



Countryside Access Strategy

East Sussex public rights of way
and countryside sites 2016

DRAFT: proposals for consultation



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Foreword by Councillor Maynard

Lead Member for Transport and Environment

As East Sussex residents we are fortunate to have such beautiful countryside on our doorstep. Two thirds of our county is either National Park or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We have everything, from the stunning iconic cliffs at Seven Sisters to the rolling hills of the South Downs, the farmland and villages of the Low Weald and the woodland of the High Weald.

The network of 2,000 miles of public rights of way (PRoW) and the ten countryside sites currently managed by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) help to provide access for the public to this wonderful countryside, and to maintain and broaden our wildlife.

The purpose of this Countryside Access Strategy document is to examine and set out how we should manage those PRoW and countryside sites in the future. In preparation, we have consulted widely. We have talked to residents, visitors, landowners, user groups and partners. Their responses have been used to improve our understanding of how and why the community uses these assets. This will inform our future working plans and has contributed to Our Vision:

To ensure that our public rights of way and countryside sites are accessible, maintained, enhanced and promoted; meeting the needs of our residents and visitors in the most efficient, affordable and effective manner.

To achieve this vision we will need to change how we work. From our research, we have found that we manage cost well in many areas. We are efficient and work well within the resources we have. In making our money go further, we will work closely with our council colleagues, with partners, stakeholders and other authorities to make sure we are as efficient as possible. By applying a strategic commissioning approach, we can ensure we make the best use of our resources when meeting our statutory duties, and maximise how PRoW and countryside sites contribute to our council priorities.

This strategy marks the first step in a long journey. Over the next two years we will be working to identify delivery partners who will be able to enhance community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement at the countryside sites.

How we manage the PRoW and countryside sites is essential to their long term protection. I am excited by the prospect of how we could manage them in the future and I'm proud to support this plan. It is based on an improved understanding of what our communities in East Sussex expect from PRoW and countryside sites and how and why they are used. It also sets out how we will structure our resources to deliver against the strategic outcomes set out in this document.

Executive Summary

Public rights of way and countryside sites

In East Sussex we have 2,000 miles of public rights of way (PRoW), made up of footpaths, bridleways, byways and restricted byways. We are also involved in managing ten countryside sites.

PRoW enable free access to our county, crossing through towns and the countryside. Depending on their type they can be used on foot, bicycle, horse (and carriage) or in a vehicle. The ten countryside sites are:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camber Sand Dunes/Johnson's Field • Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve • Cuckoo Trail • Ditchling Common Country Park • Forest Way Country Park | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve • Riverside Park • Seven Sisters Country Park • Shinewater Park • Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve |
|--|--|

These are open spaces managed for their value to wildlife and the wider communities. You can walk across all of them and at some you can ride a bike or horse.

To manage the PRoW and countryside sites we have a range of responsibilities. These include the maintenance of furniture (such as bridges and gates) as well as legal record keeping. We also do clearance and resurfacing, coppicing and grazing and we work with various local community partners to help deliver all the work. In 2015/16 it cost us over £1.8m to do this.

It is very important that we make the best use of the resources we have. This Countryside Access Strategy is being prepared at a time of unprecedented change and severe financial pressure. Like many other local authorities across the country, we are dealing with cuts in government funding. We are facing the challenge of saving between £70m and £90m in the next three years whilst keeping council tax as low as possible.

To develop this strategy, we have completed a wide engagement process to understand how and why people are using PRoW and countryside sites. In doing so, we have spoken to user groups, landowners and partners about their involvement and plans for the future.

The feedback has enabled us to establish what contribution PRoW and countryside sites make to our Council priorities. Most notable is the contribution to our priority: "Helping people to help themselves". This can take many forms and includes:

- Helping people to be healthy, stay active and independent and particularly enjoy the benefits of green exercise (exercise outdoors in green areas);
- Improving community involvement and community wellbeing through locally established volunteer and interest groups set up to look after stretches of the PRoW network or for conservation work.

There is also undoubtedly a contribution to the economy of the county. Tourism in East Sussex is valued at £1.35bn and accounts for 22,483 jobs. It is estimated that countryside accounts for roughly 10% of tourist related business, though it remains difficult to assess the link between this figure and the PRoW network and countryside sites.

An analysis of how we structure the service, together with an examination of our costs, resource availability and achievements, demonstrates how effective we are at providing the service. This information along with the insight from our engagement activity, has been used to set out our vision for the future.

Our Vision

To ensure that our public rights of way and countryside sites are accessible, maintained, enhanced and promoted; meeting the needs of our residents and visitors in the most efficient, affordable and effective manner.

This vision is supported by four strategic outcomes that will be used to structure and prioritise our spend to ensure the contribution to Council priorities is maximised.

How we will manage public rights of way and countryside sites:



We propose that how we manage the countryside sites should change. By working to pass most of the sites to others more experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement, we hope to improve what the countryside sites have to offer. We will work to identify the right organisations and arrangements to achieve this. The Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way are more like Public Rights of Way in their appearance and use, so they require different management arrangements to green open space. Consequently we propose that the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way continue to be managed in-house by East Sussex County Council.

This strategy document sets out the information we have researched, why we have reached our conclusions and recommendations, and how we propose to develop our services in the future. The plan is devised to ensure PRow and countryside sites are managed to meet the strategic outcomes set out in this document and to make best use of our limited resources.

Introduction

In this strategy document we set out how we will manage public rights of way (PRoW) and countryside sites for East Sussex residents and visitors. In developing the plan, we have looked at our statutory obligations and the contribution that PRoW and countryside sites make to council priorities. We have also explored a range of options for their future management.

