

Countryside for All Good Practice Guide



A Guide to Disabled People's Access in the Countryside



Contents

Contents	2
Foreword	3
Introduction	4
Acknowledgements	9
The Guide's Sections	10
Using this CD-ROM	Navigation tips for finding your way around the guide 11
Feed-back Form	Let us have your comments 12
Accessibility Standards	Setting standards for countryside paths and trails
Networking Guidelines	Supporting joint working between people who provide countryside services and disabled people
Information Guidelines	Providing information about countryside opportunities
Transport Guidelines	Providing accessible transport in the countryside
Interpretation Guidelines	Providing accessible countryside interpretation
Events Management Guidelines	Staging accessible countryside events
Least Restrictive Access Guidelines	Improving access for disabled people on all countryside paths and trails
Countryside Path Network Guidelines	Planning accessibility across countryside path networks
Accessibility Surveys and Access Audit Guidelines	Surveying and auditing countryside paths and trails for accessibility
Guidelines on the Implications of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 for Countryside Service Providers	Avoiding discrimination against disabled people
Information Sheets	Information on the countryside access needs of disabled people

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Foreword

I like, many other people, find regular access to the countryside is an essential balance to the pressures in our lives today. Ten years ago I first became concerned that people with disabilities could not enjoy that essential access to the countryside which should provide us all with opportunities to relax, explore, or even perhaps have an adventure. It should be enjoyed every day by all people independently or as a shared experience with family and friends.

In the last ten years there has been a lot of progress in improving countryside access opportunities for disabled people. The BT Countryside for All project, which I led as BT's Director of Corporate Affairs, has come and gone but left an impressive legacy which has been built on by many individuals and organisations in the voluntary, private and public sectors. Many of our partners in that groundbreaking project have made remarkable strides in promoting equal opportunities in countryside recreation. That group of partners have continued to meet, cooperate and share our efforts towards the common goal of providing countryside access for all.

Some very significant changes have taken place in the past ten years. The DDA is now firmly in place and new countryside access legislation has been passed in England, Wales and Scotland. These policy frameworks have created a more positive environment in which the rights of disabled people to enjoy the countryside along with everyone else are recognised. However, we have all learned that hard and fast rules are not the way forward.

Every countryside facility is different, every person has their own individual abilities and disabilities. The on-going need is to develop good practice which empowers countryside service providers to get the balance right and cater for everyone within the constraints of preserving the natural environment. At the same time disabled people are becoming more adept at campaigning for and advising on access provision that meets their needs.

Against this background the Fieldfare Trust has, along with many other organisations, continued its work based on the experience gained from the "BT Countryside for All" to expand the information and guidance available to users and managers alike. This Good Practice Guide incorporates all the sections in the first guide. It is expanded with four new sections which are significant in helping access managers to look at countryside access strategically. The concept of least restrictive access introduced in the first guide is enlarged so as to facilitate that approach, which seeks to make access improvements wherever and whenever reasonably practical.

All the information in this guide has value to anyone who both shares and wants to implement our vision of a countryside which includes high quality access opportunities for people with and without disabilities.



Ian Ash, Chair, Countryside for All National Forum

Introduction

Countryside for All

Disabled people are increasingly choosing to visit the countryside in their leisure time. This is partly due to the general rise in disabled people's expectations to be able to participate in the same activities as everyone else. Also there have been improvements in access provision for disabled people in the countryside over the recent past.

Everyone working to provide public access to the countryside now has a responsibility to do their job without discriminating against disabled people. The countryside contains many challenging and sensitive environments which at first sight may appear to present insurmountable difficulties with respect to providing access for all and for disabled people in particular. However, there are also a great many countryside situations where access for all can and should be provided to the benefit of all concerned.

'*Countryside for All*' does not mean that every country park, nature reserve or countryside path must be capable of accommodating all disabled people at all times. This would be unrealistic economically and probably undesirable environmentally. In simple terms '*Countryside for All*' means that where good access can be provided it is provided and where it can't as much as possible is done to avoid restricting or limiting disabled people unnecessarily.



The Good Practice Guide

This guide is divided into sections which will help disabled people and countryside access managers recognise what '*Countryside for All*' means and how to work towards it. It provides a series of tools and outlines suggested processes which can lead to better countryside access for disabled people, with due regard to economic and environmental constraints.



