



Hampshire
County Council

Countryside

Countryside Access Plan 2025-2035

AT A GLANCE

This document is a summary of the
Countryside Access Plan 2025-2035

Purpose and scope

Hampshire's Countryside Access Network is an extensive and diverse resource, highly valued by both residents and visitors. It not only serves as a transport network but also enriches our quality of life by contributing to physical and mental wellbeing, fostering community cohesion, and supporting a robust rural economy.

Under Section 60 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 every Local Authority must prepare, publish, and update a Rights of Way Improvement Plan every ten years. Hampshire County Council's Countryside Access Plan fulfils this requirement, whilst also addressing the broader Countryside Access Network managed by the Countryside Service. Within this statutory duty we must:

Produce a Countryside Access Plan (CAP) which aims to guide the efforts of Hampshire County Council, its partners, and the communities of Hampshire towards safely maintaining and enhancing the network of access provisions over the next ten years. Additionally, it seeks to identify new sources of income to support these improvements. The 2025 CAP recognises the financial position that the county now finds itself in and looks to make the best use of available resources. The Plan has also been designed to adapt to any other financial changes within its tenure. It seeks to continue the great work of the Service through alternative means which include:

- Better sourcing and use of external funding.
- Building on existing partnerships and seeking new ones.
- Volunteering to support our work.



New areas of focus

■ Planning and transport systems

Hampshire is expected to face significant developmental pressures over the next decade, necessitating a strategic focus on enhancing the Public Rights of Way network and Countryside Access. The Plan aims to influence local plans and planning decisions, ensuring Hampshire County Council's stance on Countryside Access is considered, thereby protecting and improving the network. This will involve proactive engagement with planning authorities and developers, leveraging planning obligations and policies to promote active travel, recreational activities, and mitigate the impacts of development on countryside access.

Guiding Principles:

Seek to effectively engage with the planning process to ensure suitable and sustainable mitigation and compensation for direct and indirect impacts in accordance with national and local policy. This includes encouraging positive local policy that supports the protection and enhancement of the network for Countryside Access and Green Infrastructure.

Pursue enhancements to Countryside Access including improving interconnectivity and accessibility of the network, reflecting the changing patterns of existing and new residents' needs, and the evidenced public health benefits of access to nature and landscape.

■ Health and wellbeing

Nature plays a crucial role in supporting health and wellbeing, with government recommendations highlighting the importance of local green and blue spaces. Hampshire County Council aims to increase healthy life years and reduce health disparities by addressing key health determinants such as environment, travel, food, education, and community connections. Aligning countryside, nature, and health priorities can enhance the quality of life, support physical and mental health, and mitigate environmental issues, particularly benefitting disadvantaged communities.

Guiding Principle:

To support the health and wellbeing of all communities within Hampshire, we aim to provide a network that ensures physical access and encourages its use, promoting the link between regular Countryside Access and improved health outcomes.

To work with Public Health, NHS and other partners (e.g. Mind) to explore funding and opportunities to work together to develop initiatives that promote health and wellbeing through improved access to Public Rights of Way.



Accessibility for all (physical, mental, cultural, socioeconomic)

Access to the countryside is crucial for health and wellbeing, but not everyone in Hampshire can equally enjoy these natural spaces. The Countryside Access Plan aims to identify and address barriers to access, such as physical, mental, cultural, or socioeconomic challenges, through engagement with underrepresented groups. By improving access and providing clear information, the Plan seeks to reduce inequalities and ensure that everyone can benefit from Hampshire's natural resources.

Guiding Principles:

To understand the physical and mental barriers to accessing the countryside in the county and, where practical, working with others to take action to overcome them.

The Countryside Access Plan and the work of the Countryside Service will, through its management of sites, open spaces and the wider Rights of Way network, seek to provide access for all to the countryside and natural environment, within the bounds of what is reasonably feasible.

Climate change/resilience and environment

Hampshire County Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019 set targets for carbon neutrality and resilience to climate impacts, which will create challenges when maintaining countryside infrastructure and managing visitors. The refreshed Plan includes measures to integrate our resilience and response to climate change impacts, emphasising collaboration, education, and sustainable practices to support and balance both the environment and users of the network. Meeting our service aim to connect people with nature whilst balancing usage and conservation, fostering lifelong connections and a desire to protect nature.

