

Cornwall Countryside Access Strategy
Second Workshop for Local Access Forum
Agriculture House, Truro, Tuesday 21st March 2006

Introductory Discussion

- At first meeting, was agreed not to use "strategy" in project title. Forum is annoyed that were asked but their response not acknowledged.
 - 'Strategy' implies a vision – aren't we past this stage now and into action?
- Some forum members did not receive an agenda and prep packs for this meeting
- Community benefits as well as public rights of way are on the forum's wish list.
- Police should get on board, to enforce speed limits on access roads. Highways agency also, as main roads are difficult to cross.
- Funding; Is there an estimate of total funds required? And the percentage of responsibility taken (eg CCC accountable for 95%)
- Disappointment because no spreadsheet available with a breakdown of funding – it is actually the main factor here and is the most important issue.
- Efficiency of spending – using Farmers' Package as an effective model. Less than £3,000 per item, with very good improvements made.
 - Essential aspects of delivery will be treating the situations as a package rather than singularly.

People's Panel

- The figures are ridiculous – far too overestimated and "daft".
- Substantial proportion of figures are gained from visitors to Cornwall
- Winter doesn't stop users, there used to be a very limited tourist season but now it is year-long.
- People's panel should be taken with extreme caution, as it is "fantasy".
- Must remember that if we can spot 'mistakes' then those it is being sold to will be able to also.
 - Open space / Country Park terminology has different meaning to everyone – so is a weak question.
- What sort of demographic are chosen for the panel?

Assets, Issues and Agendas

- Should have made the scale 1-10, not 1-3; its too limiting.
- Bodmin Moor – labelled too low in certain areas, such as 'Antiquities & Historic Landscape'
- The forum would like to give their feedback on the scaling.
- Clarification is required on what zero signifies.
- As a raw table, in general the figures do bring out a set of patterns to be applied.

Themes and Strategies

- Why have you separated 'Public Paths' and 'Filling Gaps in Network'? – they should come under the same heading
- There is nothing obvious on motor vehicles present in the table. Everybody places the topic into different categories, so shouldn't it have its own, separate category to avoid confusion?

Opportunities and Pitfalls – AKA Snakes and Ladders

Pitfalls

- Lack of money
- As paths become more accessible, there may be more illegal usage
- Resent between user groups if there is a lack of understanding

Opportunities

- To do something rather than nothing
- To improve tourist participation
- To create a plan that can be quantifiable against the structure, measurable year after year
Rolling plan that will allow modification as and when needed
- To improve the economy by bringing more tourism to the County
- Work towards a healthier population, exercising more – So less will be spent on healthcare within Cornwall.

Group Discussions of the Strategy themes

Asset Management

- 'Adequate resources available for footpaths' – No there haven't been
- Contractors are not doing their jobs properly ie, cleaning and maintaining paths
- Difficulty with making paths accessible to the disabled is opening gates. The term 'Footpath' denotes feet and walking. It just can't work for the disabled.
- Public footpaths shouldn't be used by vehicles. An extra 2% taken from the Highways Agency budget and put into the PROW schemes would pay for everything in this strategy.
 - Why do 'low traffic' roads not come under the Highways Agency, when tourism brings in a great deal of traffic to these roads?
- Bridleways – badly maintained, should be made passable. Money should also be spent on crossing roads, for both walkers and riders.
 - Some paths are not used purely because they cross busy roads. The speed limit is not enforced in rural areas also.
- The statistics provided by CCC are all "gobbledigoop".
- It is essential that the definitive maps are always kept up to date and are available on a parish basis. Also, a definitive map statement should be made, detailing all stiles, gates, etc.

- We should make more use of voluntary groups in the maintenance of public footpaths.
- Landowners need some economic income – problem is that there are not many large landowners in Cornwall.
- Economy should be kept within districts; in-house training of contractors, etc
- A lot of money will depend on individuals' opinions on access and countryside
- We should make a list of the best and worst possible scenarios and see how the money is spent in each case – get rid of large wish list and refine objectives for the scheme.
 - The public should see the wish list, as well as the costs, and then they'll see why the priorities are set out the way they are.
 - A lot of people are more worried about lowering taxes than spending on the environment
- How do you stop road racers on lanes and paths?
 - We need to get people into the mindset that lanes are for walkers / cyclists / horse-riders.
- The Camel Trail and MUT are madness – Lots of confrontation on both every day – Possibly they are too busy now?
- Spread the impact, spread the benefit
 - Maybe if users went to other paths then the more popular ones wouldn't need such high maintenance – deliver the benefits to neighbouring areas.

