

Forest of Bere Countryside Access Plan December 2005



This Countryside Access Plan for the Forest of Bere is a revision of the draft plan that was published for consultation at the end of 2004. During the 3 month consultation period more than 300 copies of the plan were distributed to a broad range of consultees including parish and district councils, public and private land managers, user group representatives, government agencies, conservation organisations and local residents. Copies were available to view at main libraries and information centres throughout the county; the draft could also be downloaded from the Hampshire County Council website. A total of 23 responses were received, with wide-ranging comment on the content and layout of the plan. This feedback has been taken into account within the revised plan that follows.

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Introduction

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, all highway authorities must produce a ‘Rights of Way Improvement Plan’ which contains

- an assessment of:
 - the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
 - the opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and enjoyment;
 - the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and people with mobility problems.
- a statement of the action the authority proposes to take for the management of local rights of way, and for securing an improved network of local rights of way.

Throughout the production of these plans, Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (a statutory forum who advise the County Council on countryside recreation matters) have provided guidance on the approach taken and research methods used. The Forum will continue to advise on the production of these plans and implementation of the actions arising from them.

A Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Hampshire

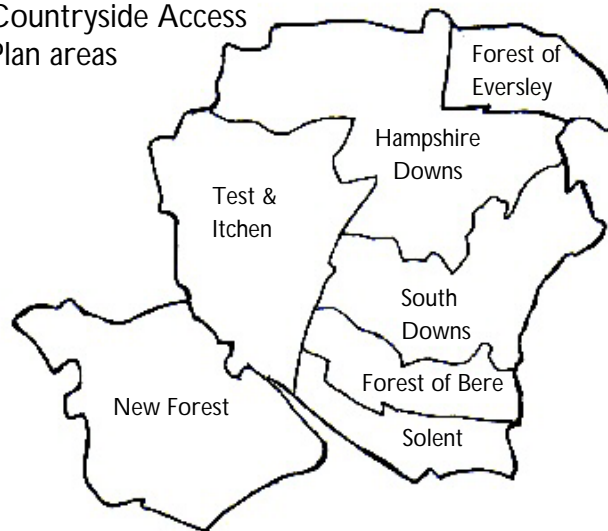
As well as over 4,500 km of rights of way in the county, there are many ways that people enjoy Hampshire’s countryside – for example, Hampshire County Council’s Countryside Service manages over 80 sites, and other organisations such as the Forestry Commission, Hampshire Wildlife Trust and the Ministry of Defence provide many other options. Local farmers may offer permissive or informal paths, and since 14 December 2004 the public also have access on foot to designated open access land and registered commons. People use all of these, and so we have chosen to look at the whole of countryside access, rather than just rights of way, under the title ‘Countryside Access Plan’.

Initial research has shown that demand for and provision of access vary across the county, and therefore Hampshire County Council intend to produce seven plans to cover different parts of Hampshire (see Figure 1).

These areas have been determined roughly by landscape character as this reflects factors such as soil type, vegetation and topography that can strongly affect access to the countryside.

The purpose of this plan is to respond to local needs in modernising the access network to make the countryside a welcoming place for everyone to enjoy.

Figure 1:
Countryside Access
Plan areas



Producing Countryside Access Plans

The process used to produce each plan is illustrated in a diagram at Appendix 2.

Every plan is based on research carried out with local residents, access user groups, land owners, land managers and farmers, asking about problems they have experienced and improvements they would like to see in the local countryside. Existing research and information is analysed, a detailed map is made of the access resource and a background report is prepared as a factual record.

The need for countryside access is compared to the current access resource; the issues identified and the actions that would resolve these form the Draft Plan which is then made available for public consultation.

Estimated consultation dates are (for guidance only):

Forest of Bere	Autumn 2004
Forest of Eversley	Autumn 2004
South Downs	Autumn 2005
New Forest	Winter 2005
Solent	Spring 2006
Test & Itchen	Summer 2006
Hampshire Downs	Winter 2006

A minimum of 3 months is allowed for members of the public to comment on each Draft Plan, after which the document is revised and published as the Countryside Access Plan. Copies of the plans are available on www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/access, by emailing www.access.development@hants.gov.uk or writing to the Access Development Team at the address on the back cover of this document.

Implementation

The actions arising from the completed Countryside Access Plans will be implemented in partnership with others such as district councils, parish councils and both private and public land owners and managers. Priorities for implementation will be agreed in consultation with the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum and will take full account of the Biodiversity Action Plan for Hampshire. Guidance will be provided by local working groups for each area, made up of local users, landowners and access managers.

Monitoring and review

The Countryside Access Plans will be monitored on an on-going basis, with regular reports to the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum and the Recreation and Heritage Policy Review Committee. Each year an Action Plan and Annual Report will be published, giving details of:

- actions completed
- priority actions to be undertaken in the coming year
- cost and resource implications of undertaking priority actions
- an update on progress with Draft Plans that are under development.

Many actions identified in the Countryside Access Plans match the objectives in the Local Transport Plan (this is the document that sets out the County Council's transport strategy for the next five years. Hampshire County Council Countryside Service will work to ensure that these links with the Local Transport Plan continue to be identified. A more detailed review will take place in 2010, in line with guidance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Transport

Background to the Forest of Bere

The Forest of Bere is an area of approximately 260 km² (100 square miles) stretching over south east Hampshire from Eastleigh to the border with West Sussex and to the south of the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The southern, eastern and western borders are flanked by large conurbations. Nearly 40% of Hampshire's population live within 10 miles of its centre.

From the time of the Saxon occupation to the early 19th century, the Forest of Bere (which takes its name from its later dedication as a royal hunting forest by the Normans) was managed by local communities to produce food and raw materials. This management and the local geographical conditions created a landscape mosaic of wood pasture, heathland, meadows and farmland. Three main rivers dissect the land from north to south and hedgerows dating from pre-medieval to present day create a patchwork stretching from west to east. From the 14th century Royal Forests were broken up to make way for agricultural improvements, creating opportunities for

higher yields. In 1812, Bere was the last substantial Forest to be removed from Forest Law and was divided up through parliamentary enclosures; much of the common land was bought by noblemen and those that could afford it.

Today the area is predominately ancient woodland and lowland farmland which is increasingly under threat from development and the pressures of being close to large urban areas. Fifteen percent of the land area is designated a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and nearly 6% is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Forest of Bere is also a stronghold for the Small-leaved Lime, holding 40% of Hampshire's total.

