking) Land fill tax</p>	Above comments apply

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
		c) Maintenance of paths					
	Low Dinsdale Wood	This wood has many wet sections that are easily eroded. Work is needed to add in duck boarding, drainage etc. Look towards identifying funds for this work to be completed in the near future.	£3,000 (U) £500 per annum maintenance (U)	2007	DBC (Countryside) North East Community Wood Landowner		Above comments apply
	Skerningham Wood	a) Diversion is required. b) Investigate the process towards providing car park, signage, interpretation maps, leaflets, guided walks programme. Annual maintenance c) Creation of sustainable Green venue through arts scheme.	£1,375 (C) External funding being investigated. £50,000 capital works (U) £5,000 (U) £30,000 (U) External funding being sought.	2010	DBC (Countryside) Landowners North East Community Forest NECF Tees Valley Arts.	LTP/Cycling England North East Community Forest	Above comments apply
3.3 Rights of Way users enjoy quality landscape walks along waterways	Access along the River Tees	d) Investigate the possibility of improving access along the River Tees. e) Negotiate with landowners for diversions/creations for	£2,000 per annum (C) Dependent on identifying external funding.	On going	DBC DBC, Developers, Landowners DEFRA	DBC, Developer contribution, Landowners,	Above comments apply

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
		Sockburn Loop Rockcliffe Loop. Caravan park- Newbus Grange Loop. Improve the access around the Tees between Broken Scar and Blackwell	£150,000 (U)			DEFRA.	
	Access along the Teesdale Way (an E2 route)	Investigate the possibility for improving a number of sections that follow roadsides with no pedestrian provision a) Identify “at risk” sites and investigate possible funding sources - eg, at Stressholme to Hurworth Place section. b) Plan suitable crossings/ walkways.	unknown	On going	DBC (Countryside, Planning, Highways, Legal, Transport) Landowners User Groups	LTP (Road Safety)	Above comments apply

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
	Access along the Skerne	<p>a) Similar to the Tees, investigate the possibility of improving access along the banks of the Skerne.</p> <p>b) Look for opportunities to plan suitable routes and enter into negotiations with landowners.</p> <p>c) Aim to create cycle friendly route between Mill Lane and Houghton road.</p> <p>d) Investigate the opportunity to create a footpath up to Barmpton Hall.</p> <p>e) Look for opportunities to Improve link between Barmpton and Ketton Packhorse Bridge.</p>	<p>£90,000</p> <p>Unknown</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>2007-2017 (On going)</p> <p>2007- 2008</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>DBC Landowners User Groups DEFRA, LTP, Cycle England, The Environment Agency.</p> <p>Landowners, user groups, DBC.</p>	<p>DEFRA, LTP, Cycling England, DBC Capital Programme,</p> <p>DBC.</p>	Above comments apply

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
	Access along Cocker Beck	f) Details of this scheme have been subject to wide consultations and have met with a high rate of approval. g) The scheme will provide local people with good sustainable access to a piece of quality countryside.	Feasibility Study, £8,000 (C) £70,000 (C)	2008	CDENT, The EA, Darlington LSP, Community Groups,	CDENT, The Environment Agency, DBC, Cycle England.	
	The Rockcliffe Loop See Teesdale Way.						
3.4 The A66, A67 and A68 run through Darlington Borough and sever several ROWs making crossing dangerous.	Investigate the possibility of creating safe crossing points where ROWs have been severed by major roads.	a) Pursue this aim by Identifying "at risk" sites and prioritise regarding promoted routes. b) Move towards when resources allow suitable crossings / walkways.	Funding subject to successful bids and other third party contributions. 2 bridges over A66 £1 million (U) 10 Traffic Islands £100,000 (U)	2007-2017 (On going)	DBC (Countryside, Highways, Transport, Legal, Planning)	LTP/Cycling England DETC Highways Agency DEFRA	Row users are placed in dangerous situations at certain points on the ROW network. Improving safety (Road safety) would improve access (Accessibility), make more people confident to use the network (Quality of life) and reduce the nos. of car trips (Congestion, Air quality).

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
4. MAINTENANCE OF RIGHTS OF WAY							
4.1 In order to ensure that countryside access through the use of the public rights of way network meets statutory guidelines a whole range of on and off site activities take place.	Reactive and proactive surveying	a) 4 days per week surveying of paths.	£25,000pa (C)	Ongoing	Volunteers, User groups, landowners and farmers.	DBC	
4.3 It is important to users that ROWs are well maintained and obstruction free.	Vegetation strimming	a) Identify ROWs at risk from vegetation overgrowth. b) Plan a bi-annual strim of the most used ROWs and annual strim of remainder.	£1,000 (C) £15,000 per annum (C)	Annual event	DBC (Countryside, Community Services) Contractors - Landowners	DBC	Row users want unobstructed paths. Maintenance will improve access (Accessibility), increase no. of people out enjoying them (Quality of life)