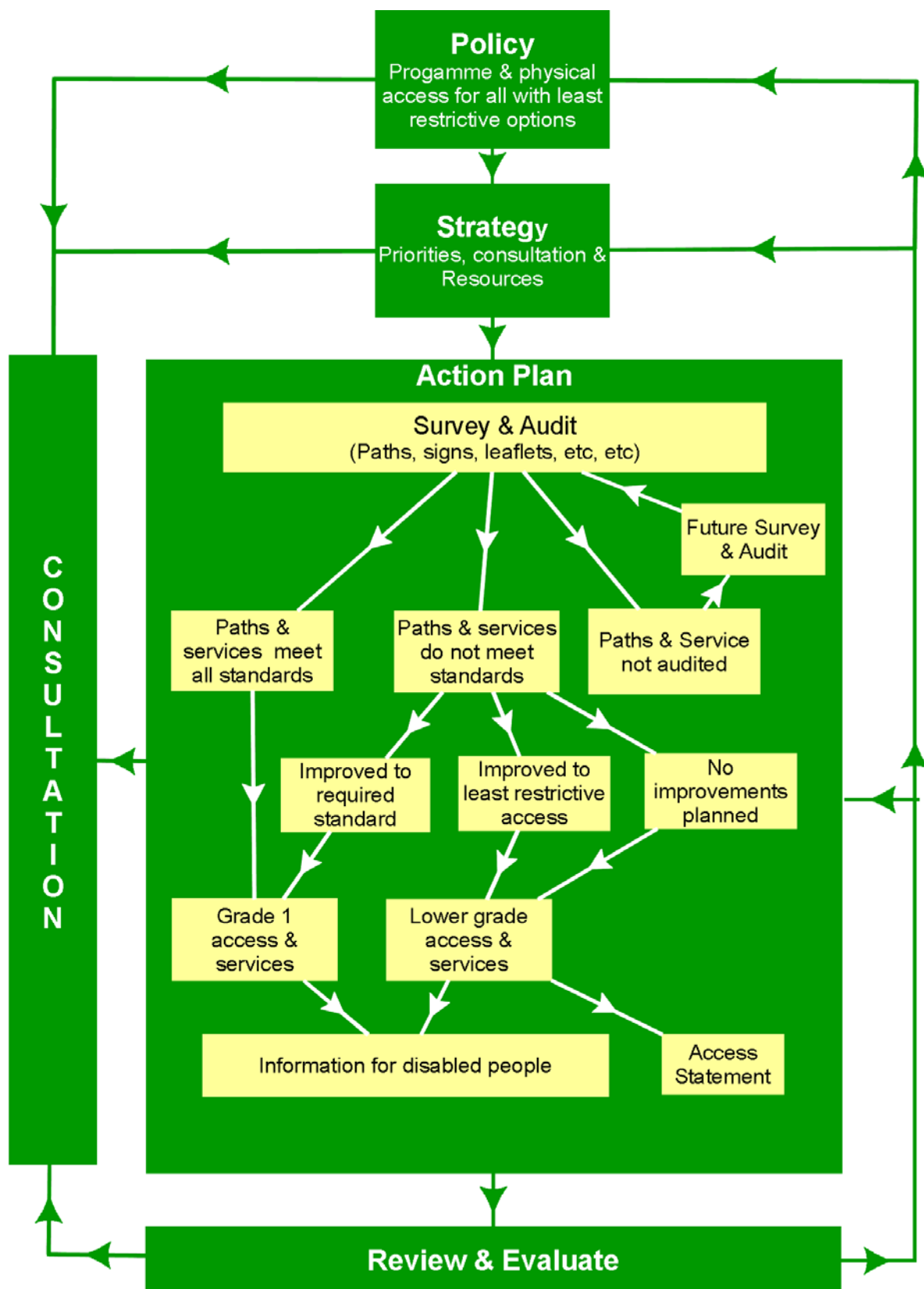
The background to a great deal of information on access for disabled people in the countryside is not as substantial nor as longstanding as for built environments. This guide accepts the precept that the countryside cannot be managed in the same way as urban environments. Nonetheless, ergonomic research and development practices in built environments have done a great deal to establish the access needs of disabled people. These do not change when someone moves from the centre of Manchester to the heart of the Peak District.

The challenge facing countryside access managers is therefore to find creative and innovative ways of providing access that fits into the countryside and meets the needs of disabled visitors. It is important to remember that access for disabled people is not just about the physical condition of paths and trails. These are important as the means to the end. '*Countryside for All*' means disabled people sharing in the enjoyment, challenges and recreation that rural environments have to offer. It is no good having excellent paths that do not lead to exciting and interesting areas. Nor should the needs of people with sensory or intellectual impairments be forgotten when access improvements are being made.

Each of the sections of this guide contributes to an overall process that countryside access managers can follow to improve their provision for disabled people. The guide covers a significant part of this process as far as it has gone to date. Countryside access for disabled people is developing all the time and the Fieldfare Trust along with many other organisations is working to extend its experience, knowledge and skill in this field.