There are 1,056 km (660 miles) of public rights of way, 2 major country parks, 3 large areas of Forestry Commission land with significant access, and numerous smaller countryside sites and nature reserves. The new rights of access to Open Access Land introduced in December 2004 apply only to Portsdown Hill and a few common areas within the Forest of Bere boundary.

A map is enclosed as Appendix 3, showing the main countryside access network within the plan area.

The Forest of Bere Countryside and Community Project was set up in 1998 to investigate and test methods of developing links, trust and understanding between rural and urban communities. The project aims to identify appropriate management to protect and enhance the forest; develop a strong network within, and identity for, the Forest of Bere and to encourage the development of more sustainable agriculture.

This project comprises a partnership of East Hampshire District Council, Fareham Borough Council, Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council, Winchester City Council, and local communities.



The Vision

In support of the vision of the Forest of Bere Countryside and Community Project, the vision for countryside access in the area is:

To provide local residents and those in the adjacent conurbations with sustainable opportunities to access and enjoy the 'countryside on their doorstep'. In particular the Countryside Access Plan for the Forest of Bere should aim to ensure that access opportunities within the area, both new and existing:

- enable local people to access and enjoy high quality countryside in the Forest
- best meet the needs and demands of users whilst maximising benefits to land managers and owners
- are promoted to all sections of the community, including information on how to behave responsibly in the countryside and have respect for those who live and work there
- respect sensitive habitats and
- provide opportunities to educate local people about the wider landscape, history and countryside of the Forest (educational access provision).

This plan supports the overall vision for the Local Transport Plan of a strategy that enhances quality of life and economic prosperity by connecting people, communities, employment, goods, services and amenities.

The Countryside Access Plan for the Forest of Bere

The production of the Countryside Access Plan followed the process outlined in Appendix 2. The needs of walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers as well as the needs and demands of farmers and land managers were identified through:

- i) Literature research – a review of all relevant published research and information.
- ii) In depth interviews with land managers; Hampshire County Council staff; relevant staff at Winchester City Council, Fareham Borough Council, Havant Borough Council; individual users and user group representatives; and representatives of conservation bodies.
- iii) Responses to a questionnaire sent out to a selection of community and user groups and to the 21 parish councils within the Forest of Bere.

In addition Sheffield Hallam University conducted research into equestrian user needs (within the Forest of Bere and countywide) and farmers (Forest of Bere) to produce an Assessment of Use and Demand for Equestrian Access to the Countryside. This involved over 1,000 horse riders and carriage drivers across Hampshire.

The extent of the public rights of way network, countryside sites and all areas and routes that the public have access to, was assessed in light of the user and land manager needs and requirements. Comparing the need for access against what is currently available resulted in the identification of 15 issues. The following pages provide a rationale for each issue and suggest actions that could be undertaken to help to resolve them.

List of Issues

The Forest of Bere is an attractive rural area where people living in the adjoining urban areas can enjoy the countryside close to where they live. However;

1. There are difficulties in getting to the Forest of Bere to enjoy the countryside.
2. There are insufficient off-road routes that link centres of population to each other and to countryside sites.
3. There are limited resources for off-road cycling.
4. There is an undersupply of access resource for horse riding and carriage driving.
5. Countryside users are forced to use or cross busy roads to link up off-road access.
6. There is a lack of awareness of users' requirements when creating new or managing existing access and access facilities.
7. There is a lack of consideration for other users on multi use routes.
8. Many farmers and landowners find that providing public access entails a work load and financial burden.
9. Multi use routes in the Forest of Bere are in a worse condition than the rest of the county.
10. Uncontrolled dogs and fouling are a deterrent to countryside users and make managing land for access both costly and hazardous.
11. Crime and misuse of the countryside is costly for those managing land with access and affects people's enjoyment.
12. Public access to the countryside can have a negative impact on land management for conservation and the sustainability of vulnerable species and habitats.
13. The information provided about the access resource for all users is inadequate.
14. Poor communication between users and access providers leads to misunderstandings.
15. New legislation is imposing a cut-off date for historical rights of way.

A Guide to the Action Tables

In the pages that follow there is a description of each of the issues followed by a table showing how they may be addressed. The first column of each table outlines the proposed actions. This is followed by a column indicating the main benefits of such action as set out below. Estimated costs and timescales are also indicated, and the last column identifies the organisations likely to be involved in implementing the actions.

Potential Benefits

This column gives an indication of the potential benefits of undertaking the action. These link to the vision for this plan and the overall vision for the Local Transport Plan.

1. Enabling local people to access and enjoy high quality countryside in the forest

- a. Improving understanding of local needs for and provision of access
- b. Extending and developing the network
- c. Improving quality of the network in terms of safety, condition, amenity or aesthetic appeal
- d. Improving accessibility of the countryside to all users
- e. Connecting settlements with the countryside and with each other
- f. Facilitating and promoting use of sustainable transport
- g. Supporting health improvement / enhancing quality of life

2. Promoting access to all sections of the community, including information on how to behave responsibly in the countryside and have respect for those who live and work there

- a. Improving information provision
- b. Improving understanding amongst users and landowners
- c. Encouraging behaviour that respects a living, working landscape

3. Meeting the needs and demands of users whilst maximising benefits to land managers and owners

4. Respecting sensitive habitats


- a. Increasing understanding of and respect for environmental sensitivity
- b. Conserving and enhancing the environment
- c. Reducing environmental impact of visitors

5. Providing opportunities to educate local people about the wider landscape, history and countryside of the Forest (educational access provision)

- a. Developing understanding and appreciation of the special qualities of the area
- b. Enhancing enjoyment of the countryside
- c. Inspiring exploration

Estimated Costs

The likely costs are shown against the year the work will be undertaken.

-  extra staff requirements,
- £ less than £5,000
- ££ £5,000 - £50,000
- £££ more than £50,000

Lead Bodies and Potential Partners

The lead body is shown in bold, where it is known. The following acronyms are used in this column:

- CA Countryside Agency
- CLA Country Land and Business Association
- CRH Committee for Rural Hampshire
- Defra Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- EA Environment Agency
- FoBP Forest of Bere Project
- FC Forestry Commission
- HCAF Hampshire Countryside Access Forum
- HCC Hampshire County Council
- HWT Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
- NFU National Farmers Union
- RSPB Royal Society for Protection of Birds

Issue 1 - There are difficulties in getting to the Forest of Bere to enjoy the countryside

Many people live within easy reach of the Forest of Bere and it is the nearest countryside for many of these people from the surrounding towns and cities. The fragmented nature of the area and the fact that some recreational sites are difficult for some to get to without a vehicle has led to a number of issues.

