

26.02.2009

Surrey County Council Equality Impact Assessment Template

1. Context of the Service or Policy

Service or Policy being assessed: **Countryside Access, Countryside Access Legal and Countryside Access Promotion**

Assessor: David Greenwood
Date: February 2009

What are the aims of the service or policy? If this assessment is part of a project it is important to focus on the service or policy the project aims to review/improve

(NB this should set out the aims and objectives of the policy or service)

The aim of the service is to provide the public with access to the Surrey countryside. Surrey residents and its many visitors have long enjoyed access to the countryside through an extensive public rights of way network – footpaths, bridleways and byways.

There are 3444 km of public rights of way in Surrey, consisting of:

- 2239 km of public footpath (65%) – pedestrians only
- 1068 km of public bridleway (31%) – pedestrians, cyclists and horseriders
- 134 km of public byway (4%) – all traffic, including motor vehicles
- 0.5 km of restricted byway (<1%) – all traffic, excluding motor vehicles

The County Council has recently prepared a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. For the first time we have considered the development of the rights of way network and how that network can better serve the needs of both the present and future generations. The Plan is intended to be the prime means by which local highway authorities identify the changes to be made in respect of the management and improvements to their local rights of way network, in order to meet the Government's aim of better provision for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and people with mobility difficulties.

The County Council has a statutory duty to protect and maintain the network – which it has carried out for many years and to which it is highly committed. The County Council has achieved consistently high results under the Government's target (BVPI 178) for ease of use of the network.

The main areas of work cover the following activities within the Countryside Division of Surrey County Council:

Countryside Access:

- Maintaining and protecting the Rights of Way network and open access land.
- Responding to reports of access issues from the public.
- Resolving problems on the RoW problem list.
- Implementing improvements to Rights of Way.
- Working with local volunteers on access projects.

Countryside Legal:

- Maintaining the definitive RoW Map and Statement.
- Making legal orders to resolve RoW and access problems.
- Making Map Modification Orders to ensure that changes or newly created routes are correctly recorded and a public register maintained.
- Writing, publishing and implementing the RoW Improvement Plan.
Administering the Surrey Countryside Access Forum.

Countryside Access Promotion:

- Reviewing and maintaining up-to-date, informative and accessible Countryside web pages.
- Organising and publicising an ongoing programme of walks and events.
- Organising the inspection and promotion of promoted routes.

2. Who are the beneficiaries /users of this service or policy?

(NB this should address needs of client groups and a review of barriers to policy or services)

Large numbers of local residents, visitors and tourists use the Surrey rights of way network. Walkers are the largest group of users and many walkers use the rights of way network frequently: many of these frequent users are dog walkers. Rights of way are particularly important in enabling those without a car to access local services. In the wider countryside many walkers are likely to appreciate short, circular routes from villages and countryside sites. Many of these routes are likely to be accessed from car parks or train stations.

Cyclists are the second most numerous group after walkers. They include utility cyclists who cycle for day-to-day journeys often from home, and recreational cyclists who include trail riders, family groups and mountain bikers. Mountain biking is particularly popular in the Surrey Hills. Recreational cycling routes are often accessed from car parks. Horse riding is very significant in Surrey where there is estimated to be more than 20,000 horses. Horse riders have many needs in addition to access to bridleways - including stabling, horse pasture, and parking for horse boxes. Surrey has an above average number of carriage drivers and some recreational motor vehicle users.

In April 2004 the County Council issued a pilot questionnaire to residents to identify the broad access issues in the north east of the County. Over 250 responses were received and 100 respondents were contacted again and invited to propose access improvements in their area.

As part of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan consultation over 650 letters were sent to user groups, community leaders and landowners in May 2006, inviting them to complete a questionnaire about their use of the network and propose improvements for the future. 76% of respondents used the rights of way network at least once per week, 42% thought that the number of stiles and barriers was a problem and 70% thought that there were not enough linkages and circular routes. Many of the proposed improvements involved a change in legal status from a footpath to bridleway with the majority of respondents favouring multi-user routes.

Countryside Agency national surveys between 2002-2005 identified that up to 40% of the population do not visit the countryside. These people include those without access to a car, black and minority ethnic people, disabled people, young people, people who live in inner cities, women, older people and people on low incomes.

It is estimated that 20% of the population nationally has some sort of disability and the population is ageing. Many of those who are blind, partially sighted and with mobility difficulties are among the 40% of the population who do not visit the countryside. A non-user study in Surrey could provide a greater understanding of the barriers and needs of non-users.

3. What is the existing situation in relation to minority, disadvantaged and excluded groups in which this service/policy operates? (including age, belief/faith, disability, Gender/transgender, sexual orientation, race and other general equality strands or issues that might make people vulnerable. NB this will require declaring what information is currently captured with respect to equality & diversity Monitoring) of this service or policy. It is also important to show the relevance of capturing this data.)