What are public rights of way (PRoW) and countryside sites?

We have a network of 2,000 miles of PRoW across East Sussex. PRoW are mostly in the countryside but can also be found in towns in the form of alleyways or twittens. They provide access to the countryside, as well as helping people go about their everyday lives. Their use varies depending on their designation and can include walking, cycling, horse-riding and driving. As PRoW cross many different areas, you may come across stiles, gates and bridges when using them.

Most PRoW run across private land, so we work closely with landowners to manage them. The landowner is responsible for making sure paths are not obstructed, and to maintain gates and stiles. We look after legal records in relation to public access; for example, the Definitive Map and Statement and the registers of Town & Village Greens and Common Land. Where we maintain the PRoW, our work includes installing signposts, buildings, bridges and path clearance.

We are also involved in the management of ten countryside sites:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camber Sand Dunes/Johnson's Field • Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve • Cuckoo Trail • Ditchling Common Country Park • Forest Way Country Park | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve • Riverside Park • Seven Sisters Country Park • Shinewater Park • Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve |
|--|--|

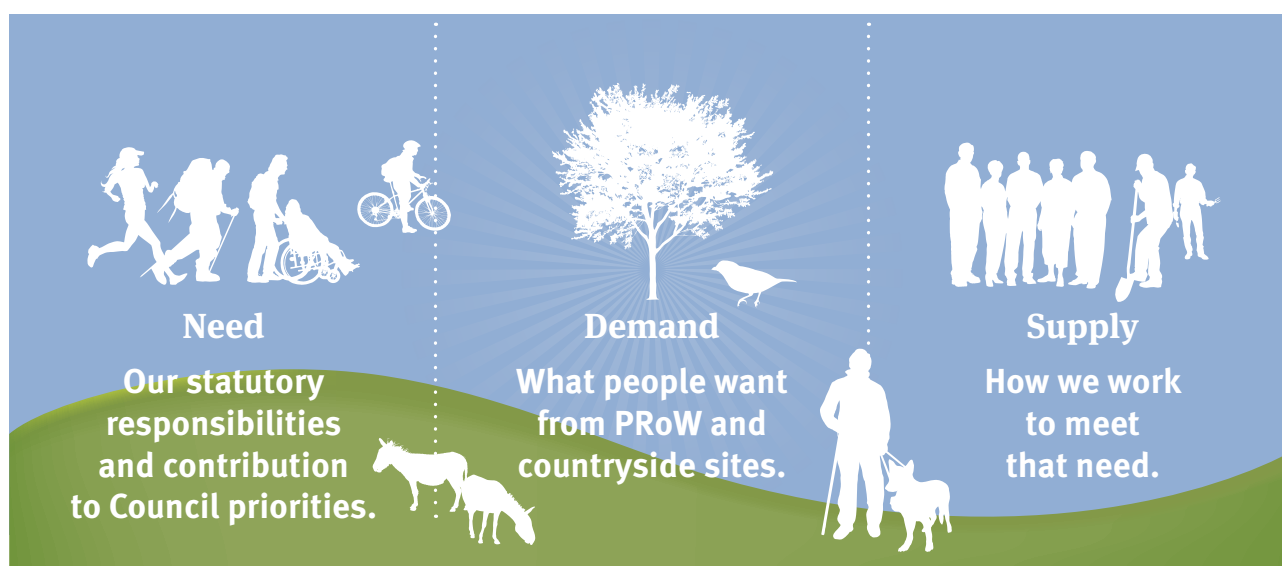
The countryside sites provide an important way to access our county. You can walk across all of the sites and at some you can ride a bike or horse. Most have parking facilities and offer open access instead of one path to follow. As well as the sites, they usually have a designation which means they are vital for conservation and the local environment. Their management follows the regulations set out in legislation, which helps nature thrive and enhances biodiversity in East Sussex. Each countryside site is different, so we can be involved in a range of activities, from scrub clearance, habitat management and coppicing, to litter picking and visitor information. Partnership working is a feature in much of our work.

You can find more information on the PRoW and countryside sites in the Technical Appendix and on our website.

What is strategic commissioning?

We want to make sure our strategy is designed properly and provides a long term focus on what is important for East Sussex residents. To develop the plan we are using the 'strategic commissioning framework' (framework). This ensures a clear understanding of 'need', before identifying the best way to meet it. It also sets out a clear rationale for the review and decision making process.

Adopting the framework approach enables us to understand three key areas:



Developing our understanding of ‘need’ (the first stage in the commissioning cycle) was a very inclusive process. Alongside our knowledge of our statutory responsibilities, we spoke with stakeholders, partners and residents to seek their views. We also researched the impact of PRow and countryside sites on the Council’s priorities, on health benefits, conservation and our economy.

Developing the strategy involved an in-depth review of all of our activities to see, for example, how much it costs us to build a bridge, take enforcement action or clear a path.

The information and insights we have gathered includes how well we’re currently doing and helps us understand how we should structure our services in the future, i.e. the ‘supply’ aspect of the framework. We have used this to develop the vision and set out four strategic outcomes that represent our statutory obligations and the benefits that PRow and countryside sites bring. This underpins our long term planning.

But it won’t stop there. Strategic commissioning is a cyclical process. We will monitor our plans to ensure they are effective and that our work remains focused on maximising the benefits of PRow and countryside sites.

In this document, we set out how we will prioritise our work in the future as well as all the research used to develop the strategy.

By developing this Countryside Access Strategy we are making sure our service is designed to meet our statutory duties, get the maximum benefit from these assets and reflect the expectations of our community.

The Strategy

To develop the Strategy we have used a range of information to improve our understanding of how and why people use PRow and countryside sites, the health and economic benefits they generate and how stakeholders are involved.

