



## The role of Natural England –setting the scene for access

Jane Yates - Recreation and Access Policy Team





## Aim of this presentation

- To increase understanding of Natural England's role in recreation, access and health:
  - - Key facts, figures and trends
  - - Where it fits in Natural England's remit
  - - Benefits to individuals and society
  - - Challenges for us in promoting recreation and access
  - - Current programmes

## Recreation is.....

- People in the outdoors, spending leisure time, enjoying themselves
- Motivations: fresh air, exercise, hobby, sport, close to nature, fun, time with friends & family, challenge, lifestyle, wanting to improve the environment, relaxation, get away from it all
- Comes from the word "re-create" meaning to refresh, renew





## Inland town/city leisure visit key facts

- 52% of adults in England had made a leisure visit to an inland town/city in the past week in 2005, compared to 19% to the countryside, 5% to a seaside town/city and 2% to the seaside coast
- More surprising is that walking/rambling is in the top four main leisure activities undertaken in a town/city:
  - 18% eat/drink out
  - 16% go shopping
  - 13% visit friends/relatives
  - 12% go walking
- Main mode of transport for activities in inland town/city:
  - 58% car/van
  - 23% on foot/walking

Source: England Leisure Visits Survey 2005

## Access is.....



- Public Rights of Way -the legal right to go onto private land, on foot, cycle or horseback
- Small scale improvements to make it easier to get onto land, eg gates and other entrances, paths that people can easily use, signs, information boards
- Places where people have permission to go from landowners eg access and education access with agri-environmental schemes, many large estates
- Places that people can use, from the small scale eg local nature reserves/village greens to the large scale country parks
- Access Land – open tracts of lands, go anywhere
- Connections between places



## Access Key Facts

- 91,300 miles of footpath
- 19,900 miles of bridleway
- 3,700 miles of by ways - open to all
- 1 million hectares of open access land
- 200 country parks
- 12 National Trails, providing the best views and walks
- 22 National Nature Reserves
- 1280 Local Nature Reserves
- 10,000 miles of National Cycle Network
- 2,000 miles of towpaths
- Woods/Forests
- Unknown quantity of informal greenspace in towns/cities and villages



## Key Benefits to Health of Recreation and Access

- Contact with the natural environment provides the following benefits:
- Childhood Development
  - Improved social, mental and physical development
  - More likely to be active and less risk of obesity
- Pro-Active Adults
  - Improves sense of wellbeing
  - Reduces stress
  - Increases physical activity so reduces risk factors of many diseases
- Healthy Ageing
  - Delays onset of diseases eg heart disease, diabetes, some cancers
  - Reduces affects of ageing
  - Increases independence
  - Life span increases when live near greenspace

Our Remit:

2 of the 5 Natural England's general purposes are about recreation, access and health:



- “Securing provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment”
- “Promoting access to the countryside and open space and encouraging open air recreation”

(Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006)

## Big Challenges....



- ***About one third of adults in England have little or no contact with the natural environment in a year, and many only have occasional contact: especially young, ethnic minorities, low incomes***
- ***Inequality in access to natural greenspace is most acute in urban & peri-urban areas, where most people live, especially in deprived communities***
- ***Lack of contact with the natural environment is causing major problems for peoples' health***

## Smaller challenges...

- ***Promoting use without adding to our carbon footprint***
  - ***Most contact is close to home***
  - ***Opportunities to promote walking and cycling***
- ***Promoting use without affecting wildlife***
  - ***Main problem is ground nesting birds in spring in a few locations***
  - ***Good management is the key***
  - ***Little evidence of generic problems***
- ***Attitudes to other people sometimes the underlining cause for how small challenges are dealt with***



## Our Recreation Policy

- The main message is get the balance right between the SUPPLY of access facilities and stimulating and satisfying DEMAND: i.e.
  - Widen the appeal of recreation opportunities – ‘make more popular’
  - Be more aware of different customer needs, not just respond to the well organised user groups

## Recreation policy themes

- Supply
  - higher quality places - especially close to home
  - Better physical links between sites, to encourage low carbon travel
  - Better recreation value from agri-environmental programmes
  - Making the most of coastal access, links to tourism
- Demand
  - Promotion to widen use, via health, young peoples adventure, deprived communities, volunteering,
  - Backed by customer intelligence and information



## Current and New Programmes

- Rights of Way – encouraging highway authorities to improve networks for modern use, ongoing support for ROWIP officers and LAFs through advice and training, monitoring and evaluation
- National Trails – marketing and improvement as green tourism assets
- Country Parks – kite mark for quality
- Green space – improving provision in areas of greatest need, via Growth Areas, Eco towns and Planning
- ‘Walking the way to Health’ initiative and new NHS/GP walking programmes
- Access Land and Coastal Access
- Access and Education access via Environmental Stewardship
- Access to Nature – new lottery funded grant scheme