Guiding Principle:

To strike the balance between encouraging both Countryside Access and nature recovery whilst building on climate change resilience within our work.

Understanding the importance of access to the coastline. Seek to work with partners to proactively adapt coastal access, to ensure that access responds to the challenge of our changing coastline.



Delivery Areas

The refreshed CAP features three delivery areas, each accompanied by an action table detailing a success plan. To distinguish between statutory duties and non-mandatory actions that are highly beneficial to the network and community but require external funding, we have established three categories to prioritise each action point. Each action is categorised and assigned a corresponding funding stream.

Timescale output	
S	Short term – 1 to 4 years
M	Medium term – 3 to 7 years
L	Long term – Implemented throughout, completed within 10 years
Funding stream	
HCC	Hampshire County Council
P	Hampshire County Council with External Partner Organisations
E	External Funding Only
Priority level	
S	Statutory: Actions that Hampshire County Council is legally required to do or that support our legal obligations; these actions will take priority.
DP	Discretionary Preventative: Non-statutory projects that have a clear demonstrable long-term value for money. For example, those which significantly benefit community health and wellbeing, thereby reducing the burden on the healthcare system or removing the need for vehicle use which reduces emissions and socioeconomic inequality.
D	Discretionary: Actions that are not statutory and would require external funding but will assist in our duties as Highway Authority and would be valuable to the network and Hampshire residents.
Annual Review and Implementation Planning	
<p>The service will produce annual reviews to monitor progress against the Plan. It will also develop annual implementation plans that respond to changing conditions and funding availability, while continuing to deliver the actions set out in the Plan. This will be done in collaboration with the five Protected Landscapes and the three Local Access Forums, ensuring that local priorities and insights are reflected in both the review and planning processes.</p>	

Delivery Area A: Developing a strategic approach to network management

Action	Output timescale	Funding stream	Priority category
A1: Seek early interaction with the planning system, including partnership with local planning authorities and involvement at local plan writing stage; to include the production of new and revised guidance.	L	HCC	S
A2: Examine, and update where appropriate, existing policies and working practices, and develop new policies and practices, to ensure the Service operates efficiently and responsively. To include within the first year a review of the policy on the Management of Vehicles in the Countryside and the use of Traffic Regulation Orders.	L	HCC	S
A3: Where safety concerns are identified on or near byways, restricted byways or T roads, seek practical solutions to mitigate issues.	L	HCC/ P/E	S
A4: Identify changes required following new legislation or best practice and update policies and processes as appropriate, giving precedence to strategically important routes where possible. To include a full review of our policies.	L	HCC	S
A5: Create an Accessibility / Least Restrictive statement by seeking to better understand the barriers to accessing the countryside whether that be disability, socioeconomic, cultural or any other barriers. Work with Partners to identify routes that can be improved for accessibility.	S	HCC	S
A6: Provide digital information on accessibility to routes (possibly adapting mapping systems to show structures, surfacing, seating, route types, facilities etc); provide better facilities at our Country Parks; review design standards for structures, surfacing and the removal of limitations on access routes.	L	HCC/P	S
A7: Early engagement with other internal teams and partners, particularly those within Protected Landscapes such as the National Park Authorities, is essential to ensure our objectives align and do not conflict with others. This collaboration helps us fulfil our duty to advance the purposes of these designated areas, especially concerning the impact on the natural environment and nature recovery. It also ensures that all opportunities for working together are thoroughly explored.	L	HCC	S/DP



Delivery Area A: Developing a strategic approach to network management

Action	Output timescale	Funding stream	Priority category
A8: Seek to create an evolving network which can upgrade and flex with landscape changes through the legal instruments available to the Authority and activities under the other action outcomes. Provide and implement Green Wheels around settlements, creating better connections between communities and to green space and the natural environment.	L	HCC/P/E	DP
A9: Following consultation with key stakeholders, work with the National Park and National Landscape authorities, borough and district councils to collaboratively produce a district-based mapping layer, including dedicated sections for Protected Landscapes. This will support the development of strategically important routes and Green Wheels, and assist both the Authority's strategic planning role as a consultee, Hampshire's planning authorities, partners, landowners and developers to get the best outcome for joined-up public access.	M	HCC/P	DP
A10: Audit the strategically important routes and develop a strategy to proactively manage them when funding becomes available, incorporating path maintenance, improvements to surface/drainage/structures, signage and promotion of through-routes and creation of new links. Seek to remove structures which limit use by people with mobility difficulties.	L	HCC/P	DP
A11: Maximise the use of external funding opportunities to develop and enhance strategically important routes. Forge connections with partners including Local Economic Partnerships, planning authorities and the Health and Wellbeing Board, and form links both internally and externally where joint objectives can be met more efficiently through working together. Develop a suite of costed schemes to call on when responding to short term funding opportunities.	L	HCC/P/E	DP
A12: Deliver improvements to strategically important routes as opportunities arise, whether through funding availability, landowner assistance or proactive interaction with the planning system.	L	HCC/P/E	DP
A13: Revise internal policies to ensure that strategically important routes have a high priority, including for maintenance, resolving issues and changes to the Definitive Map.	S	HCC	D