For example, we found:

- Being active has a wide range of benefits for our physical and mental wellbeing. It reduces the risk of heart disease by 35%, breast cancer by 20% and depression by 30%.
- Exercise, and in particular 'green' exercise (exercise outdoors in green areas), can improve self-esteem, mood disturbance, stress and anxiety.
- Green space can be a contributor to social cohesion.

If you want to know more about our research and findings, these are summarised in the later sections 'Understanding Need', and the 'Technical Appendix'.

While it is not easy to draw a direct link or conclusion between the above findings and the role of PRow and countryside sites in the county, feedback from stakeholders confirms that they are used to enjoy fresh air, health benefits and to enjoy scenery and walking. We can therefore conclude that they make a contribution to our Council priority: 'Helping people to help themselves' in the following ways:

- Helping people to be healthy, stay active and independent and particularly enjoy the benefits of green exercise (exercise outdoors in green areas);
- Improving community involvement and community wellbeing through locally established volunteer and interest groups set up to look after stretches of the PRow network or for conservation work.

This research shows how PRow and the countryside sites are important for people who use them. They help us to maintain a healthy lifestyle, through getting out and about, as well as experiencing and learning about nature. They give us the opportunity for group activity, or the chance for quiet personal enjoyment. As a county of mixed rural and urban communities, PRow and countryside sites provide a rounded visitor experience and enhance our tourism offer. An estimated 10% of our tourist related business in East Sussex is related to the countryside, generating some £135m a year for the local economy (although it remains difficult to assess the direct relationship between this and PRow and countryside sites).

The range of biodiversity at the countryside sites is important for the wildlife that is able to thrive there, or pass through on migration, as well as for the enjoyment of visitors. The record keeping of our PRow network and countryside sites enables us to stay up-to-date with changing wildlife and communities.

As well as establishing a better understanding of how PRow and countryside sites contribute to our priorities and communities, we reviewed how we manage them i.e. our 'supply'. This aspect of the review covered a wide range of work to understand how much we spend on the service, as well as individual pieces of work, such as building a bridge or taking enforcement action if a path is blocked. Our costs were also compared with other authorities and external contractors.

We found that in many areas we are achieving well, particularly in managing the 2,000 mile PRow network, but that some changes could bring improvements. This is particularly the case for the countryside sites.

We are drawing a distinction between the management of PRow and countryside sites due to their differing requirements and the differences in our responsibilities. County Councils have a statutory Countryside Access Strategy obligation in respect of PRow and, while varying models can be considered in the delivery of that obligation, (e.g. the use of contractors) the obligation will

ultimately always remain with us. This is not true of countryside sites where, for example, duties in relation to the conservation of wildlife rest with the landowner. We have no statutory obligation to retain a network of sites. We can therefore consider passing the sites to others more experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement. Such organisations may be better placed to take long-term responsibility for the countryside sites and improve what they have to offer. The only exception relates to countryside sites where we are the declaring authority and, in these cases, we retain some duties ourselves regardless of ownership.

This distinction between PRow and countryside sites has given us clarity and options in reaching our recommendations for the respective future management arrangements as set out below.

Setting out our future plan

In creating a Countryside Access Strategy, we are determining what we want our PRow and countryside site service to look like. Our aspiration is that we continue to provide a network of PRow and that the county should continue to benefit from its countryside sites. The whole offer needs to be safe and welcoming to residents, visitors and wildlife. The proposed service model will enable us to meet our statutory obligations, as well as maximise the community, health and economic benefits.

By setting this out in a clear and simple form, we can define what we will be working towards.

This is **'Our Vision'**:

To ensure that our public rights of way and countryside sites are accessible, maintained, enhanced and promoted; meeting the needs of our residents and visitors in the most efficient, affordable and effective manner.

This 'vision' is supported by four 'strategic outcomes'. These will be used to structure and prioritise our spending. They also provide a means to monitor and measure service performance to ensure maximum benefit is gained and best use of resources is achieved.

Strategic outcome 1: Enable residents and visitors to safely use our public rights of way and countryside sites.

We will use an effective and efficient Asset Management Programme (a plan for maintaining assets such as structures and countryside site condition). We will use it to manage the maintenance requirements of the PRow network and countryside sites. The same asset management approach will be used to plan and prioritise PRow legal and enforcement work. To deliver this programme, our main areas of focus will be to:

- Use reports, surveys and information from partners and volunteers to inform the PRow and countryside site asset management plan.
- Work to minimise cost, by understanding the balance between materials, maintenance and repair.
- Source work externally where it is shown to be better value. This will be put in place immediately.

Strategic outcome 2: Support and enable landowners, stakeholders and residents to exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities.

Public access on the PRow network and countryside sites is dependent on good working relationships between landowners, stakeholders and residents. To maintain and improve these relationships, our main areas of work will be to:

- Maintain legal records including the Definitive Map and Statement, and the Town and Village Greens and Common Land Registers. They are made available publically and can be viewed at our offices free of charge; informing land purchase as well as legal responsibilities.

- Work with landowners to help them understand and meet their responsibilities in maintaining the PRoW network. We will also provide advice to help landowners manage public access on their land.
- Improve the processing of landowner diversions to raise more income and create more capacity within the Public Rights of Way and Countryside Team. The diversion of a PRoW is a County Council power which can also be carried out by borough and district councils. Diversions can be made in the interests of the public (e.g. to improve access) or in the interests of the landowner (e.g. to improve privacy or security). There is a high demand from landowners for path diversions.

Strategic outcome 3: Achieve the most effective and efficient management of our public rights of way and countryside sites for the benefit of residents, visitors and wildlife.