Where improvements are being made to the Rights of Way network a “least restrictive” option is implemented. This means that, where possible, features like stiles will be replaced with kissing gates that allow easier access. Given the nature of the countryside (hilly and muddy in places) it is difficult to provide full access for everyone to everywhere.

The 2006 survey results support a need to replace stiles and barriers where possible, to improve way marking and to make information available, including for those with special needs. Routes for these people are also specifically needed to access local services.

We aim to improve the information available to enable people to make an evaluation of the suitability of routes for them.

There are some routes (often circular) specifically designed and promoted for those with mobility difficulties. This Easy Walks pack has been developed in conjunction with disability groups and is available in paper form and on the County Council's website.

4. Given what you already know, what is the potential for this service/policy to have a negative or differential impact on minority, disadvantaged, vulnerable and excluded groups or on race relations and community cohesion?

Please summarise the negative impact identified due to age, belief/faith, disability, Gender/transgender, sexual orientation, race and other or general equality issues

The nature of the countryside (hilly and muddy in places) means that it is difficult to provide full access for everyone to everywhere. When implementing improvements we aim to adopt a least restrictive access approach to ensure that, for example, stiles are replaced with more accessible alternatives. We also aim to improve the information available to people about routes to enable them to make an evaluation of the suitability of routes for their own ability.

5. Given what you already know, what is the potential for this service/policy to have a positive impact, such as tackling discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and / or promoting good community relations, for minority, disadvantaged and excluded groups?

Please summarise the positive impact identified due to age, belief/faith, disability, Gender/transgender, sexual orientation, race and other or general equality issues.

NB this would include positive initiatives delivered by the service or through the policy for any/all of these equality groups. What have been the outcomes or changes?

Adopting the least restrictive access principle to improvements has a positive impact in enabling easier access to the rights of way network for many more people. Similarly providing better information to people enables them to make more informed decisions about the suitability of routes for their abilities.

Producing promotional material such as the pack of Easy Walk guides has made a positive contribution to enabling the countryside to be enjoyed by a wider range of people.

6. Give details of involvement, consultation and or research undertaken for each relevant equality and diversity grouping, upon which this policy/service has had an impact either internally or externally.

What is the research telling you in relation to age, belief/faith, disability, race gender/transgender, sexual orientation and other equality issues?

The Surrey Countryside Access Forum is an independent body that advises the County Council and others on improving access to the countryside. It has 22 members who represent a broad range of interests, including farmers, landowners and those who earn their living in the countryside, users who enjoy the countryside in many different ways; and other relevant interests, such as nature conservation. Disability groups have previously been represented on the Forum and have contributed actively. There is not currently any specific representation for disability or the other equality strands and this should be addressed.

The Countryside Agency identified that certain groups are under-represented amongst users of the countryside. People from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people, young people, people who live in inner cities, women, older people and people on low income all make limited use of the countryside and green outdoor spaces. The Countryside Agency suggested that many service providers take what they regard as an even-handed approach and promote 'Countryside for All' - nobody is excluded, but equally nobody is specifically encouraged. The needs of specific groups are often insufficiently understood and potential opportunities that inclusion would bring to both the user and provider are lost.

Between 2002 and 2005 the Countryside Agency carried out a national review of the diversity of people who access outdoor recreation in the countryside. The review comprised:

- research with under-represented groups to establish their needs and perceptions of what is available for them
- research with providers of outdoor recreation experiences assessing their awareness of the needs of the under-represented groups.

The research concluded that:

- all the groups researched clearly expressed a desire to enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation
- a lack of information and concern about not being made welcome would undermine people's confidence to access outdoor recreation and those without access to a car found transport a major barrier
- a lack of confidence in engaging with diverse groups was also apparent amongst recreation providers.

As a result of the research the Countryside Agency recommended that:

- diversity and equality principles should be embedded into the planning and practice of service providers in the outdoor recreation sector so that under-represented groups are made welcome and have their needs met
- a climate of confidence should be created in under-represented groups about visiting the countryside, so they feel able to visit and enjoy it.

The Countryside Agency state in their publication “By All Reasonable Means” (2005): “Disabled people do not have ‘special needs’. But different people do need different things to enable them to enjoy the outdoors....”

Blind and partially sighted people and those with mobility difficulties will generally be on foot or using a mobility vehicle, although there is potential for them to access the countryside on horseback and in a vehicle. Whilst they represent substantially less than 1% of respondents to the 2006 survey, they may represent up to 20% of the general population. As the population ages, the percentage of people with mobility difficulties and other disabilities will also increase and this may be exacerbated if levels of obesity continue to increase. By 2031, the median age of the population is predicted to rise from 38.6 to 42.9 years and the percentage of the population over retirement age from 19% to 23%.