Most of the main recreation sites with facilities within the Forest of Bere charge for parking. People are very divided over this with some feeling it is acceptable if the fee is not too high and the income goes towards managing the site while others are vehemently opposed to paying. To avoid paying, people often park beyond the car park which can result in damage to verges and block access.

Other than at main recreation sites and in a few towns and villages there is a general lack of parking available to enable people to access the wider countryside within the Forest of Bere.

'I would walk more if there were more suitable car parks from which to do circular walks'

While there is a desire for additional parking provision (tourism officers, walkers and Parish Councils all identified a need for more), one large private land owner has reduced opportunities for parking in laybys (by filling them in) and on verges (by digging trenches) in an attempt to prevent obstruction and damage. 59% of farmers who participated in the Forest of Bere Farmers research report that blocking of gates or accesses by vehicles has been a problem in the last year.

Horse riders and those with limited mobility identified inconsiderately parked cars to be a problem; this is likely to be because most other groups can, albeit with difficulty, negotiate a vehicle to gain access to the desired route. Other parking issues include the lack of provision for horse box parking (issue 5) and

parking requirements of the less active/disabled visitors. These users especially value car parks in the countryside as the views and close proximity to nature contribute to a feeling of general wellbeing. It was mentioned that some car parks are provided but design and location do not always meet their needs (issue 6).

'Car parking and the therapeutic value of just driving into the countryside and sitting in the car are often overlooked and views not considered'

Although some Parish Councils and several users think that public transport to the countryside needs to be provided, the Integrated Access Demonstration Programme* has piloted a bus service in this area which proved to be unsustainable.

Research has shown that some people, although they live within or very close to the Forest of Bere study area, feel more connected with other areas of countryside. In particular some people who live east of the A3(M) in Havant, Rowlands Castle and Emsworth relate more to the Sussex countryside. Some who live to the south of the M27 found it easier to access the coast as these areas of countryside could be reached without having to negotiate significant urban areas. Other areas further afield such as the South Downs and New Forest are considered by some to be higher quality and therefore worth a longer journey.

* the Integrated Access Demonstration Programme was a national pilot project that developed new approaches to countryside recreation opportunities. It was joint project between the Countryside Agency and Hampshire County Council

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 1.1	Audit the existing car park provision and identify areas of need.	1a	♀				HCC / District & borough councils
FoB 1.2	If necessary, investigate the potential for a scheme for local landowners and rural businesses to provide car and horse box parking in key locations.	1a, d 3		♀	♀	£	HCC CLA / NFU / district & borough councils
FoB 1.3	Develop and promote sustainable linear and circular walking and cycling routes from communities into the countryside. Work with the HCAF and local people to identify priority links.	1b, c, e, f, g 2a	♀	££	££	££	HCC / HCAF District, borough and parish councils / Defra / landowners
FoB 1.4	Improve and promote existing bus and train services to countryside sites, and where they link with promoted routes, whenever the opportunity arises.	1d, e, f 2a 4c					HCC FC / NT / public transport providers
FoB 1.5	Develop and promote walking and cycle routes that connect with public transport links.	1b, d, e, f 2a		♀	£	£	HCC / bus companies / users

Issue 2 - There are insufficient off-road routes that link centres of population to each other and to countryside sites

The Forest of Bere is surrounded on three sides by significant urban populations, and there are also many towns and villages such as Bishops Waltham, Botley, Wickham, Denmead, Southwick and Havant that lie within the area.

The research has indicated that as development continues within the Forest of Bere, so the network of rights of way in these areas appears to be gradually being eroded. Routes that previously ran usefully from one place to another are becoming contorted and fractured as paths are diverted and extinguished. The increasing development potentially leads to an associated increase in traffic, adding to the danger on local roads that once served as links between the rights of way network and local centres.








Demand for safe, off-road walking and cycling routes has been identified linking the village and towns with both other towns and villages and major countryside sites. 66% of respondents to the Forest of Bere questionnaire stated that they would like more routes that linked the urban areas with the countryside and would use off-road links between countryside sites if they existed. These may take the form of public rights of way, permissive routes, verges and paths running alongside hedges parallel to roads. Any newly-created routes should be sited so as to avoid negative impact on wildlife.

Principal places raised as requiring links to other centres were Botley, Bishops Waltham, Denmead, Southwick and Whiteley. Countryside sites that require off-road links to them from local

centres of population were highlighted as Creech Woods, West Walk and Manor Farm Country Park. The lack of safe off-road links across the M27 was also identified, with Fareham, Paulsgrove and Portchester highlighted as needing links north into the Forest of Bere. Visitors to Portsdown Hill, which is a linear site with a busy road, find it difficult to access the wider countryside from the hill.

Research revealed that respondents generally felt that there were sufficient long distance promoted routes in the Forest of Bere and that they required more circular local routes. Linking populations in this way will help in meeting this demand.

This in turn can also be important for the rural economy. Those involved in local tourism favour activities that start or finish at local centres as this creates more of a 'package'; money is spent in local pubs, tearooms and other local facilities.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 2.1	Identify the routes required to establish links between key centres of population e.g. Botley to Bishops Waltham. Work with the HCAF to prioritise and implement these links.	1b, e, f			££	££	HCC / HCAF district, borough and parish councils / landowners / Defra
FoB 2.2	Identify the routes required to establish links between key countryside sites e.g. Creech Wood and West Walk. Work with the HCAF to prioritise and implement these links.	1b, e, f			££	££	HCC / HCAF / Forestry Commission / district, borough and parish councils / landowners / Defra
FoB 2.3	Identify the routes required to establish links from urban areas to countryside sites. Work with the HCAF to prioritise and implement these links.	1b, e, f			££	££	HCC / HCAF / district, borough and parish councils / landowners
FoB 2.4	Establish the principle for County farm estates, highway verges and other publicly owned land to make relevant links, where required.	1c, e, f					HCC

Issue 3 - There are limited resources for off-road cycling

There are limited opportunities for off-road cycling in the Forest of Bere as the density of rights of way available to cyclists is low and few sites offer routes for cycling. West Walk and Itchen Valley Country Park provide off-road circular cycle routes and supply leaflets about these. Cycling is allowed in most other Forestry Commission sites but this is not publicised well. Adventure cycling is provided for at Queen Elizabeth Country Park just beyond the north-eastern edge of the Forest of Bere and the Park is currently working with disabled cyclists in an innovative partnership. There is no charge for cycling at these sites but many participants drive to site and therefore pay indirectly through parking fees.

Over 50% of the people who completed the user group questionnaire replied that they would use more off-road cycle routes if they were available.