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
	Continue the process of continually Improving countryside furniture when resources allow.	c) Identify sites in need of improved furniture d) Installation of new furniture	£1,000 per annum (C) £5,000 per annum (C)	On going	DBC (Countryside) Landowners North East Community Forest	LTP DBC	And encourage people to make fewer car trips (Congestion, Air quality)
		Identify sites that would benefit from additional security measures e.g. barriers, especially on the urban fringe and put in place. Maintain these features	£1,500 pa (C) £2,500 (C)	Ongoing		DBC, LTP, Cycle England	
	Giant hog weed spraying	Keep locations map up to date Ensure annual spraying takes place on time Ensure detailed information is provided to the public	£200 (C) £2,500 (C) £500 (C)				
4.4 Way marking and signage is considered important by ROW users.	Road side ROW flag maintenance survey and repair work	Keep this up to date	£3,000 per annum (C)		On going	DBC (Countryside) Police Landowners Wardens	LTP DBC
	Destination signs on selected paths	a) Identify ROWs leading to specific sites. b) Install signs naming destination eg town centre,	£5,000 per annum (U)	On going	DBC (Countryside) DBC (Transport) DBC (Highways) DBC (Leisure Services)	LTP (Walking/Cycling) DBC	

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
		facilities, village names					
4.5 Several Rights of Way are suffering from a poor surface thus reducing their possible use and enjoyment gain.	Surface of RoWs	<p>b) Investigate the possibilities of improving ROWs when resources become available, where surface conditions are seriously below standard and would make a valuable contribution to countryside amenities. These routes are generally in poor condition and as is the case across the country, resources are not available except in exceptional circumstances, to repair them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catkill Lane ▪ Patches Lane ▪ Sunken Lane ▪ Salters Lane ▪ High use and ▪ Urban paths <p>Annual</p>	<p>The estimated costs to carry out these works are listed below. These sums are beyond ROW maintenance budgets. Occasionally however, opportunities do arise for improvements to be made.</p> <p>Catkill Lane £75,000 (U) Patches Lane £43,000 (U) Sunken Lane £25, 000 (U) Salters Lane £43,000 (U) High use and Urban paths £20,000 (U) Maintenance (Figure not known but it is likely to be substantial)</p>	unknown	DBC (Countryside) Landowners User Groups	LTP DBC Parish Councils Landowners This is a problem area and will need further investigation.	

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
		maintenance					

5. PUBLIC BRIDLEWAY PROVISION

5.1 A large part of the Borough is poorly served by Public Bridleways	Public Bridleway provision	a) Investigate where there may be possibilities of improving links in the bridleway network. b) Negotiate when resources allow, with landowners, possible diversions, creations, permissive routes and/or upgrades to create links offering payment for public path order	unknown	On going	DBC (Countryside) Landowners User Groups North East Community Forest	DBC DEFRA Landfill Tax Lottery Countryside Agency	Horses are often forced to use roads. Improved bridleway provision would improve access for all esp. equestrians and cyclists (Accessibility, Quality of life), remove horses and off-road cyclists from the roads (Road safety), allow more trips to be made by other means other than cars (Congestion, Air quality)
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Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brafferton - Hurworth Moor c) Promote these new routes to the wider public 	£1,000 per annum (U)				
	Assessing Public Bridleway provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Investigate conducting a survey looking at equine use and demand b) Use results to improve network. 	Existing (U) Unknown (U)		DBC (Countryside) Landowners North East Community Forest User Groups		
	Provision of horse friendly gate catches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identify a programme improving equine access on bridleways that presently are not horse friendly. b) Negotiate with landowners for horse friendly catches to be installed. 	£1,000 per annum (U) £1,500 per annum (U)	On going	DBC (Countryside) Landowners North East Community Forest Equestrian groups	DBC	
6. PUBLIC FOOTPATH PROVISION							

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
6.1 There are a number of missing links in the Rights of Way network	Public Footpath Provision	<p>a) Locate where existing footpath dead ends are located and identify potential links</p> <p>b) Negotiate with landowners possible diversions, creations and/or upgrades to create links offering payment for public path order</p> <p>c) Promote these new routes to the wider public</p>	<p>£500 per annum (C)</p> <p>£500 per annum + cost of creations? (C)</p> <p>£1,000 per leaflet (U)</p>	On going	<p>DBC (Countryside)</p> <p>Landowners</p> <p>User Groups</p> <p>North East Community Forest</p> <p>PCT</p> <p>DEFRA</p>	<p>LTP (Walking)</p> <p>DBC</p>	<p>Improved footpath provision would improve access for walkers (Accessibility, Quality of life), remove pedestrians from the roads (Road safety), allow more trips to be made by other means other than cars (Congestion, Air quality)</p>
6.2 Investigate possibilities for improved access by cycle to countryside access sites	<p>Examples of where these links could be created are-:</p> <p>Link through to Hurworth Place, (See above)</p> <p>Link from Firth Moor Nature Reserve to Hurworth and Neasham inc A66 Bridge</p> <p>Link to Merrybent</p>		<p>Estimated costs of creating these routes and work towards identifying possible sources of funding</p> <p>Total £100,000 (U)</p> <p>£400,000 (Inc Bridge) (U)</p>	<p>Research ongoing</p> <p>Unknown</p> <p>Unknown</p>	<p>Links to the countryside. Sustainable travel. Sustrans, .LTP, Landowner(s), Darlington Cycle Campaign Group</p> <p>Landowners, Tees Forest, Lottery, others to be identified.</p> <p>Landowners, DBC,</p>	<p>Sustrans, .LTP, Landowner(s) Some potential for developer contributions on sites nearer to population centres.</p> <p>Developer contribution, DEFRA, Landfill, Aggregates levy.</p> <p>LTP, DBC.</p>	