It is important that we utilise our assets appropriately to maximise the benefits that can be gained from them, to reflect the expectations of residents, visitors and users and to make the best use of our resources. This could mean charging for services to generate income, or putting in place different management arrangements. From our research and consultation work, we have found that we could achieve a better service by managing the countryside sites differently. We have also found that charging for services we provide, and how we work with internal and external colleagues, can be improved. We have set out our next steps below.

- We believe that, by changing how the countryside sites are managed, we would be able to improve overall effectiveness. By working to pass the sites to others more experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement, we may improve what the countryside sites have to offer for health and wellbeing, conservation and to contribute to a sustainable economy. We will work to identify the right organisations and arrangements to manage our countryside sites. This will be done in 2016 and, if found appropriate, put in place by summer 2018.
- Expand and improve how we charge for our services – for example, PRoW diversions. This will ensure that our costs are covered whilst minimising the impact of non-statutory work or other ‘powers’ on our capacity to meet statutory duties. We will have set an improved fee and charges structure and employed additional capacity by spring 2017.
- We will work proactively with internal colleagues (including Public Health and Infrastructure Development) and external colleagues (such as local authorities and community organisations) to develop partnerships and the network. This will enable us to ensure our infrastructure and health programmes work in harmony to make them as effective as possible. We will meet quarterly and embed each other’s priorities in our working practices by spring 2017.

Strategic outcome 4: Enhance local communities through engagement with our public rights of way and countryside sites.

Volunteer opportunities play an important role in developing a community, enabling healthy activity and, in turn, maintaining the PRoW and countryside sites. Whilst volunteers work for free, facilitating and running volunteer activities carries a cost and we must ensure that all our work is as efficient and effective as possible. To meet this outcome, we will:

- Work with council colleagues to effectively link our programs for outdoor and volunteer activity where possible. We will set an annual plan for review by spring 2017.
- Work with the partners who excel at working with volunteers, visitors and the wider community. This will improve both the involvement and experience of volunteers, and help ensure PRoW and countryside sites are developed to provide the best possible offer for residents in the community and visitors. Additionally, increased engagement will protect the PRoW and countryside sites in the longer term. We will have identified partners and put arrangements in place by summer 2018.

Glossary

Asset management approach. Each countryside site and item of furniture (such as a bridge or signpost) is an asset. We use surveys to monitor the condition of our assets and a priority system to determine which work should be done first – our Asset Management Programme. This helps us balance reactive and proactive requirements. The priority system is set out in the appendix 7 of the Technical Appendices.

Asset Management Programme. A plan for managing assets (such as structures and countryside sites) to an agreed standard through monitoring and maintenance.

Benchmarking. Learning how effective you are by comparing with others. This can be done in any area (such as unit costs or customer satisfaction) if the data is recorded.

Countryside Access Strategy (also called strategy or plan). This is a document that tells people what we have decided to do and why we have decided to do it (Our Vision and priorities). It contains a detailed plan describing the things that we will do to deliver the service and monitor how effective it is.

Countryside site. There are ten countryside sites that we are involved in managing, these are: Camber Sand Dunes/Johnson's Field, Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve, Cuckoo Trail, Ditchling Common Country Park, Forest Way Country Park, Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve, Riverside Park, Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP), Shinewater Park, Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve. They vary in form; some are open space with conservation designations while others are long thin sites largely used for walking, cycling or horse riding.

Declaring Authority. As a Local Authority we have powers to acquire, declare and manage Local Nature Reserves (LNR). To qualify as an LNR a countryside site must be of importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment. You can get more information about LNRs on page 29 of this strategy.

Delivery model. How a service is provided. By completing our options appraisal process we analyse a number of different models and determine which ones are best for East Sussex. Until the model is agreed with Councillors we call it the preferred model.

Legal records and maps. The Council is responsible for the maintenance and update of a number of legal records and maps, these include:

- **The Definitive Map and Statement** – which records the routes of PROW.
- **The Town and Village Green Register** – which records the location and boundaries of town and village greens.
- **The Common Land Register** – which records the location and boundaries of common land.

Our Vision. This is our idea for what we think the service should be like in the future, set out in a short, clear and simple form.

Priorities. These are the most important things that we need to do.

Public Rights of Way (PROW). PROW enable free access to our County, crossing through towns and the countryside. Depending on their type they can be used on foot, bicycle, horse (and carriage) or in a vehicle. You can get more information on page 30.

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Some of our countryside sites have this designation as they are very important for wildlife. You can get more information on all the different designations on page 34.

Stakeholder. An individual, group or organisation that has an interest in the Strategy. As an example this includes: residents, visitors, landowners, councils (such as districts, boroughs, parishes and towns), tenants, councillors, the Environment Agency, Natural England, local communities and users groups. This list is not exhaustive.

Strategic Commissioning Framework (framework). This is a way of working that we use to help ensure all Council departments follow the same process to make decisions about the services that we provide. The process has four groups of tasks (analyse, plan, do and review) that we carry out to find out what residents need and how our services are provided to meet those needs. There are three key terms:

- **Need** – our statutory responsibilities and contribution to Council policies.
- **Demand** – what people want from PRow and countryside sites.
- **Supply** – how we work to meet need.

There is more information on the framework in the Technical Appendix.

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How we developed the Strategy

Introduction

As previously described, to develop our Countryside Access Strategy, we adopted the Strategic Commissioning Framework approach. The following sections summarise the information we gathered, and its analysis, as we applied this process. This includes:

- research to better understand how and why PRoW and countryside sites are used, and the benefits users get from them
- information reviewed to understand how we provide the service and how our methods compare to others
- a gap analysis looking for any differences between the two above
- some information on how we will model our service in the future.