Public Path Improvement Programme

- Gold / Silver / Bronze prioritisation is very controversial to many people. But we recognise the need for it, otherwise we would never get anywhere with path improvements
 - Gold paths in Fowey don't need so much money spent on them, only require signs.
- You cannot remove granite stiles as they are listed – so kissing gates have been added. It is important to retain vernacular features wherever possible, with supplementary features added where necessary.
- Only a few people are interested in PPIP, the average Joe Bloggs couldn't care as long they can walk around – So communication is unnecessary
- Silver Path improvements – this should be an achievable 10 yr plan
- Who will be paying for signage on Gold Paths that are on highways? Signs aren't planned for that

Filling the Gaps

- Do we want the widest range of users possible? – No.
- Keep footpaths and bridleways separate. No to multi-functional paths.
- Sponging out of the useless paths on the definitive map, so that resources can go to new paths – unanimously important.
- Much more co-operation with landowners to agree on different paths.
- St Michael's Way has two bad roads to cross. It is important to resolve the problems with crossing busy roads and railways.
- Waste tips and quarries

Access For All

- Don't want a wide range of users on footpaths. Some are so narrow that you can't pass a horse – and in winter, the mud and sludge created by horses can get extremely deep
- It is pointless focusing on signs to health centres – a bit nanny state
- Always looking to minimise costs and improvements so that people can attain a “wilderness experience”
 - Avoid straight lines and signposts everywhere – we should be taking people on a journey
- It is very difficult to curb noise pollution in Cornwall when we have such a small countryside
- There are so many roads and lanes into the countryside we shouldn't need to make any more provisions for car users and off-roaders.
- How do you control illegal dog-fowling? A wardening system is the only way to make the walking experience really pleasant.
- Recommend to leave no gaps, replace all stiles etc with kissing gates.

Spreading the Word

- 1% of CCC budget as well as others' cost too should be spent here.
- Initial confusion regarding the paperwork
- Bus timetables including a route plan and connections to footpaths. Rail timetables also.

Health

- Maximum of 3% of total budget
- Doesn't matter if they are circular or linear routes. Focus on 30 minute duration, as it is the recommended daily amount of exercise
- Information packs should be available to GPs – concern over doctor resistance due to fear of liability
- Government funding should be involved in getting the message across, but plans will still go on because everything happens from the bottom up, at District Council level.
- Small symbols on signs denoting health markings.

Tourist Economy

- A push needs to be made for the tourist business itself to fund the new information.
- Tourist tax
- Encourage a spread – themed trails (pub, churches, etc), an opportunity for new ideas.
 - Risk turning the countryside into a theme park though
- More appropriate car parking – priority should be given to those paths suitable for disabled access.

Planners

- Creating new links between the town and countryside

- Try to retain path aspects rather than creating a tarmac surface
 - Enforcement action is very important when agreements are broken by developers.
- Consideration should be given to minimising the impact on the community.
- The forum want money spent on ground – paths, not outside factors.

Land Management

- Work with landowners to achieve the right approach at whatever stage. Not users vs. landowners
- Early dialogue to avoid conflict / misunderstanding.
- Educate conveying (?) solicitors. Also, PROW information supplied in vendors packages.
- Improve the help / information available through the CCC. Speedy delivery is also important.

Securing to Legal Record

- Ensure priority is given to meeting statutory duties.

Finance

- Sufficient, but in proportion to other aspects / themes.

Group Responses to the Strategy

- What's going to happen in my locality? (will be the general response from the public)
 - People will want to see maps, to see which paths will be altered, where and how. If these are not provided, a large proportion of the public will be disinterested.
 - Not going down to individual path level, talk instead in terms of principles
- Individuals should be dealt with through the partnership bodies
- Colour schemes – just black and yellow can be very harsh, so maybe use the colour scheme for the documents, but vary it a little.
- The public don't want 80 page documents. They want a lead – we should give them a brief summary of topics / items, and a price list
- I like the summary document idea – but don't like 3 choices as it will confuse people.
- Perhaps a leaflet t “wet their appetite” with a number on the back for them to access the 80 page document if they want to.
- 92% of people don't want electronic documents.
 - I actually think more people are using email nowadays.
- Get Parish Councils involved – giving them a large copy
- Get libraries involved, you can send 5/6 to each library for the public to access.
- Try to work out with a Parish Council how to get the public aware of the leaflet.
- Response Slips
 - You might receive a lot from one person

- Giving the public a say will motivate them to get involved.
- It should be the same response slip for every document, even if there are 3 different summary documents
- Don't give people too many options – tick boxes are better as they are easier to digest and the continuity help as well. Less is more. There should be one blank box at the end to add in any personal thoughts and opinions.