Currently Staunton Country Park and Manor Farm Country Park do not have designated cycle routes and a demand for these has been identified through the user questionnaire. Neither of these sites could meet the needs of adventure off-road cyclists due to topography and ground conditions - any future provision would be more appropriate for the family market. Hampshire County Council's Recreational Cycling Strategy (2002-2006) aims to increase recreational cycling and identifies 'novice cyclist and family groups' as a key target market. Experience has shown that new cycle facilities are at times under-used because they have suffered from a lack of publicity.

Family cyclists and younger cyclists prefer off-road routes, supported by good information and availability of facilities such

as safe parking, toilets, shops and cafés and are generally willing to travel to sites that offer such amenities. Many cyclists consulted expressed a desire for safe links from the urban areas into the countryside and between recreational sites (issue 2); however some specifically did not want all routes to be tarmacked or the countryside to be overly urbanised. Improvements to existing routes and provision of new, linear off-road routes to sites with designated routes add value to recreation sites that provide cycling facilities as they may help to reduce people's dependence on vehicles to get to sites.

Land managers (both private and public) identified a need for purpose built BMX tracks as they have experienced unauthorised tracks being constructed, with associated management problems.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 3.1	Develop cycle routes for a wide range of users within countryside sites that currently offer limited resources e.g. Staunton Country Park & Manor Farm Country Park.	1b, d, g	££	££	££	££	HCC
FoB 3.2	Work in partnership to identify other countryside sites where cycling resources can be developed.	1b, d, g			👤	££	HCC / district & borough councils/ FC / cycling groups
FoB 3.3	Liaise with young people to look at the need for purpose built BMX tracks and if viable develop the resource particularly as part of new development.	1a, b, c, d, g				👤	District & borough councils / FC / HCC / youth service/ youth council
FoB 3.4	Identify requirements for other provision such as cycle racks, cycle hire and cycle loan schemes.	1a, c, f	👤	£	£		HCC / FC
FoB 3.5	Increase the number of guided cycle rides.	1g 2a, c 5a, b, c	👤				HCC / cycling groups
FoB 3.6	Develop schemes to promote and provide safer cycling to school and places of work.	1c, e, f, g 2a	👤	👤	👤	👤	Sustrans / HCC / district & borough councils / schools

Issue 4 - There is an undersupply of access resource for horse riding and carriage driving

The Forest of Bere has 54% of the county wide average of equestrian rights of way per hectare. An Assessment of Riding Routes in South East Hampshire identified that over 2,300 horses are kept within the Forest of Bere area, although this did not specify whether they were ridden or driven.

Although 76% of horse riders and 100% of carriage drivers in the Forest of Bere agreed that there are not enough public rights of way where they live, they did not feel that existing routes were used to an extent that spoilt their enjoyment. Therefore the need for more routes arises not from existing routes being over crowded but from the limited choice of routes available and the lack of linking between existing routes forcing riders and drivers to use roads (issue 5).








Both horse riders and carriage drivers use the same routes time and time again, but 69% of horse riders and 94% of carriage drivers agreed that they enjoy planning and trying out new routes. This indicates that additional resources made available to these users will be utilised, even if riders are initially unfamiliar with them.

Regular, heavy use of this limited resource combined with local soils that have a high clay content results in routes becoming rutted and unusable in some cases (issue 9). Extending the existing access resource would give horse riders and carriage drivers more choice and spread the pressure of use across a wider network.

Over 60% of both horse riders and carriage drivers agreed that they would be willing to pay for access but there were many comments made, particularly by horse riders, about the poor quality of the resource that they are paying for and many questioned why horse riders and carriage drivers had to pay when cyclists and walkers use the same resource for free.

Many horse riders felt that Countryside Stewardship could be utilised more effectively to provide more access and specifically praised the scheme at Corhampton.

There is also an undersupply of routes available for trail riders and four-by-four vehicles users. There are only 5 BOATs (byways open to all traffic) and 4 RUPPs (roads used as a public path) within the Forest boundary.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 4.1	Continue to implement the strategic links identified by the Forest of Bere Equestrian Forum.	1b	£ 	£ 	£ 	£ 	HCC Local users / public & private landowners / district & borough councils.
FoB 4.2	Work with others to promote the use of agri-environment and other schemes to assist in the provision of good quality permissive equestrian access.	1b 2a 3					Defra / landowners / Toll Rides
FoB 4.3	Prioritise claims for bridleways or byways in the Forest of Bere area.	1b, c					HCC
FoB 4.4	Ensure that new planning applications for new horse livery yards give consideration to the access implications.	1a, c					Local planning authorities
FoB 4.5	Encourage horse owners to check that there are suitable riding routes accessible from where they intend to keep their horses.	1a, c					British Horse Society, Riding Clubs
FoB 4.6	Develop demonstration horse access projects on HCC estates & include access improvement in new tenancy agreements.	1a, b		£ 	£ 		HCC

Issue 5 – Countryside users are forced to use or cross busy roads to link up off-road access







This issue has arisen predominately from the equestrian research, but other users have also identified concerns with the use of minor and major roads required to link up off-road routes. 97% of horse riders and 100% of carriage drivers in the Forest of Bere use minor roads and 75% of horse riders and 95% of carriage drivers (10% higher than county average) use major roads to gain access to the countryside. Other users have noted increasing amounts of traffic within the Forest of Bere and raised concerns about the fragmentation of the countryside by busy roads.

Some roads may form an important part of the access network and there are major concerns about the safety of walkers, equestrians and cyclists who travel along or cross these highways. There are few official statistics available on road traffic accidents involving a horse but the equestrian research indicates that horse riders are more likely to have had a road traffic accident in the Forest of Bere than in the rest of the county and are more likely to have had a near miss.

*“It’s no good pretending that riding out on the roads is safe
– it just isn’t”*

Poor sight lines at junctions and having to cross busy roads are a problem encountered by nearly all carriage drivers (90%) and a vast majority of horse riders (78%). Whilst it is likely that the situation is very similar for cyclists and walkers, for equestrian users it is exacerbated by the unpredictable nature of horses and the position of the rider or driver. Portsdown Hill has been identified as a particular road safety problem for walkers and cyclists who wish to access the countryside of the Forest of Bere from the south.