5. Given your answers to the previous questions, how will your service or policy be revised to mitigate, reduce or eliminate negative impacts and enhance positive impacts for the relevant equality groups?

(NB this is in effect the Recommendations to improve this policy)

Representation

Steps will taken to ensure that there is once again equality representation on the Surrey Local Access Forum at the earliest opportunity.

Accessibility

One of the central aims of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is to increase the accessibility of the network for all users, including blind and partially sighted people and those with mobility difficulties. It is proposed that this will be achieved by assessing every improvement on the basis of “least restrictive” access, including the following factors:

- minimising barriers
- considering the needs of every potential user at the earliest stage in the design of a scheme
- aiming for the highest possible standards of construction.

In order to accommodate disabled users as far as possible, it is proposed to pay particular attention to the following:

- quality of surfaces – providing firm level surfaces, well drained and free from mud
- natural hazards – protecting users from natural hazards of the landscape, including steep slopes, sudden drops and overhanging vegetation which might cause injury
- signage – providing good quality signage and waymarking, accessible to the blind and partially sighted where appropriate
- barriers – removing barriers wherever possible and adhering to the principles of least restrictive access where barriers are unavoidable. Stiles will only be considered where no other option is practicable.

High quality multi-user routes will be developed - giving access to local services and circular routes around popular visitor sites for all users.

Data will be collected on the accessibility of the network and used to improve monitoring and the future management of accessibility.

Information

Information promoting countryside access will follow County Council equality guidelines.

More comprehensive information will be introduced on the website and in printed material about routes (eg disabled parking facilities, slopes etc). This will enable all users to make a more informed decision about the suitability of routes for them.

An updated “Easy Walks” pack will be produced with short routes accessible to those with wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Understanding the barriers

The non-user study suggested in the Surrey Countryside Access Review will provide an understanding of the barriers, needs and opportunities of non-users.

Staff Awareness

Countryside access staff training and information will ensure that staff are aware of equality and diversity considerations and conduct their work in accordance with legal requirements and good practice.

6. Actions needed to implement the EIA recommendations:

Action Plan

Issue	Action	Expected outcome	Who	Deadline for action
Equality representation on countryside access issues.	Ensure that there is an equality representation on the Surrey Local Access Forum	Improved awareness and representation of equality issues.	Countryside Legal Team Manager	September 2009
Improving accessibility.	Ensure that all improvements comply with the principles of least restrictive access.	Improved accessibility for all users.	Countryside Access Team Manager	April 2009 and ongoing
	Create high quality multi-user routes giving access to local services and circular routes around popular visitor sites.	Improved accessibility for all users.	Countryside Legal Team Manager	April 2010 and ongoing
	Collect data on the accessibility of the network and make this publicly available.	Improved monitoring and future management of accessibility.	Countryside Legal Team Manager	2012 and ongoing

Information that takes equality issues into account.	Ensure that all information promoting countryside access follows County Council equality guidelines.	Improved access to information for all.	Countryside Project Development Team Manager	April 2009 and ongoing
	Introduce more comprehensive information on the website and in printed material about routes (eg disabled parking facilities, slopes etc)	Enable all users to make a more informed decision about the suitability of routes for them.	Countryside Project Development Team Manager	April 2010 and ongoing
	Produce an updated "Easy Walks" pack of short routes accessible with wheelchairs and pushchairs.	Enable all users to access.	Countryside Project Development Team Manager	May 2010
Understand the barriers (physical, information, other) to accessing the countryside.	Conduct a user and non-user survey to understand the barriers people have in accessing the countryside.	Better information to make more informed decisions in the future.	Countryside Project Development Team Manager	April 2010 and ongoing
Countryside access staff awareness of equality and diversity issues.	Through training and information ensure that countryside access staff are aware of equality and diversity considerations and conduct their work in accordance with legal requirements and good practice.	More awareness and confidence in addressing equality issues.	Countryside Manager	April 2009 and ongoing

NB these actions should have SMART Targets
Please continue and attach a separate sheet if necessary
NB these actions should be reported to the Departmental Equality and
Diversity Implementation Group (DIG) and incorporated into the Equality and
Diversity Action Plan, Service Plans and/or personal objectives of key staff.

7. If no actions are to be taken with respect to the recommendations please give reasons below:

Action plan review date: ___April 2010_ _____

Name of person responsible for review: __David Greenwood

Name of person who carried out assessment: David Greenwood

Name Head of Service: ___R Hargreaves

Signed: _Signed paper copy filed by E&R Business Support Team_____

Date Completed: 17 March 2009_____

1. Signed off electronic version to be kept in your team for monitoring and audit purposes
2. Send an electronic copy to the SCC 'Web Operations Team' for publication on the SCC website
3. Send Action Plan to DIG for review at its next meeting.

Date sent to Web Operations Team: _____