Sub-group Discussions

Users

- Branding
 - Gorse
 - Chough
 - Engine House
 - Headland
 - Think about visitors
- Summary Documents
 - No targeting
 - Needed as a précis of the plan
 - Include phone number / website for full document
 - Use libraries / TICs / Hotels / NT offices
 - CD rom on request for full document
 - Full document available on request
 - English only
 - Available on request in a different language? – Summary only?
- Response Slips
 - Timed – return by date
 - Reply based on summary document only, so must stand alone.
 - Phrase – 'Your Countryside: Your Money' – perhaps adding in – 'Your Responsibility'
 - Tick boxes
 - Comments box at the bottom
 - Road shows – arrange in liaison with PCs and DCs

Landowners

- How to target the group
 - Send information out to CLA, NFU, RICS, NT, Bodmin Moor Landowners Council, Royal Cornwall Show, Military, Police, 'Southwest Farmer' magazine, etc.
 - Landowners could have a flyer to hand out to people they meet out walking.
 - Users must be sensitive to the environment and surroundings – security is also a worry for landowners
- Actions

- Priority should be placed on current paths that are of benefit to users, before focusing on those less used as well as possible dangerous ones.
- Having a network of wardens to 'police' the environment. It is easier to resolve conflicts from the ground up, also with an authoritative middle-man, rather than between landowner and user.
- Dog fouling needs to be stopped – it ruins it for all. Impose an appropriate top-down organised structure.
- We need to understand whether problems are really due to the reported cause.
- Travellers issues should be included in considerations
- Should include custodians' responsibility to the natural environment and natural tranquillity. Too much will spoil the very thing we're promoting.
- Distinguish between rural and urban treatments
- Land Management
 - Work with landowners to achieve the right approach at whatever stage
 - Early dialogue to avoid misunderstanding / conflict.
 - Educate 'conveyancing' solicitors, include ROW information in vendors' packages
 - Improve help / information available from the CCC. Speedy delivery of CCC response is essential. Ensure accuracy of information – verify with all involved.
 - Avoid the 'them' and 'us' approach
 - Securing the legal record. Ensure that priority is given to meeting statutory duties.
 - Finance: ensure that sufficient additional funding secured to implement the plan

Miscellaneous – 'Others'

- Access to the countryside is one of the most important and understated facilities.
 - People realise that access to the countryside has a huge effect on the economy, such as tourists accessing a beach from a coastal path and the cost of maintaining.
 - It has to be a two-way process
- The initiatives are already in place. There is plenty of information, quality control, etc. The base forms are there so we should make the most of them.
- Do we treat the countryside as a theme for doing things or do we use it for ourselves, individually?
- Some demographics aren't prepared for the countryside – within the Health Agenda we need to be targeting those who don't ever really 'experience' the countryside. Those who stay by their cars and use the countryside to its full potential.
 - Like the tourists who only ever go to the beach.
- Let people find the countryside for themselves. It should be a personal experience.
- 1/3 of Camborne school children have never been to a woodland
 - So the countryside isn't currently accessible to all
 - There is a fear of the countryside, of the unknown. How do we get children who have never been to woodland to go into a seemingly daunting place?
- All of these agendas aren't currently joined together.
- Access to the countryside is becoming more middle-classed
- Focus on the production of children's literature – Cornwall outdoors, etc
- Over decades the countryside has been shutting down, as people protect their own land from others – so we must now build the right relationships with landowners in order to create a more pleasant walking experience

- All the things we have grown up with were based on people's ideas. Those who knew the countryside in detail and who didn't need guides or way marking, etc
 - Now we have a generation who can't read maps and who don't like getting lost or muddy. So we must make the countryside more accessible to them.
- Roads used to be viewed as boundary lines, and people didn't like to cross over these lines. Hopefully this has stopped now.
- PROW need to bring people together, all roles and all agencies, to acknowledge a shared interest in the countryside in general.
- It is difficult to change people's behaviour without a continuous presence and ongoing message
- 3 different summaries would cause a problem – different / conflicting messages
- Group / mass walking has an adverse effect – having too many people can be off-putting to landowners.
- The term 'public' refers to families – those who go out every now and again – rather than ramblers.
 - The landowner issue is overemphasised – most people walk on open land, not private land
 - The users vs landowners debate is old fashioned
- We are entering a new era in perceptions on the countryside
- Housing is predominantly in towns / cities now – so fewer children are leaving the town environment. It is only going to get worse as well.

'Wrap-up' group discussion

- A list of actions should be gone through with a fine-toothed comb. Take out all that are irrelevant to PROW. Statutory guidance relates to PROW only.
 - 'quiet lanes network' issues
 - Country parks maintenance, beach maintenance
 - Focus not staying on PROW
- We haven't mentioned bridleways enough. Horse ownership is increasing – there is a greater pressure from riders to use footpaths and private land
- People need more access to coastal paths
- Is there a danger that by including other issues, we will overlook some important aspects of the PROW? We don't want to look woolly, need to refine our vision.
- We should never lose sight of the magic of the countryside, not fabricated, manufactured routes but natural beauty. That's what brings people to Cornwall.
- We should invite someone from the planning department to the next meeting with the District Councils.