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
	Community woodland		Unknown				
	Link to Walworth and Piercebridge using Barnard Castle track bed.		Unknown (U)	unknown			
	Family cycling opportunities around the Ketton Bridleways.		Unknown	2009	DfT, Local Motion, Cycle England, Tees Valley Arts, Sustrans, Tees Forest DBC.	LTP, DfT, Heritage Lottery, DBC, Others.	
	Green Cycle route to Sadberge via Trackbed.		Unknown				
	Heritage route to Middleton St George and on to Stockton		£150,000 (U) £250,000 (C)				
	Reprint and update of Darlington Off Road cycle leaflet.		£2,000 (C)				

7. DISABLED ACCESS

7.1 The Rights of Way Team is required to adhere to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in both the	Disabled access – Stiles to kissing gates or gaps	a) Identify with full consultation of partner groups, where kissing gates/gaps could replace stiles to		2007-2011 (10 kissing gates per annum)	DBC (Countryside, Social Services) Landowners DAD. Other disability	LTP DBC	Improved disabled access provision would improve access for people with disabilities, families with
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Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
urban and countryside environment.	New disabled friendly route at Broken Scar to Blackwell.	<p>open network up to more users</p> <p>b) Negotiate with landowners for subsidised work to be carried out and future maintenance</p> <p>c) Continue the process of converting Stiles to Kissing Gates at key points on the network on strategic routes.</p> <p>d) Surfacing works</p> <p>Work with partners and landowner/ farmer to create improved facility.</p> <p>Carry out resurfacing works and provide on site furniture.</p>	<p>£1,000 per annum (C)</p> <p>Capital items. Unknown at this stage.</p>	Ongoing	<p>groups</p> <p>Contractors</p> <p>North East Community Forest</p> <p>PCT</p> <p>As above</p>	Lottery, DBC,	<p>pushchairs etc (Accessibility, Quality of life), remove pedestrians and electric scooters from roads/pavements (Road safety), allow more trips to be made by other means other than cars (Congestion, Air quality)</p>
8. MAJOR PROJECTS AFFECTING THE ROW NETWORK AND COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS (More detail above under Network Improvements)							
8.1 Durham Tees Valley Airport originally severed many ROWs and is now looking to expand.	Durham Tees Valley Airport expansion	<p>a) Work towards Identifying new links to improve severed network</p> <p>b) Carry out improvements</p>	Unknown	Ongoing	<p>DBC (Countryside, Planning)</p> <p>Durham Teesside Airport</p> <p>Landowners</p> <p>User Groups</p>	<p>Durham Tees Valley Airport</p> <p>Parish Council</p> <p>DBC</p>	
8.2 New Community Woodlands are planned for the Borough	Cycle, equestrian and walking access to community woodlands	<p>Investigate improved access to the existing and future community woodland.</p> <p>Implement schemes</p>	Unknown	Ongoing	<p>DBC (Countryside)</p> <p>North East Community Forest</p> <p>Northumbrian water, LTP, DBC.</p>	<p>LTP</p> <p>DBC</p> <p>Northumbrian Water, LTP, DBC. Lottery.</p>	

Issue	Project	Key Action	Estimated costs Committed (C) uncommitted (U)	Completion date	Key partners /policy	Funding source	LTP
8.3 Darlington is increasing its number of Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)	Access to Local Nature Reserves, see above under network improvements	These are used by many groups and need sympathetic path surfaces		Much work carried out during 2006 – 2007, leaving annual cost of approximately, £5,000 pa.	DBC (Countryside)	LTP (Cycling) DBC, LAA.	

Summary of some of Darlington Borough Council's Rights of Way and Countryside Access, Projects and Policies

- ¹ Off-road traffic-free cycle routes: Commitment to the creation of these, as enshrined in the Tees Valley Structure Plan. p.30
- ² Rights of Way and sustainable access: the Local Development Framework.p.36
- ³ Sustainable green routes and the Local Travel Plan.p.37
- ⁴ Riverbank Access: Improving access along the banks of the River Skerne, in the urban area. p.68
- ⁵ Cycling: Cycle Route to Middleton St. George. p.68
- ⁶ Equestrian users: Bridleway, from Archdeacon Newton to the Staindrop Road. p.68
- ⁷ Access to countryside via green corridors. p.68
- ⁸ Access without cars: Encouraging use of sustainable transport p.68
- ⁹ Working with partners and stakeholders to improve access to quality countryside.p.69
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- ¹² Safer road crossings: Bridging the A66 in Eastern Darlington. p.70
- ¹³ Multi user paths: between Blackwell to Broken Scar. p.71
- ¹⁴ Access to countryside in Western Darlington: Connecting new Community Woodland and Merrybent. p.72
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