The need to enhance the existing network by creating linkages to form circular routes and improving road crossing was cited as the most important improvement by equestrians. 93% of horse riders and 100% of carriage drivers in the Forest of Bere agreed that these improvements to the network would result in an increase in safety. Local cyclists have suggested that restricting speeds in rural locations will help to make roads safer.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 5.1	Continue to develop & implement the pilot Whole Network Approach* project that aims to improve the connectivity of routes in a specific area of Hampshire.	1b, c	 £	 £	 £	 £	HCC HCAF
FoB 5.2	Establish a better system to inform rights of way teams and users of new road schemes and more information on maintenance works.	1a					HCC
FoB 5.3	Prioritise the management and creation of routes that avoid busy roads.	1b, c					HCC Landowners
FoB 5.4	Identify verges that could be managed to provide safer links in the access network and agree standard of maintenance required.	1b, c					HCC Local users

* the Whole Network Approach is a Hampshire County Council pilot project that is examining the interconnectivity and recreational use of all the highways in a specific area of south east Hampshire. Further information available on HCC website at www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/access/projects.html


Issue 6 - There is a lack of awareness of users' requirements when creating new or managing existing access and access facilities

Equestrians expressed a need for a variety of routes that offered them opportunities to go faster than walk or trot; many resort to transporting their horses to ride in the New Forest or take part in hunts so that they can canter or gallop safely. Inappropriate surfacing is one of the problems as hard surfacing is sometimes used on very muddy or boggy patches. This may be a particular issue in the Forest of Bere, which has very heavy clay soils in some areas resulting in the need for hard surfacing so that routes can be used all year round.

Insufficient head clearance is a problem encountered by most horse riders and carriage drivers. Cutting overhanging vegetation is often the responsibility of the landowner, many of whom may not be aware how high overhanging vegetation needs to be cut for horse riders to use routes safely.

Many issues were raised by respondents in the Forest of Bere concerning the needs of people with a range of abilities that would like to visit the countryside. The condition of surfaces suitable for wheelchair users was a primary concern with problems ranging from loose gravel, slippery wooden bridges and boardwalks to eroded ramps and ruts. Gates that are used to replace stiles are not always wide enough and there is a demand for more seats and benches along rights of way so that people can take a rest.

In some cases where attempts have been made to provide access, the needs of different users (e.g. manual wheelchair users, power scooter users, people with pushchairs and those who are visually impaired) have not been fully understood, resulting in poor or inadequate facilities. This highlights the need for greater consultation and collaboration on schemes to improve access to the countryside for all to enjoy.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 6.1	Identify and develop channels for liaison with all types of users either through existing groups or new focus groups.	1a 2a					HCC District & borough councils / user groups / local disabled access and community groups / local HCAF / landowners
FoB 6.2	Increase the use of community groups when creating, providing and maintaining access.	1a		£	£	£	HCC / HCAF/ district, borough and parish councils / local working group* / user groups / local disabled access and community groups

* For each Countryside Access Plan area a local working group is established to advise on the production of the plan and guide and participate in the implementation.

Issue 7 - There is a lack of consideration for other users on multi use routes

There has been much debate and research into the conflict between users on highways where walkers, cyclists and horse riders share the same route. In the Countryside Agency Research Note CRN32 'How people interact on off-road routes' it was found that conflict is very infrequent, is generally slight and is mainly concerned with intrusion. Generally perceptions of conflict were found to be much higher than that actually experienced. User research carried out in the Forest of Bere has shown that people's experiences are very varied although cyclists are referred to more often. This may be due to the fact that they can move quite quickly and quietly, as demonstrated by this quote from a local cyclist:

'I enjoy off-road mountain biking fast and hard and should be more considerate when using shared paths. In the past I have had near misses with walkers. Enforcing usage rules may be less effective than graded paths similar to ski resorts'

and these quotes from local horse riders and carriage drivers:

'Inconsiderate motorbike and quad bike riders. Everyone else on the whole is great: pedestrians and cyclists'

'Motorcyclists are generally very courteous'

Although the experiences of conflict seem to be inconsistent on off-road routes and may be more to do with perception than actual incidences, carriage drivers ranked 'changing public attitudes towards carriage drivers and their needs' the highest priority for improvement. This could be due to the fact that carriage drivers often share roads and routes with motorised vehicles:

'The public need more information on equine behaviour e.g. how to pass a horse when driving, 40mph means 40mph not 60 mph'

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 7.1	Investigate avenues for educating all users on the Country Code and how to behave when meeting other users e.g. web, print and signage.	2a, b, c	♀	£	£	£	CA / HCC / user groups / district and borough councils
FoB 7.2	Develop ways of bringing together different user groups e.g. events and work parties and investigate further ways of promoting tolerance.	2a, b			♀	£	HCC / user groups / district and borough councils
FoB 7.3	Develop ways of engaging with young people to increase countryside literacy e.g. school visits, Trailblazer*.	2a, b 5a, b	♀	£	£	£	HCC / schools / Hampshire Country Learning

* Trailblazer is a scheme led by the Outdoor Unit, Hampshire County Council which provides a framework for schools and youth groups to reward young people for the time they spend exploring, discovering and caring for the environment.

Issue 8 - Many farmers and landowners find that providing public access entails a work load and financial burden

A survey of farmers in the Forest of Bere showed that the vast majority (84%) had rights of way on their land and 22% stated that the public had permissive access to their land. Most farmers therefore have some experience of managing public access. The survey also showed that increasing public access is a low priority for most farmers, coming after maintaining the safety and security of land, buildings and machinery, managing a viable business, developing business opportunities, and conservation work.

Landowners are responsible for elements of maintenance on rights of way - ensuring that paths are clear of crops or other obstructions such as fallen trees, keeping side and overhanging vegetation from encroaching the path, and maintaining stiles, gates or alternative structures crossing fences/hedges. The County Council is responsible for signposting and waymarking, surface vegetation clearance and maintaining some bridges; there are also local agreements beyond this for the maintenance of paths which form part of a long distance route.


In addition to their legal responsibilities, farmers frequently encounter problems caused by members of the public; over the four weeks preceding the survey, 53% of farmers reported litter, 53% dogs not under control; 47% trespass, 31% gates/access blocked by vehicles and 31% vandalism. All of these problems cause extra work for the farmer, and along with the low priority that access has in the running of a farm, are likely to dissuade farmers from opening up further access, or in some cases from ensuring that existing paths are kept open and maintained to the legal standard. In the Forest of Bere user questionnaire, 44% of

respondents agreed that they had been put off using rights of way by deterrent notices (for example 'Private – Keep Out').

Only 22% of respondents in the farmers' survey stated that they would be willing to increase public access if given sufficient financial incentive. Most were aware of funding available for access through such schemes as 'Countryside Stewardship' but there is little take-up of this in the Forest of Bere. More than two-thirds of respondents felt that greater access would create more work for no meaningful return, that it would mean higher insurance premiums and that it would lower commercial value of the land.