Delivery Area B: Working with other organisations and with volunteers

Action	Output timescale	Funding stream	Priority category
B1: Enhance and diversify volunteering opportunities, including increasing volunteer hours, while expanding outreach to ensure broader community involvement and coverage.	L	HCC/P	DP
B2: Co-ordinate and integrate the contribution of volunteers in the day-to-day work of the Countryside Service; enable groups to work independently where appropriate.	L	HCC/P	DP
B3: Identify appropriate and accessible grants, provide advice and toolkits to enable communities to develop solutions to local issues. Continue to develop existing initiatives such as stile-free routes and the Path Warden Scheme and seek to expand this where appropriate.	L	HCC/P/E	DP
B4: Where there is a community, a group or a landowner who wishes to do so, enable and support them to maintain and improve specific routes/parts of the network in an appropriate manner.	L	HCC/P/E	DP
B5: Support Parish and Town Councils through events, regular liaison with officers, and promoting and reviewing the Parish Reference Guide to help them utilise their powers and support our statutory duties. Where appropriate participate in new clerk training and assist Parishes in developing work programmes for their lengthsman or contractors, further supporting our statutory duties.	L	HCC	DP
B6: Build on further Parish and Town Council involvement in network management and improvement providing them with more support and guidance e.g. wardening, the formation of voluntary Parish working groups, path problem report protocols and training.	L	HCC/P	DP

Delivery Area C: Listening, Informing, Educating

Action	Output timescale	Funding stream	Priority category
C1: Incorporate climate change resilience in the work that we do, identifying areas at most risk and prioritising response to areas which bring the most benefit to local communities. Specifically, develop an approach to the management of coastal access that mitigates the impact of coastal change.	M	HCC	S
C2: Continue to work on providing adequate signage on the network with support from volunteers. Explore the use of user group symbols on signage and use of QR codes for providing information such as Protected Landscapes and Nature Conservation designations.	L	HCC/P	S
C3: Work with groups such as the Local Access Forums to increase understanding between different types of users, increase understanding of landowner perspectives and impacts of climate change on the network. Create better links and engagement with less explored user groups, representatives and communities of all ages.	M	HCC/P	S/DP
C4: Review the approach to promotion of routes – explore the potential for partnerships with other organisations, seek to create volunteer wardening and maintenance groups.	M	P	DP
C5: Revise the Countryside Access webpages to ensure that information is easy to find, up-to-date and accurate. Ensure information such as the Countryside Code is available to enable inexperienced or less confident users to make the most of the network.	S	HCC	DP
C6: Develop the use of social media to promote a wider awareness and to provide appropriate, timely updates. Seek better attendance at community events with targeted professional materials to get the most impact.	M	HCC	DP
C7: Continue to develop online mapping to show path issues which have been reported and progress in resolving them.	M	HCC	DP
C8: Build on current partnerships with volunteers to map infrastructure such as gates, stiles, steps, and bridges, both for public information and to assist in asset and network management; commencing with the strategically important routes.	L	HCC/P	DP



Delivery Area C: Listening, Informing, Educating

Action	Output timescale	Funding stream	Priority category
C9: Explore possibilities for improving understanding among children of how to find and use the Countryside Access Network, working through existing channels such as school visits to Country Parks, Trailblazer and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programmes and supporting Parish and Town Councils who are interested in doing so.	M	HCC/P	DP
C10: Collate and review existing customer satisfaction and performance data. Develop ways of gathering feedback and providing information in remote locations. Develop cost-effective mechanisms to enable annual monitoring and reporting against the Countryside Access Plan objectives.	S	HCC	DP