More detailed reports are shown in the Technical Appendix starting on page 24.

Understanding ‘Need’:

Our statutory responsibilities and contribution to Council priorities

To understand this we looked at a range of information and spoke to a number of groups.

The findings of this research are summarised on the next three pages while the Technical Appendix has more detail.

We looked at all the information we had collected, as well as legislation and guidance that sets out our statutory obligations. We also identified how PRoW and countryside sites contribute to our council priorities and what residents and visitors expect. These have been used to underpin our vision and the strategy. Our strategic outcomes set out how we will meet them and prioritise spend in the future.

Health Benefits



Promoting active lifestyles can help us address some of the important challenges facing the UK today. Increasing activity has the potential to improve the physical and mental health of the nation, reduce all-cause mortality and improve life expectancy. It can also save money by significantly easing the burden of chronic disease on the health and social care services.

We looked in to the health benefits of activity. Appendix 1 (A Review of the Potential to Contribute To Improving Health) highlights a range of research.

Being active has a wide range of benefits for our physical and mental wellbeing. It reduces risk of heart disease by 35%, type II diabetes by 40%, breast cancer by 20%, depression and dementia by 30%.

To live a healthy lifestyle each week adults should do:



150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity



An activity to improve muscle strength twice



Minimise extended sedentary periods

Research has found that green exercise (i.e. outdoors in green areas) can provide additional benefits by improving self-esteem, mood disturbance, stress and anxiety. Furthermore, early indications from research identify green space as a contributor to social cohesion.

We also know that children should:

- Engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) every day.
- Undertake vigorous activities, including those that strengthen muscle and bone, at least three days a week.
- Minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (sitting) for extended periods.

By maintaining our PRoW and countryside sites we are providing key infrastructure which can support people to meet their need for outdoor activity. By working with council colleagues we can ensure that our Countryside Access Strategy takes into account the health benefits that can be achieved through improving access to green spaces. It can also prioritise supporting access for people with poorer health outcomes, maximising our positive impact as a Council.

Usage



We employed various methods to gather information to understand how and why people are using the PRow and countryside sites. The Consultation Reports (appendices 3 and 4 of the Technical Appendix) show all of our results.

Individual survey

A survey asking people how and why they use PRow and our countryside sites.

This was advertised across East Sussex and we received 886 responses. 97% of respondents had used PRow and 85% a countryside site in the last two years. 60% said they used them to get fresh air, for their health and to enjoy scenery and walking. We learnt that over 80% of those visiting a countryside site travelled there by car.

We had 405 additional comments about PRow which told us: they are a valued asset (14%), where accessibility (15%) and maintenance (26%) is important.

We had 141 additional comments on countryside sites: 18% said they were a valued asset; 12% said maintenance and management was important; 15% praised our management; 85% said the countryside sites were important for wildlife conservation; 18% wanted easier access; and 13% wanted more information.

Stakeholder engagement

We also asked our stakeholders how they are involved and what their plans are for the future.

We received 126 replies to our survey and had 65 attendees at our meetings. We spoke to a range of stakeholders including landowners, user groups, partners and organisations. 10% were from the private sector, 14% voluntary, 18% public sector and 42% association or society.

The top reasons respondents were involved in PRow and countryside sites were:

- Enjoyment of the countryside
- Health and exercise
- Monitoring and management.

20% were involved with Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP), 27% with the Cuckoo Trail and 64% in walking.

When asked about the future, the main issues cited were: financing (12%), co-ordination (12%), change (13%) and information (12%).

Other usage data

Recordings of visitor numbers give some indication of use across the network. SSCP visitor centre numbers show relatively consistent use of between 45,000 and 65,000 per year except for one dip of roughly 25% in 2012. (It should be noted not all visitors enter the centre).

In 2014/15 we received 3,705 reports in relation to maintenance of the PRow network. These are fed into our 'asset management system', so work can be reviewed, prioritised and action taken where appropriate.

Economy 	Tourism is important to rural communities and the countryside can be a key driver for influencing visitor behaviour. Tourism is valued at £1.35bn for East Sussex, and accounts for 22,483 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) jobs. The countryside is estimated to account for roughly 10%, i.e. between £134m/2,250 FTE and £147m/2,600 FTE. While the exact draw of the PRoW and our countryside sites to the countryside of East Sussex is not known, it is certainly an important aspect. By maintaining our PRoW and countryside sites we are providing key infrastructure that has a direct impact on visitor attraction and experience of East Sussex. The ‘Strategy Assessment Report (Economic Impact)’ provides more information. See appendix 2 of the Technical Appendix.
Legislation and guidance 	The Council, as Highway Authority, has a statutory duty to assert and protect the public’s right to use the 2,000 miles of footpaths, bridleways and byways in East Sussex. These public highways run predominantly across private land. The Highways Act 1980, along with other legislation, places obligations on both the Council and landowners to maintain the network. Managing the network covers a range of work. As well as completing maintenance (such as building bridges, installing gates and resurfacing paths) the Council works with landowners to help them understand and meet their responsibilities. In managing the network the Council also has a statutory responsibility to maintain legal records such as the Definitive Map and Statement, which records all PRoW, and the Town and Village Green and Common Land Registers. In updating these records, there may be objections from landowners and users, which can require legal advice and even Public Inquiries. As a landowner of countryside sites, the Council has a range of responsibilities which broadly involve: wildlife conservation in line with its designation; ensuring assets are safe; enforcement of bylaws; and providing suitable access. The Council is also the Declaring Authority at two countryside sites: Chailey Common LNR and Weir Wood LNR. Here the Council has further responsibilities, even though it is not the landowner. There is a wide range of national legislation and regional policy that affects how PRoW and countryside sites are managed. This ranges from planning policy on development to conservation policy on how works can be completed. It also includes local policy such as the Transport Plan and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). A strategy map is detailed in the Technical Appendix and anyone working in this field must be aware of this information.