However, the survey also showed that many farmers are actively involved in the community and there is evidence to show that farmers will tolerate the workload to provide access if it is well used - 72% of farmers agreed that it would be best to have a network of routes that people actually used rather than being concerned with historical rights of way that are not required.

'There is a huge amount of improvement to the access network that could be made with simple and sensible compromise between owners/occupiers and user groups, and all at little cost'

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 8.1	Ensure that HCC staff are kept informed of new funding opportunities available to farmers so that they may help promote funding for access improvements where appropriate.	1b, c 3					HCC / Defra / NFU / CLA
FoB 8.2	Improve signage and include destination and distance on some routes, as part of a pilot project to increase user confidence and reduce unintentional trespass.	1c, g 2a, b 3 5a, b, c		££ 			HCC Relevant land owners / managers
FoB 8.3	In areas of particular conflict, establish a close working relationship with land managers to seek resolution of issues on both sides.	2b, c					HCC Relevant land owners / managers
FoB 8.4	Develop opportunities for local volunteer groups to work with landowners to maintain access routes, e.g. through Hampshire Paths Partnership and HCC Small Grants Scheme.	2b, c 3 5a, b					HCC / parish councils / local community groups

Issue 9 - Multi use routes in the Forest of Bere are in a worse condition than the rest of the county

The Forest of Bere research indicated that most of the user respondents thought that the condition of rights of way in the area was adequately maintained although concern was raised regarding regular crop obstruction by landowners. The research revealed that some felt that certain landowner practices themselves could have a detrimental effect on the access network, for example, uncleared ditches leading to localised flooding and forestry vehicles creating large ruts. In contrast the majority of horse riders and just under half of the carriage drivers who responded agreed that equestrian rights of way in the Forest of Bere are maintained in a poor state.

The main problems encountered by horse riders on rights of way are: insufficient head clearance, rough surfaces/deep ruts, muddy/boggy/flooded routes and vegetation encroachment. Whilst these are the top four problems across the county the situation is magnified within the Forest of Bere.


Insufficient head clearance is often caused by overhanging vegetation, which is the responsibility of the landowner and not the Highway Authority, as is encroachment from side vegetation; however the Highway Authority should maintain vegetation on the surface of the route.

There may be specific reasons why the situation regarding maintenance is perceived as being worse within the Forest of Bere than in other areas of Hampshire and many of these have been highlighted in Issue 1.

There is a smaller network of equestrian routes along with a high number of horse riders and carriage drivers in the Forest of Bere. This concentrates the use onto the same routes over and over again and, coupled with the heavy clay soil conditions in the area, results in muddy, rutted routes.

Some of the permissive riding route schemes have also been criticised for their poor quality and inadequate maintenance.

' We pay to ride in the Forest of Bere however during winter, paths are too muddy (heavy clay) and not upgraded so we may use them all year round'

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 9.1	Produce information to raise awareness of the minimum requirements with those responsible for cutting overhanging vegetation.	1c					HCC / NFU / CLA
FoB 9.2	Prioritise the maintenance of bridleways and re-distribute funding to take account of the increased cost of works caused by soil type.	1c					HCC
FoB 9.3	Research, test and get advice on most appropriate surfacing materials for all users.	1a					HCC HCAF / local users
FoB 9.4	Build on existing local volunteer groups which assist in improving access provision.	1c					HCC

Issue 10 - Uncontrolled dogs and fouling are a deterrent to countryside users and make managing land for access both costly and hazardous

Many people using the countryside do so to walk their dogs and in law dogs are generally assumed to be a 'usual accompaniment' on a right of way. Forest of Bere farmer research shows that nearly all farmers asked agreed that dog owners are unaware of the problems their animals can cause in the countryside and 84% said that they had experienced trouble with dogs chasing livestock, particularly sheep, and game such as pheasant, partridge and hare.






Within the Forest of Bere research public land managers also raised the issue of dog and owner behaviour, stating that dogs out of control may worry livestock and that this can make it more difficult to find graziers. Ensuring that people keep their dogs under control requires a range of measures including the installation of often costly fencing and increased supervision.

Although users of the countryside have indicated that uncontrolled dogs are a problem, more widely recognised was the effect that dog fouling has on the countryside and their enjoyment of it. Local authorities have a duty to keep certain types of land under their control (e.g. recreation grounds) clear of dog faeces and dog bins are installed at some countryside sites. The majority of parish councils that responded were very concerned about dog fouling on their land.

It is acknowledged by both users of the countryside and land managers that dog fouling puts people off visiting the countryside. Catherington Down Nature Reserve, for example, experiences a large amount of dog use. A County Council survey of the site found that 75-80% of the users were dog walkers and that the majority of people who chose not to use it were put off by the dog fouling. Dog fouling is also extremely unpleasant for wheelchair users.

From a land management point of view, maintaining rights of way and countryside sites where dog fouling has taken place is hazardous, particularly when undertaking such activities as mowing and strimming. Dog use of a site also restricts management of nutrient-poor habitats as nutrient enrichment can occur through fouling.

Where dog bins are provided they are well used, however collection of waste is costly and the installation of bins can lead to urbanisation of the countryside.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 10.1	Seek to establish a common approach to minimising problems on publicly-maintained sites, through appropriate use of composting dog bins, byelaws, advice and enforcement, designated dog walks and pick-up areas.	1c 2b, c 3 4a, c		 ££	 £		HCC FC / NT / HWT / RSPB / district, borough and parish councils
FoB 10.2	Seek to increase awareness of appropriate behaviour amongst dog walkers, through a positive educational campaign supported by on-site notices and staff involvement if sites are publicly managed.	2a, b, c		 £	 £		HCC / CA / HCAF / land managers, dog owning groups / NFU / CLA / district, borough and parish councils

Issue 11 - Crime and misuse of the countryside is costly for those managing land with access and affects people's enjoyment

The Forest of Bere Farmer research shows that over 80% of the farmers who responded stated that they had experienced problems with litter, dogs out of control (see issue 10) and trespass in the last year. 84% of the farmers believe that the public have low awareness of how to behave in the countryside, rather than acting out of malice. In a young persons' survey of South East Hampshire only one person in five claimed to know about the Country Code, and once in the countryside 30% were unsure of what they were or were not allowed to do.








There are, however, some incidents reported by farmers that can only be explained as deliberate acts, such as fly tipping, vandalism, fires, theft and unauthorised camping. This type of behaviour is not only costly in terms of landowner time and money in remedying damage caused, but shows a complete lack of respect for others. This can result in the landowner being less than welcoming towards legitimate users of the countryside, for example respondents to the research reported deterrent notices and deliberate obstruction.