The 'Countryside for All' Process



Consultation

It can be seen that consultation is a important element throughout the '*Countryside for All*' process. This means the views disabled people and representatives of disability organisations should be included at all key stages. Advice on how to network with disabled people are provided in the [Networking Guidelines](#).

Policy

A policy states the aims of an organisation. Good policies on countryside access for disabled people will assist countryside managers and their customers. Policies exist to inform and lubricate both the internal workings and the external relationships of an organisation. Accordingly they should meet the needs of:

- ▶ those responsible for implementation
(e.g. access managers, land owners, planners, contractors)
- ▶ those who are to be its ultimate beneficiaries.
(e.g. disabled people, young people, elderly people, the public)

Guidance on why policies are needed and how to develop them is provided in the [Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#). The [Implications of the Disabilities Discrimination Act for Countryside Service Providers](#) outlines the importance of this legislation in the development of policies.

Strategy

A strategy lays out how policies are to be achieved. The '*Countryside for All*' approach rests comfortably with a strategic approach to planning countryside opportunities. It provides managers and the people they consult with the chance to balance improvements to the facilities being managed with the needs of prospective users and the resources available. A good strategy will review economic and environmental considerations and take account of all factors that might help or hinder the achievement of the policies on which it is based.

The strategic approach is covered in more detail in the [Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#). A comprehensive strategy also looks at how disabled people will get to the countryside, what information they need and how interpretation and events can enhance their experiences. The [Transport, Information, Interpretation and Events Management Guidelines](#) give supporting guidance for these planning processes.

Action Plan

An action plan details what is to be done. As can be seen from the flow chart on [page 6](#) the starting point of the action plan is to collect information on current levels of accessibility. The [Accessibility Survey and Access Audit Guidelines](#) provide guidance on how to do this for the physical conditions on countryside paths and trails.

The [Countryside Path Network Guidelines](#) provide further detail on how to use survey and audit information to select paths for upgrading to fully accessibility routes (i.e paths which meet the [Countryside for All Accessibility Standards](#)). For routes that cannot reasonably be expected to reach these standards, the [Least Restrictive Access Guidelines](#) provide information which can be used to guide decisions on the removal of barriers and the best possible improvement of accessibility.

The next stage in the action plan is to use the information that has been collected from surveys,

audits and any improvement works, to inform disabled people of the opportunities available to them. Even if no improvement works have been undertaken the information collected on accessibility will be of value to many disabled people. Linked to positive information on access opportunities there should be an access statement which details what has been done to improve accessibility and explains what could not be done for whatever reason.

Future Work

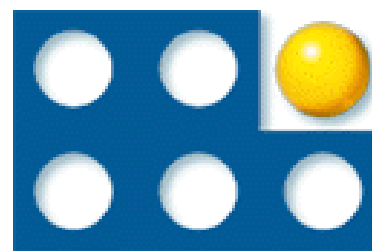
With respect to information on countryside access and access statements the Fieldfare Trust and other organisations are working to extend the guidance currently available. The [Information Guidelines](#) provide advice on what information disabled people may need and how it can be delivered to them. What is not yet available is a simple, user-friendly system for abbreviating countryside access information for disabled people. If such a system can be developed in the near future, it would readily be integrated into the '*Countryside for All*' approach without changing its basic approach of making improvements wherever and whenever possible.

Access statements are a relatively new feature of urban planning and development. They provide for the promotion of positive achievements in access development and allow justification where it has not been possible to achieve all that might have been desirable. Certainly, in the countryside there are likely to be many areas where, for very good reasons, full accessibility cannot be achieved. Here the '*Least Restrictive Access*' should have been applied, even if that means no action was taken because of limited resources or other constraints. Access statements will become a tool for use in countryside situations and further guidance will be provided when appropriate processes have been developed.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who has given time, ideas, information and advice to assist the Fieldfare Trust in the production of the '*Countryside for All*' Good Practice Guide. All the guidance in this publication was developed through the execution of practical projects involving disabled people. Additionally research into countryside and access issues in the UK and abroad has been used to refine the guidance and ensure, as far as has been practicable, that it incorporates the best information currently available and reflects the interests of the disability community and its rights to access in the countryside.

The following organisations welcome the approach of the '*Countryside for All*' Good Practice Guide and recognise its content as a valuable addition to the information and advice that is currently available on good practice on countryside access for disabled people.



Disability Wales  Anabledd Cymru



These organisations also accept the BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards as the basis for achieving good practice in the provision of countryside access for disabled people. The standards should be achieved wherever possible.

