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RUTLAND COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

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MILES WITHOUT BARRIERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rutland has very few fully accessible countryside routes, which are promoted and open for public access. There are only three Countryside For All routes in Rutland, two of which are at Rutland Water and the other being at Exton. The Countryside For All routes have leaflets displaying gradients, cross slopes, route surfaces, width between barriers, gates etc. There is not likely to be any additional Countryside For All routes in the County in the near future. So to make Rutland countryside more accessible to

members of the public with limited mobility, it is necessary to examine how accessible our Public Rights of Way are and make the public aware of their standard of accessibility.

It is important to keep people physically fit and reduce the high level of mental health issues. With an ageing population it is even more challenging. As walking and access to the countryside is proven to be good for our health and general wellbeing it shows our PROW network is very valuable. So, promoting its accessibility is very important. Promoting the most accessible routes with very few barriers such as stiles is a necessity, to ensure all members of the public can enjoy the countryside.

2. THE GOAL

To provide and promote a web site which displays to the public how accessible individual routes are across the network. This will be achieved by displaying the PROW in categories which denote if they are barrier free (a route without stiles etc.) or the type of barriers on the route.

To involve members of the public in checking and collecting data to ensure the correct information is available to categories PROW routes.

To involve members of the public in surveying the routes, once the web site is live, to ensure standards do not deteriorate.

To provide a method that displays how to prioritise improvements in the PROW network, to make the network more accessible to people with limited mobility.

To aid green social prescribing.

3. WHAT IS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

Initially it was a case of investigating to see if any other local authorities had carried out a similar project, to see if we could follow a process that had already worked. Natural England was contacted to see if they could help in this area. However, it appeared that nothing was known of a similar task which had been undertaken. Some other organisations had classified their routes in terms of difficulty. However, we are aware of what might be seen as difficult to some people may be easy to others. What we want to do is to follow the Countryside For All principles by providing factual information, to enable the members of the public to assess what is a suitable route for them.

RCC does have information available on a number of databases in relation to structural barriers, their grid references and the land owners or tenants, whose land the barrier is on. However, this does involve some work to cross reference with the individual PROW id. There may be a need to update the names and contact details of the land owners and tenants. In some cases it is also necessary obtain a search from

Land Registry to find the owner of the land. However, the need for this only comes about when the structural barrier needs repairing or replacing.

4. HOW WE REACH OUR GOAL

4.a. Categories

All the data for the Rutland PROW network was analysed displaying the individual PROW with their structural barrier/s. It was decided to categorise every PROW. This initial categorisation is to assist in understanding the PROWs that need no work or very little work to be undertaken, to make them more accessible for people with limited mobility. It also is an aid to prioritise surveying and work to make the network more accessible with limited funds. The current categories are displayed in the table on the following page.

There will be far fewer categories that will describe the network to the public. Discussions will take place with relevant groups of people, to ensure the categories needed are available for the public to access.

Category Description	Category (Version 2)
Sealed or compacted stone path. No Stiles, Bridges or Fords but is a Bridleway or only has gates with Radar locks or gates that are suitable to for large all terrain mobility scooters and large buggies.	A
As Category "A" but has bridges no greater than "X" when accessing and exiting	B
As Category "A" but has bridges above "X" and below "Y" when accessing and exiting	C
As Category "A" but has bridges above "Y" when accessing and exiting	D
Route in Natural Landscape. No Stiles, Briidges or Fords but is a bridleway or only has gates with Radar locks or gates that are suitable for large all terrain mobility scooters and large buggies	E
As Category "E" but has bridges no greater than "X" when accessing and exiting	F
As Category "E" but has bridges greater than "X" but no greater than "Y" when accessing and exiting	G
As Category "E" but has bridges greater than "Y" when accessing and exiting	H

Natural Landscape. With kissing gates but No Stiles, or fords or bridges	I
As Category "I" but with bridges no greater than "X" when accessing and exiting.	J
As Category "I" but with bridges greater than "X" but no greater than "Y" when accessing and exiting	K
As category "I" but with bridges greater than "Y" when accessing and exiting	L
Bridges and 1 Stile Or Just 1 Stile	M
Bridges and 2 Stiles or Just 2 Stiles	N
3 Stiles and above and Fords	O
Steps	P
PROW Ending or starting with a private road	Q
PROW outside of category A- Q	R

The “X” and “Y” factor when accessing and exiting bridges needs to be determined. Further Advice on this matter is sought.