Understanding Supply: How we manage public rights of way and countryside sites

We looked at a range of information to review how we provide our services including costs and what outcomes are achieved.

A lot of the information we gathered was held internally, but some was collected from external partners, colleagues or businesses.

By analysing this information we are able to understand how well we are doing.

The findings of this research are detailed on these two pages while the Technical Appendix has more detail.

Maintenance of PRow and countryside sites 	We have 2,000 miles of PRow and are involved in managing ten countryside sites (1,160 hectares). The Council operates an effective ‘asset management system’ to prioritise and balance reactive and proactive maintenance (see glossary and appendix 7). Each year over a quarter of the PRow and countryside sites are surveyed – inspecting and recording the condition of our assets. This data is then added to the Rights of Way Asset Management (RAM) system which is used to organise and prioritise work. Applying an asset management approach gives the Council a good understanding of the condition of PRow and countryside sites and flexibility in its maintenance. We are proud to report that over 99% of our PRow network is accessible by foot and 80% of the furniture is in a good condition.
Countryside site condition 	The countryside sites are important locally and nationally, which is reflected in their designations. The designations inform what can be done on the countryside site and how works should be arranged. There are species records and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designations linked to the countryside sites. These show that ESCC, as landowner or manager of land, has a duty to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity at all of the countryside sites. The data collated shows that ESCC is currently meeting this duty. The five SSSI countryside sites it manages are meeting the national target of the land being within a ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable recovering’ condition. Additionally, rare and protected species continue to be recorded across all the countryside sites. 80% of countryside site furniture, which is maintained by ESCC, is also recorded as being in a good condition.
Market analysis 	To understand our supply we have reviewed our staff cost, resource, equipment and depot arrangements, along with how much work we are able to complete each year. This has enabled us to develop a good understanding of the average unit costs across all our work, from clearance to building bridges, from letter writing to resurfacing. This information was compared to contractor costs for similar works and research findings reported by Surrey County Council (SCC) into the market in East Sussex. Our research found that we have a competitive unit price for our work.

Benchmarking 	We spoke to our neighbouring authorities to understand how they manage PRoW and countryside sites, as well as the benefits of different models. Each council arranges their services slightly differently, to suit the need of their local area. Some have more PRoW while others have more countryside sites, and we all record our work differently. This meant direct comparison of our outputs, such as the percentage of bridges that are in a good condition, was not possible. On a broad level, it was useful to appreciate the different arrangements in place, how income was secured and what benefits different models achieve. We found that ESCC is competitive in its management cost and level of maintenance, and leading in asset management techniques. We are the only Council in the south-east that has a joint PRoW and countryside site maintenance team.
Consultation 	As well as helping understand how and why people use the PRoW and countryside sites, the consultations helped us understand how well we manage them. Respondents told us that maintenance and accessibility were important issues and that in some cases if this was better it may encourage them to use PRoW and countryside sites more. However, more people said that there was nothing that we could do to increase their usage, while some said that location and time was a factor. This was repeated in the stakeholder survey, where respondents told us that the condition of the PRoW/countryside site plays an important role in its usage. Other comments let us know that our system is working well considering the level of resource that we have.

Gap Analysis: understanding how well we are performing

With the information we have gathered about our supply we can see if we are meeting our statutory responsibilities, making the best use of our resources and helping people help themselves.

The gap analysis is summarised below. This shows that the current arrangements are working well (however we might be able to do more in some areas).

Meeting our statutory responsibilities as Highways Authority, landowner and declaring authority.

The Council operates an effective asset management system across the PRow and countryside sites to balance proactive and reactive work. Health and safety is the key factor, ensuring a quick response to these issues. Prioritisation of works takes into account how much a path has been actively promoted to the public, as well as general usage and reports. This allows us to react to change of use over time (the priority statement is set out in appendix 4 of the Technical Appendix). Almost a fifth (**17.5%**) of our PRow network is prioritised as ‘well used’ or promoted by the Council. On promoted routes, the furniture maintenance is carried out by the Council.

Another key factor for good works planning is having good survey data:

- Every year we survey **over a quarter (575 miles)** of the PRow network
- Every countryside site is surveyed **every two years**

From the surveys we know that:

- **80%** of PRow and countryside site furniture is in ‘good condition’
- **Only one percent** of the PRow network is ‘not available’. This is due to legal issues or fundamental obstruction (for example, cliff falls or major developments)

Natural England’s target of **95%** of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) being in a ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable recovering’ condition is met on the countryside sites that the Council has involvement with.

The Sussex Rare Species Inventory (Sussex RSI) and Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan Species Inventory (Sussex BAPSI) show a good range of species at the countryside sites. This is an indication of the effective management of the countryside sites and applies to all countryside sites including the SSSIs.

Making the best use of our resources

Four countryside sites are supported by Higher Level Stewardship schemes; the funding is invested in the countryside sites to improve their condition further.

Where possible, funding is secured from developers and used to improve the condition of the countryside and mitigate the impact of development.

Where financially viable and possible, we use Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) contractors and local produce. Business opportunities are created on our countryside sites for SMEs where appropriate.

The asset management system ensures the maintenance of PRow and countryside sites is well managed. It also ensures the team takes into account the level of use that an individual PRow or countryside site has and how heavily they are promoted.