'My main concern with public access is nuisance, damage and theft. I have had experience of all of these and opening up the farm to more people just gives criminals easier ways to scout around. My latest problem has been six 'travellers' caravans in a hay field for two weeks, so I am probably even more biased against public access than I was!'

Over 70% of respondents to the Forest of Bere questionnaire said that the amount of litter and fly tipping in some areas affected their enjoyment of the countryside and almost 80% agreed that some people did not know how to behave in the

countryside. This was a much higher percentage than those who said that fear for personal safety affected their enjoyment, although this is of real concern to some. Attack on personal property is also a concern, with reports having been made of damage to, and theft from, cars.

Within the research concern was also raised about the unauthorised use of countryside sites and rights of way by motorised off-road vehicles. Land managers state that removal of abandoned vehicles and repair to damage caused is costly, while off-road vehicle users are concerned that the behaviour of a few all too often damages the reputation of other users.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 11.1	Audit District Council approaches to fly-tipping and seek to encourage frequent monitoring and clearing of countryside areas which are particularly badly affected.	1c			 £		District and borough councils HCC / Police/ Environment Agency / NFU / relevant landowners
FoB 11.2	Endeavour to identify regular fly-tippers and encourage and publicise prosecutions.	2c				 £	District and borough councils HCC / Police / Environment Agency / NFU / relevant landowners
FoB 11.3	Seek to increase public knowledge of appropriate behaviour – support the use of existing information, including codes of conduct and the new Country Code; where insufficient, provide information in a variety of formats for a variety of users; investigate locally-based information provision.	2a, b, c 4a, c		 £	 £	£	HCC / HCAF / user groups / landowners / NFU / EA / CRH / schools and local youth groups

Issue 12 - Public access to the countryside can have a negative impact on land management for conservation and the sustainability of vulnerable species and habitats

Within the Forest of Bere there are 11 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and over 500 Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation. The Forest of Bere Farmer research shows that 50% of the farmers asked were actively involved in conservation work.

In the last ten years the population of the area has almost doubled and there has been a resultant increase in visitor numbers to the surrounding countryside. With further development planned, these numbers will continue to grow. For example, the number of visitors to Staunton Country Park has grown by 13% since 1993.

The Forest of Bere research has identified a division in public opinion regarding the potential conflict between access and conservation. 50% of those asked stated that access to the countryside should be unrestricted, yet 33% agreed that people using the Forest of Bere are likely to damage it. There is also considerable concern about 'urbanisation' of the countryside.







'Areas more than 2 miles from car parks could perhaps be left for those who love wild places.'

*'Do not turn the forests into Theme Parks
– there are plenty of urban playgrounds...'*

It is felt by many land managers within the Forest of Bere however, that public access can have a significant impact on wildlife and a corresponding impact on management practices for

conservation. It is significant that during the Foot and Mouth outbreak (when public access was restricted) increased wildlife activity was noticed, particularly among sensitive bird species such as nightingale and hobby. There was also an increase in diversity of downland plants. Access to land by uncontrolled dogs (see issue10) can have serious consequences for management of land for conservation and wildlife, particularly in the case of ground nesting birds.

At Botley Woods, Whiteley, a decrease has been noted in the number of nightingales over past years. Suggested reasons for this are fragmentation and loss of habit through development, light disturbance or access disturbance; the probable cause is a combination of all three. As development continues to have impact on the landscape of the area and more people wish to access the countryside, it is possible that certain vulnerable species will be lost on sites that cater for public access as well as carrying out a conservation function.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 12.1	Adopt positive management of sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identify sites where access has an unsustainable negative impact on conservation and investigate the provision of 'sanctuary areas' to rectify this; - ensure routes are well-signed to avoid inadvertent encroachment and creation of unwanted informal paths; - provide for specific needs in suitable areas e.g. BMX tracks in robust areas. 	4c 5a		 ££			HCC HWT / FC / NT / RSPB
FoB 12.2	Promote good practice on managing for conservation on all HCC sites (including on Rights of Way) and other public access land.	4a, c 5a		 £			HCC HWT / FC / NT
FoB 12.3	Promote educational opportunities on biodiversity and countryside conservation Teach good practice via interpretation panels and information provision about the countryside and wildlife.	4a, c					FoBP

Issue 13 - The information provided about the access resource for all users is inadequate

Information on where to go in the Forest of Bere is provided by a number of organisations including local district councils, parish councils and the Forestry Commission. Hampshire County Council produces leaflets for three long distance walks in the area (the Wayfarers Walk, Pilgrims Trail and Staunton Way), a guided walk booklet and two packs of off-road cycle routes, some of which are in the Forest of Bere, as well as a guide to the countryside for people who have a range of abilities called 'Hampshire's Accessible Countryside'.

The leaflets produced are very popular, but people have commented on the difficulty in getting hold of copies. Whilst only a few leaflets are charged for, many people expressed a dislike in having to pay for them. Some of the respondents mentioned the usefulness of the Guided Walks booklet in getting less confident people out into the countryside but felt that the 75p charge may put some people off buying it. The need to keep leaflets up to date and to incorporate more information about refreshments and accommodation was mentioned during interviews with tourism officers.

There is very little information about the access resource provided by any organisation aimed at horse riders and carriage drivers. 57% of horse riders and 70% of carriage drivers would like to see more information provided, particularly on box parking. The Ordnance Survey maps show all footpaths, bridleways and byways and are used regularly, but only occasionally do they indicate where there are permissive routes. In the Forest of Bere there are a large number of permissive routes and schemes as well as local private agreements. In many




cases these are not widely promoted due to the fact that they are already over-subscribed or they are mainly for local use only.

The need for more interpretation on long distance routes has been suggested along with the need for more local information on parish notice boards. Hampshire Paths Partnership is already undertaking some of this work in collaboration with Parish Councils, producing parish information boards showing rights of way, other access opportunities and amenities in the parish and surrounding area.

Through the young persons' study it was found that, once in the countryside, 30% of young people are not sure what they are allowed to do and would like to see more details on way marks and sign posts particularly showing the destination and distance.

'Most of the signs just say footpath or whatever, well which footpath?'