There may be unmaintained sealed and compacted stone paths, with pot holes and loose stone. These may have no stiles, bridges or fords and have gates with Radar locks or gates that are suitable for large all terrain mobility scooters and large buggies. These are to be treated as Natural Landscape until repairs are carried out, to place it in category A, B, C or D.

It is thought that the first phase of surveys to ensure the data is correct and collect more detailed information should be on categories A to L. Whilst it seems a heavy workload, we know there are very few routes in Rutland in category A to D. When the surveys have been carried out and the PROW is placed in the correct category, work can be undertaken on understanding whether there is a need for the 12 categories A to L.

With these A to L categories it is important to make the public aware of whether there is a pavement joining the PROWs, rather than just a road crossing or the route ending at a road. So for phase 1 of the public web site, PROWs with the current categories A to L should be displayed with any pavement that is available. In the interest of road safety, it could be advantageous to display pavements which link all categories.

4.b. Additional important information

For some people information in the categories on the previous page may not provide the information they need, in terms of whether the route is suitable for them. In the Countryside For All leaflets we provide information on gradients and cross slopes. However, most of these routes are on sealed or compacted surfaces, whereas the majority of the PROW are part of the natural landscape. So our thinking at the moment is, for each PROW in the future we need to show the following:

The longest and steepest gradient both up and down hill

The longest cross slope with the greatest fall, both to the left and right of the track

This will be something we will look at capturing and we think there may be a computer application that may give us this information.

Although we have said providing this information is in the future, we need to ensure the database we use to capture all the relevant information on the PROW network, is designed to capture these and any other information we feel will be necessary to have in the future. Therefore whatever is designed needs to be future proofed. If not the system may cost too much to amend and may become obsolete.

4.c. Involving the people of Rutland

It is envisaged the surveys will be carried out by volunteers and the volunteers work coordinated by the Public Rights of Way officer's post, which is currently vacant.

Volunteers are required from all communities to help us understand the nature of the PROW network. It will be useful if we can attract people to volunteer from all sectors whether they are individuals or groups. The social prescribing team, could also see this as the start of the connection between their clients and a green social prescribing activity. The volunteers will need to be provided with data capture sheets and receive training. It would be ideal if the volunteers could enter the data on a spreadsheet using their own PC. Then email it to RCC and the data then transferred by the PROW officer to a master database. When the data has been validated it could automatically links to the web page displaying the electronic Definitive Map.

It is hoped that once the Phase 1 categories are live on the web site, that the majority of the volunteers who worked on collecting the data, would also undertake surveying the routes, to ensure standards do not deteriorate. These volunteers would be known as Countryside Access Volunteers and have the same remit as the Lincolnshire Countryside Access Volunteers as displayed in appendix A.

4.d. Promoting the accessible PROW network

Requesting volunteers could also be used to promote the PROW network. This could be done through the community radio or the local papers. The volunteers themselves, chatting with other people about what they are doing to improve the accessibility of the network, will also assist in the promotion.

The Social Prescribing team will be able to add to what they offer their clients, the role of taking part in the initial surveys to categorise the PROW, the role of a Countryside Access volunteer or a user of the network.

A park display could be provided with a kissing gate, a Woodstock large gate and a stile for all to use. An information board about the PROW network and the new

categories could also be displayed at the park. If this is thought to be a reasonable idea discussions and agreement from the park owner is necessary.

4.e. Possible funding sources

As we are all aware funding is very competitive now. Two likely sources of funds are the National Lottery and Natural England. Once we have a detailed report on the way forward, it would make sense to send it to Natural England, as they may fund or partly fund the project, as it may have some benefits to other authorities.

The project costs would include:

Training volunteers

Coordinating the volunteers

Summarising the data collected by volunteers

Web design

The cost of any extra space needed for the web site

5. DECISIONS FOR THE LAF TO MAKE

- a) Categories – Is there a need for further categories initially? If so what are they?
- b) What should the heights of X and Y be?
- c) How can we attract volunteers
- d) Do we agree that the LAF to invite Age UK, disability groups and young families to get their input, to ensure we are providing what is needed? If so at what stage should this meeting be undertaken?
- e) Further comments in relation to what is required for the project
- f) What else have we missed

COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS VOLUNTEER Appendix A **INFORMATION**

Do you enjoy spending time in the countryside? Why not volunteer and help manage your local rights of way.

Is there a footpath or right of way close to your home or have you got a favourite local walk or ride?

Would you like to play an active role in helping us manage Lincolnshire's public rights of way (PRoW) network?