Land searches are an important aspect of property purchase, especially in rural communities. We have a public commitment to provide a quick response, which is met.

Helping people help themselves

People like to enjoy the countryside in different ways. **22%** of our PRoW network is designated as a multi-user route, e.g. can be used by walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

In addition to an accessible network, there are active volunteering opportunities in 14 parishes and at six countryside sites. There is also the ability to create a volunteer group in any area if people are interested and their work is appropriate for the PRoW network and countryside sites.

886 people replied to the individuals' survey. **97%** had used the PRoW in the last two years and **85%** a countryside site. **16%** stated maintenance as a reason that would encourage them to use PRoW and countryside sites more.

In a survey completed by a total of **126** groups or organisations, maintenance was rated **7th** out of 16 in the analysis of comments from meetings.

PRoW and countryside sites are promoted on our website, in electronic leaflets, as well as via an online interactive map and a smartphone app. This gives residents and visitors easy access to maps and the countryside. The Visitor Centre at SSCP is open for nine months a year.

Options Appraisal Process: analysis of management options

As a result of the review process the strategic outcomes were developed. These are:

1. Enable residents and visitors to safely use our public rights of way and countryside sites.
2. Support and enable landowners, stakeholders and residents to exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities.
3. Achieve the most efficient and effective management of our public rights of way and countryside sites for the benefit of residents, visitors and wildlife.
4. Enhance local communities through engagement with our public rights of way and countryside sites.

These strategic outcomes set out how we will prioritise our work in the future to deliver against our statutory responsibilities and maximise the contribution to Council priorities. There are a number of ways to provide a service, such as 'in-house' staff or external contractors. We applied a thorough options appraisal process to look at all the different delivery models. This is summarised, with the preferred model, on the next page.

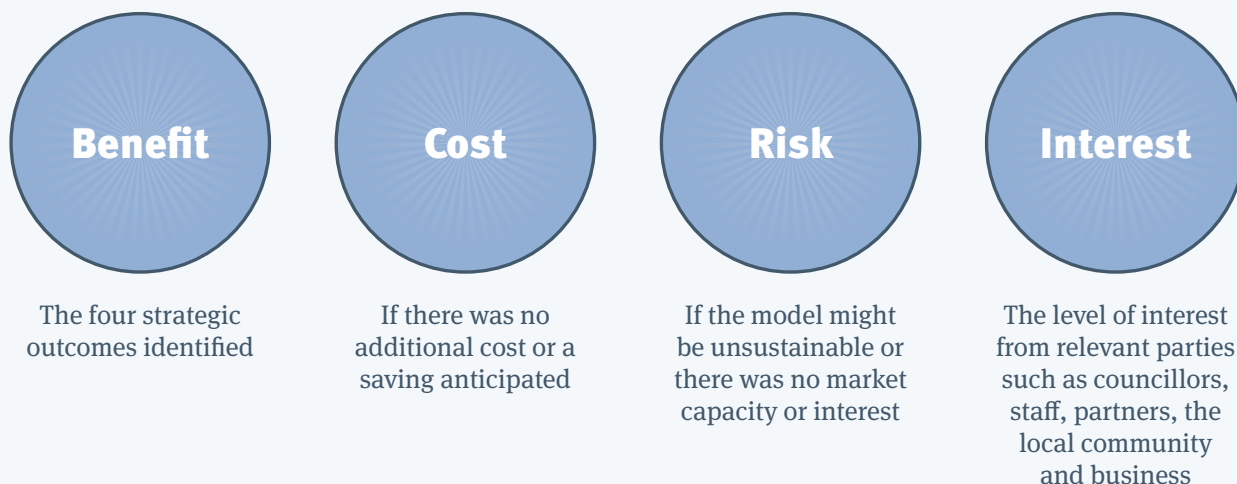
Delivery model options

Each delivery model was analysed against four categories: benefits, costs, risk and interest.

To see how PRow and countryside sites could be managed in the future we have looked at how other authorities provide a range of functions and evaluated a number of delivery models. These included: the use of contractors; management by charitable organisations, creation of a trading company or social enterprise; transfer or sale of land; in-house provision; and partnership arrangements.

Analysis: benefit, cost, risk, interest

Each area of analysis was defined before the process began and included:



This analysis enabled us to identify the best models available for East Sussex from a wide number of options. These were explored in more detail and the final delivery model developed for the strategy.

Preferred model

Broadly, the Council has determined two models for the functions:

1. **PRow will be managed in-house.** This covers areas such as maintenance, enforcement and legal record keeping. The research found that our current Asset Management Programme efficiently and effectively balances reactive and proactive maintenance and enforcement requirements. The research also found that we operate at a competitive cost when measured against external providers. By managing the service in-house, we maintain a high level of flexibility in planning how we meet the strategic outcomes. In a small number of areas, modifications were identified that may bring improvements. These include: how we structure our work with consideration of Public Health objectives; how we communicate and work with our colleagues developing new paths, and the delivery of our volunteer offer. Our Rights of Way and Countryside Team will use the findings of the research to improve how we manage our resources in the future.
2. **How we manage our countryside sites should change.** We believe that by changing how the countryside sites are managed, we may be able to improve what they have to offer. By working to pass most of the sites to others experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement, we hope to improve the contribution that countryside sites make to Council objectives and in meeting the expectations of users. If we are able to enhance their financial management they may also have long-term protection from the continued financial pressures all organisations are experiencing. The Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way are more like Public Rights of Way in their appearance and use, so they require different management arrangements to green open space. Consequently, we propose that the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way continue to be managed in-house.