The various sections of this guide were produced by Fieldfare through its own research and projects or through partnership involvement in other practical projects developing better access opportunities for disabled people. The content of the guide does not necessarily reflect the views of the organisations that have been partners in Fieldfare's projects. Those projects include:

BT Countryside for All
Waterways Access for All
Core Path Network Planning
Access Auditing Forest Paths
Open Country
Fieldfare Millennium Awards
Access for All Advisory Service

Countryside for All Advisory Group
British Waterways
Argyll & Bute Council & Scottish Natural Heritage
Forest Enterprise
Harrogate Borough Council
Millennium Commission
Countryside Agency

The Guide's Sections

Accessibility Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ These sections are essentially unchanged from those in the BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines with respect to their main content and advice on improving access and opportunities for disabled people. ▶ The contact details of many of the organisations mentioned in the texts have been up dated. ▶ Additional photographs to illustrate practical examples of countryside provision have been included. ▶ The content of these sections is derived from extensive practical work undertaken within the BT Countryside for All project between 1993 and 1997. Disabled people were involved in more than 30 local projects to help compile these sections. Additional consultation was undertaken through the BT Countryside for All Advisory Group and with a wide range of local and national countryside and disability organisations.
Networking Guidelines	
Information Guidelines	
Transport Guidelines	
Interpretation Guidelines	
Events Management Guidelines	

Least Restrictive Access Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ These sections have been produced by the Fieldfare Trust building on projects it has undertaken with, amongst others Scottish Natural Heritage, Forest Enterprise, and Argyll and Bute Council. Consultations with disabled people and disability organisations were a major element in all these projects. ▶ Because of the time scales involved in producing this guide consultation on these sections has not been as extensive as for the sections above which were included in the BT Countryside for All Good Practice Guide.
Countryside Path Network Guidelines	
Accessibility Survey and Access Audit Guidelines	
Guidelines on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 for Countryside Service Providers	

Information Sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Information Sheets in the BT guide provided technical information on the dimensions relevant to countryside access for disabled people together with examples of various types of countryside furniture. The design examples have been omitted as there are now other guides available that give more detailed construction specifications for many kinds of countryside furniture. ▶ The Information Sheets have been restricted to those giving dimensions and design guidance specifically relating to the needs of disabled people. They are electronic scans of the BT Guide sheets and have not been edited for content.
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Navigation Tips

The Good Practice Guide on this CD-ROM can be read using Adobe Acrobat Reader. The program can be installed from the CD or from the Adobe web site (www.adobe.com). Help files are available with the program and further assistance may also be available from the Adobe web site.

Links	Throughout the Guide text highlighted in blue links to another relevant section or to a relevant web site. Click on the blue text to go directly to that section. (The hand cursor will change to a pointing finger when a link is available)
Return	To return to the page you were looking at, right click the mouse and select <i>Go to previous view</i>
Return to contents	On each page (bottom left) there is a return to menu link. Click on this to return to the contents page of the section you are currently in.
Bookmarks & Thumbnails	To view Bookmarks or Thumbnails of the pages in a current document click the icon on the Adobe Acrobat Reader tool bar to open the Navigation Pane on the left hand side of the screen. Then click the tab for Bookmarks or Thumbnails. To reduce the size of the Navigation Pan click and drag the right hand border or click the Bookmark or Thumbnail tab again.
Field of View	To change the field of view to increase or decrease text size use the page icons or the '+' and '-' symbols on the tool bar
Continuous / Page View	To change the view so that all pages flow continuously, or one page at a time, click <i>View</i> on the main menu, then click <i>Continuous</i> or <i>Single Page</i>
Cursor Movement	In Continuous View you can drag the page in view up or down with the mouse by holding down the left mouse button and moving the cursor (The open hand cursor changes to a fist)
Guide Contents	To return to the contents page of the introduction in order to access other sections of the Guide click the return to menu link on each page (bottom left) to return to the contents page of the section you are current in. Then click the Contents of Good Practice Guide link at the bottom of the contents list.

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Feed-back Form

About the Guide

1	Have you found access to all parts of the Guide satisfactory? (Are you able to link between sections and to view everything clearly and in sufficient detail? How easy has it been to use the CD?)	
2	Are the contents of all the sections clear and relevant to your involvement in countryside access for disabled people? (Please give details)	
3	How do you think the new sections support the original Standards and Guidelines? (Are you pleased with the additional information provided? Do they help you in your work?)	
4	Are there any sections of the Guide that you feel do not adequately cover the sort of information you need? (Please give details)	
5	What changes would you like to see us make to the Guide?	
6	What other aspects of countryside access for disabled people would you like to see covered in an update to the Guide?	
7	Please make any other comments you have about the Guide.	

About you

Name: Address:	
Telephone: Email Address:	
Organisation:	
Where did you hear about the Guide?	

Please print this form, fill it in and send to:
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Or email us at: info@fieldfare.org.uk