If you answered 'yes' to these questions then you could be just the person we are looking for!

No previous experience or knowledge of rights of way is necessary as we will provide all the training, equipment and information you need.

Why volunteer with us?

You will be making a difference to the rights of way network, a valuable asset for both local people and visitors to an area.

You will be helping to keep the network open and easy to use.

You can use your existing skills and develop new ones.

You will gain a sense of achievement and be part of a network of like-minded people.

You will explore and discover the Lincolnshire countryside.

Walking/cycling and riding are excellent forms of exercise and can help keep you achieve and well.

It's flexible – you can do it when it suits you and for as long as you want.

Why is it important to keep rights of way open and easy to use?

They are an important asset for an area, allowing access to the countryside including many important historic and wildlife sites.

They provide an opportunity for people to exercise (walk, run, cycle and ride) and spend time in the fresh air which is good for both mental and physical well being.

They may attract visitors to area who want to explore the local countryside. In turn they may support local businesses (pubs, shops, cafes etc).

They have a role to play in sustainable transport, being used for local journeys such as taking the children to school, visiting local shops and facilities.

They are part of our heritage.

What does volunteering involve?

Regularly checking local footpaths/bridleways or a promoted route to ensure they are open and easy to use.

Replacing damaged waymarkers to ensure routes are easy to follow.

Removing vegetation overhanging gates, bridges and stiles.

Be the eyes and ears on the ground, reporting any problems you find to us.

Who will provide the equipment necessary?

We will provide you with any tools, materials and safety equipment you need for the time you volunteer

with us (for example: maps, high visibility waistcoat, first aid kit, gloves, secateurs)

What about insurance and health & safety?

Lincolnshire county council apply the same standards of health and safety to authorised volunteers as employees.

Authorised volunteers will be covered by the Council's employee liability insurance.

We will provide you with risk assessments for the activities you undertake as a volunteer.

Who can volunteer?

Almost anyone over the age of 18. But please be aware that there may be uneven and muddy ground and stiles on some routes.

Do I need to know about the countryside and rights of way?

No. We can provide training as necessary, for example map reading, and will provide you with all the information you need.

Where will I be volunteering?

We hope that volunteers will survey rights of way and promoted routes close to their home, but there may be opportunities further afield.

How do I apply to become a countryside access volunteer?

If you would like to be a volunteer please complete the application form provided.

Disabled Ramblers Field Guide to Access Appendix B

British Standard BS5709: 2018 Gaps Gates and Stiles places the emphasis on Least Restrictive Access. Suitability of structures should always be considered on the assumption that a person with reduced mobility will be going out without more-mobile helpers, so will need to operate the structure on their own, seated on their mobility vehicle.

Useful figures

- **Mobility Vehicles**
 - **Legal Maximum Width of Category 3 mobility vehicles: 85cm.** The same width is needed all the way up to pass through any kind of barrier to allow for handlebars, armrests and other bodywork.
 - **Length:** Mobility vehicles vary in length, but **173cm is a guide minimum length.**
- **Gaps** should be 1.1 minimum width on a footpath (BS5709:2018)
- **Pedestrian gates** The minimum clear width should be 1.1m (BS5709:2018)
- **Manoeuvring space** One-way opening gates need more manoeuvring space than two-way opening ones and some mobility vehicles may need a three metre diameter space
- **The ground** before, through and after any gap or barrier must be flat otherwise the resulting tilt effectively reduces the width

Choice of gates

A two-way, self-closing gate closing gate with trombone handle and Centrewire EASY LATCH is the easiest to use: <https://centrewire.com/product-category/pedestrian-and-mobility-access-gates/> <https://centrewire.com/products/easy-latch-for-2-way-gate/>

Kissing gates

If a kissing gate really must be used, we only recommend the [Centrewire Woodstock Large Mobility](#) kissing gate. This is fitted with a RADAR lock which can be used by some users of mobility vehicles. This is the only type of kissing gate that is large enough to be used by all-terrain and large mobility vehicles.

Board walks, Footbridges, Quad bike bridges

All of these structures should be designed to be appropriate for use by large mobility vehicles, be sufficiently wide and strong, and have toe-boards (a deck level edge rail) as edge protection. On longer board walks there may also be a need to provide periodic passing places.

Steps

Whenever possible, step free routes should be available to users of mobility vehicles. Existing steps could be replaced, or supplemented at the side, by a slope or ramp. Where this is not possible, an alternative route should be provided. Sometimes this might necessitate a short diversion, regaining the main route a little further on, and this diversion should be signed.