The Countryside of the Forest of Bere as a whole is currently providing a limited resource for education and awareness-raising on conservation management, landscape history and farming practices.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 13.1	Investigate a better system for providing information, auditing current print and looking at other avenues e.g. local newspapers, websites, dedicated publications for each user group, Hampshire-wide information.	2a					HCC / other access providers / local community groups
FoB 13.2	Determine what additional information is required by all user groups as part of promoting access to the countryside, including alternative formats as required under the DDA.	1a					HCC / user groups / local community groups
FoB 13.3	Develop an improved system for producing and distributing information. Use Forest of Bere website to provide information on access opportunities.	2a		£	£	£	HCC/FoBP Other access providers / local community groups




Issue 14 - Poor communication between users and access providers leads to misunderstandings

Maintenance responsibilities for rights of way are split between the Highway Authority (Hampshire County Council) and landowners (issue 8). Some users and organisations are unaware of the division of responsibilities which leads to issues being reported to Hampshire County Council that could perhaps be more effectively dealt with at a local level. Some landowners are not aware of their responsibilities and this can lead to paths not being managed and becoming unfit for their intended purpose.

User groups including the Ramblers' Association and the British Horse Society, parish councils and individuals all report problems on the rights of way network to Hampshire County Council; on average 65 reports are received each month for the Forest of Bere area. Reports are prioritised using a recently adopted system to ensure they are dealt with fairly and in an appropriate order. Whilst the County Council responds to complaints about the access network this does not include information on how or when the issue will be dealt with. This has led to the same problems being multi-reported or lesser problems not being reported at all. Some groups, including some Parish Councils, do not have the copies of the definitive maps in their area and therefore may not be able to identify a path by its correct reference; this can lead to misunderstanding over the exact location of a problem.

Within the Forest of Bere there are good examples of access providers working with users including the Safe Riding Routes Forum (Hampshire County Council and horse rider and carriage driver representatives) and the Area Officer Liaison Meetings (Hampshire County Council Rights of Way Area Officers and user group representatives) which were first held in 2003 and will be repeated annually. Such initiatives help keep users informed and help prioritise work to best meet needs.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act will provide for 'open access' on specified sites (currently being identified by the Countryside Agency). There are already many misconceptions on the part of both users and land managers as to the exact nature of this provision, and there is a need to ensure users and landowners are aware of their rights and responsibilities before this access becomes available.

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 14.1	Encourage more joint working between access providers and users to assist in developing projects and identifying priorities.	1a 2a, b					HCC Public and private land managers / local users and user groups
FoB 14.2	Promote responsibilities to both access providers and users.	1a			£		HCC Public and private land managers / local users and user groups
FoB 14.3	Improve communication between providers and people reporting problems.	1a 2a, b					HCC Local users and user groups
FoB 14.4	Promote rights and responsibilities associated with new 'open access' legislation.	1a 2a					HCAF / HCC Land managers / owners
FoB 14.5	Develop opportunities for local people to learn about the farming environment and business by providing on-farm interpretation, farm walks etc	2a, b, c 3					FoBP / HCC / land managers and owners

Issue 15 - New legislation is imposing a cut-off date for historical rights of way

Under Section 53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, local authorities have a duty to keep the definitive map and statement under continuous review. It is possible for a member of the public to claim a route as public by virtue of twenty years uninterrupted use or historic evidence. The claims are recorded by Hampshire County Council and investigated in date order.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 has introduced a cut off date (2026) for claims made for rights of way that were in existence before 1949 and this will inevitably place greater pressure on researchers, typically volunteers, to claim new rights of way on this basis. Such routes will be unable to be claimed as carrying public rights beyond 2026, even if they continue to be in use.

The Countryside Agency is looking at ways of dealing with the number of unrecorded routes through the Lost Ways Project. It is intended that it will employ salaried researchers as well as volunteers to carry out research into historic routes. 44% of respondents in the Forest of Bere equestrian research stated that they would be willing to help research unrecorded rights of way.




This will inevitably lead to a greater number of claims being made to amend the Definitive Map[†] and record new or higher public rights of way. At present there are 5 claims based on historic evidence within the Forest of Bere that are waiting for investigation and there is currently a 5 year waiting list.

Over the past few years there has been a marked increase in the number of public inquiries resulting from claims for new rights of way; these are onerous in terms of time required and cost to the public purse.

Responses to the Forest of Bere equestrian research suggest that, although many were willing to help with research, in terms of improvements to the network, active equestrians are more interested in immediate practical solutions that will enhance their riding experience rather than longer term more academic solutions.

The primary concerns raised during research related to both the potential to lose a great number of routes and the fear that resources that could be channelled into physical maintenance works on the ground, would instead be used to fund potential public inquiries.

[†] The Definitive Map is the legal record of public rights of way

Proposed Actions		Potential Benefits (see page 7)	Estimated Additional Costs				Lead Bodies & Potential Partners
			2005	2006	2007	2008	
FoB 15.1	Prioritise order of investigation of claims by needs identified in the appropriate Countryside Access Plan.	1b					HCC HCAF
FoB 15.2	Seek to identify and claim unrecorded cut-throughs, cycle tracks and paths in towns.	1b		£ 			User groups / HCC / district & borough councils
FoB 15.3	Consider diversions where they meet needs identified in the appropriate Countryside Access Plan (current policy precludes processing of claims unless significant public benefit).	1c					HCC

Importance of issues for Forest of Bere Countryside Access Plan – ranking by Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (HCAF) and Forest of Bere Equestrian Forum (FoBEF) Appendix 1

Issue No	Issue	HCAF	FoBEF
1	There are difficulties in getting to the Forest of Bere to enjoy the countryside.	High	High
2	There are insufficient off-road routes that link centres of population to each other and to countryside sites	Medium	Medium
3	There are limited resources for off-road cycling	Low	Low
4	There is an undersupply of access resource for horse riding and carriage driving	High	High
5	Countryside users are forced to use or cross busy roads to link up off-road access	High	High
6	There is a lack of awareness of users' requirements when creating new or managing existing access and access facilities	Medium	Low
7	There is a lack of consideration for other users on multi use routes	Low	Medium
8	Many farmers and landowners find that providing public access entails a work load and financial burden	High	Medium
9	Multi use routes in the Forest of Bere are in a worse condition than the rest of the county	Medium	High
10	Uncontrolled dogs and fouling are a deterrent to countryside users and make managing land for access both costly and hazardous	High	Low
11	Crime and misuse of the countryside is costly for those managing land with access and affects people's enjoyment	Medium	Medium
12	Public access to the countryside can have a negative impact on land management for conservation and the sustainability of vulnerable species and habitats	Medium	Low
13	The information provided about the access resource for all users is inadequate	Low	Low
14	Poor communication between users and access providers leads to misunderstandings	Low	Low
15	New legislation is imposing a cut-off date for historical rights of way	Low	Low

Diagram of process used to produce Countryside Access Plans

Appendix 2

