

NORTH YORKSHIRE
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

16 November 2006

Public Rights of Way Improvement in the Nidderdale AONB

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline proposals for a comprehensive programme of improvements to the public rights of way network in the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The Nidderdale AONB has a dense network of Public Rights of Way, which offers locals and visitors access to this specially designated landscape.

2.2 It is acknowledged that this network is currently of a variable standard, with some routes currently inaccessible or in a poor state of repair. Early drafts of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for North Yorkshire identify the need for improvement across the whole network within the AONB, particularly around popular locations such as reservoirs.

2.3 The aim of improving the network is an objective in the Nidderdale AONB Management Plan for the period 2004 – 2009.

2.4 Within Nidderdale AONB there are 820Km of public rights of way, made up of a ratio of approximately 80% Footpath to 20% Bridleway. 20 % of the network has currently been surveyed and along this length 525 individual problems were recorded, ranging from complete obstruction of the route to the need for improved waymarking. There is a clear need for investment in the network to bring it up to a good standard.

3.0 The Proposal

3.1 In order to realise the full potential of the network it is proposed that a programme of improvement work is undertaken, systematically visiting every route within the AONB in order to upgrade signage and waymarking and improve existing infrastructure to offer easy access for people of all abilities. This approach has been adopted very successfully in the Howardian Hills AONB leading to a substantial improvement in the network to a consistently high standard.

- 3.2 This year has been identified as the Pilot year in which £50,000 of NYCC funding has been earmarked to undertake improvement on the network within 9 parishes, based around the route of the Nidderdale Way. They are as follows:

Bewerley
Birstwith
Fountains Earth
Dacre
Harwith cum Winsley
High & Low Bishopside
Menwith with Darley
Stonebeck Up
Stonebeck Down

- 3.3 These parishes comprise 921 routes totalling 382Km. A full survey of the network will be undertaken, utilising the large volunteer base available via the Open Access Volunteers. The Access Officers will then work in partnership with landowners to produce a comprehensive schedule of improvements. The resulting practical work will then be distributed between Volunteers, Contractors and Parish Caretakers.
- 3.4 The subsequent 4 years would see the remaining 45 parishes visited and would require estimated funding of £200,000 to complete all improvement works. Further partner funding would however be necessary to sustain the full programme within this timescale.
- 3.5 The full extent of funding required depends upon the complete picture, which can only be clarified once the survey of the entire network has been completed. Based upon a similar programme in the Howardian Hills AONB a figure of £200,000 is thought to be a reasonable estimate at this stage.
- 3.6 NYCC has committed £50,000 of funding to work in the AONB in this current financial year. It is proposed that the same amount is allocated to the project next year, made up of equal contributions from Natural England and NYCC.

4.0 Relationship to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

- 4.1 The AONB proposals will address 2 of the 4 main issues for the Nidderdale Landscape Area identified in the draft ROWIP, namely the sustainable maintenance of the network and the provision of enhanced signage.

5.0 Specification for Improvement Works

- 5.1 The draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan highlights the need to provide more routes accessible to people of all abilities. A significant aim of this project is to upgrade existing PROW furniture following the British Standard approach, namely to consider a gap first and if this is not feasible a gate, followed by a kissing gate and only as a last resort a stile. This guarantees that the least able user is always considered first.

- 5.2 Surfacing will be considered only where appropriate and as a priority on those routes where access for wheelchairs and the less able bodied is feasible. Material used will be in keeping with the character of the AONB.
- 5.3 In order to promote user confidence and improve the ease of use of the network, a specific AONB fingerpost and waymark post will be designed. These will be used across the network and any promoted routes will be indicated where appropriate.
- 5.4 It has been determined that timber gates will be used wherever possible, in keeping with the character of the AONB.
- 5.5 In order to ensure consistency in future maintenance of the network, these principles will be documented in a design guide.
- 6.0 Conclusions
- 6.1 Such a programme of improvements on the public rights of way network would satisfy the aims of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the Nidderdale AONB Management Plan. It would also contribute towards maintaining and improving the rights of way indicator score, BVPI 178.
- 7.0 Recommendations
- 7.1 It is recommended that members endorse the programme set out in this report

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