Implementation and Review: next steps

In April 2016 this draft Strategy will be submitted to the County Council's Cabinet (a group of Councillors) for approval. After this we will hold a public consultation asking what people think of the Strategy. There will be a survey published on our website (www.eastsussex.gov.uk/haveyoursay). We will use this time to speak to a range of stakeholders to understand what people think of our plan and their interest in it. The survey will be open to everyone, including residents, visitors, partners and businesses.

We will use the information that we gather during this period to finalise the strategy. The final strategy will be approved by Cabinet before it is implemented.

As there are a number of changes proposed, if they are approved, we will take a staged approach to implementation. We have developed a draft implementation plan which sets out who we need to speak to and when, as well as what processes we need to follow to make sure all the changes follow the right legal process.

The information we have gathered has given us a good understanding of our current position and we will use this to monitor the changes that we put in place. Our Rights of Way and Countryside Team will work to embed these changes into their working practices. As changes are put in place they will monitor the impact of those changes. Our Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) and the strategic outcomes will be used to make sure that all changes continue to meet the objectives we have identified.

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Strategic Commissioning Framework (framework): the process used to develop our plan

The framework sets out how the Council will secure the best countryside access for East Sussex residents. By focusing on outcomes, not just the existing services, it will enable us to make the best possible use of resources, manage markets and design services to ensure a balance of cost, health, social, economic and environmental benefits for East Sussex.

The Strategy builds on existing best practice and reflects our past achievements, and will enable us to understand better the long term contribution that PRoW and countryside sites make in East Sussex. From that understanding we will identify the best approach and methods available to us to gain the most benefit.

The Strategy has been developed using our commissioning framework to provide a clear rationale for the commissioning decisions that we have to make. It also provides the basis for our decision-making, in a way that is consistent across different services.

Strategic commissioning is a cyclical activity, (ie: an ongoing process) and not a one-off event. The activities involved in strategic commissioning and the relationship with procurement is shown below.



The strategic commissioning cycle (the outer circle in the diagram) drives the procurement and contract management activities (the inner circle). The contracting experience must, however, inform the ongoing development of strategic commissioning. It is our intention that our commissioning process should be equitable and transparent, and open to influence from all stakeholders through dialogue with customers, service users and service providers.

In developing this Strategy we have sought to establish clearly what we want the network of PRoW and countryside sites in the county to look like in the future; this is 'Our Vision'. We also need to be clear about how this Vision will be achieved – the implementation process. Our Strategy for PRoW and countryside sites reflects and contributes towards the delivery of our wider strategic objectives.

Population Needs Assessment: understanding how and why people use public rights of way and countryside sites

To understand the 'need' for public rights of way (PRoW) and countryside sites we decided to research information on:

- **Health benefits**
- **Economic impact**
- **Usage**

The health benefits were investigated and reported by Peter Brett Associates. They are briefly summarised on page 15 in 'Understanding Need' and the full report is published in appendix 1.

The economic impact assessment was completed by Nairne Ltd and Venuesadvisor Ltd. Page 17 in 'Understanding Need' gives a brief summary and the full report is published in appendix 2.

We investigated usage in a number of ways:

1. **Held data.** This included data from counters showing how many people use the PRoW and countryside sites as well as recorded reports, complaints, compliments and website usage. This is summarised in the table below (Table 1A).
2. **A survey for individuals.** This was widely publicised in East Sussex and could be completed by anyone who wanted to tell us how and why they use PRoW and countryside sites. It was open to everyone, including people that didn't live in East Sussex and those that didn't use PRoW and countryside sites. The consultation report is published in appendix 3.
3. **Stakeholder engagement.** Here we spoke to a range of interested parties and groups including landowners, user groups, partners and organisations. We issued a survey and held five meetings where we explored how these stakeholders are involved and their future plans. The consultation report is published in appendix 4.

There is a small amount of data held by the Council and its partners that provides some useful context to PRoW and countryside site use. One area is the number of reports, complaints and compliments that we receive each year.

Another form of data is gathered by counters on some PRoW and at the Visitor Centre at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP). There are counters on the South Downs Way (SDW) and 1066 Route. Both routes pass through East Sussex and are funded by South Downs National Park and Rother District Council respectively. We only have access to a small number of counters as they have a cost to maintain and can be damaged in poor weather. It is also important to be aware many people visiting SSCP do not go into the Visitor Centre.

Table A1: Summary of some data sets

Area	Findings
Counters on 1066 and SDW, SSCP visitor numbers 	Counters give some indication of use across the network but due to cost we only have them on two main promoted routes. In summary: • 1066 Route – usage ranges from approx. 1,000 to 6,000 counts per year depending on the area. The highest recorded number has been found at Guestling in 2011 and the lowest in Sedlescombe in 2003. Usage was highest in 2007/8 and 2011/12 with troughs in between. • South Downs Way (SDW) – there are three counters in East Sussex and in 2013/14 they recorded • 26,217 users at Itford Farm • 40,367 users at Jevington Church • 61,191 users at Streat Hill. These are records of walkers (by far the highest), cyclists and horse riders. It could be assumed that most of those at Streat Hill and Jevington Church are different people while most of those at Itford have visited one or the other. Streat Hill is shown to be consistently the busiest across the South Downs. • Seven Sister Country Park (SSCP) – visitor centre numbers show relatively consistent use of between 45,000 and 65,000 per year except for one dip of roughly 25% in 2012.
Complaints, compliments and reports 	Reports are received to let us know about path and furniture condition. These can come from anyone, such as user groups, parish and town councils and members of the public. In 2014/15 we received 3,705 reports in relation to PRow. These are fed into the asset management system for review, and action where appropriate. In 2014/15 the contact centre received 32 compliments across the service, and only six complaints.
Website usage 	Another useful source of information that gives an indication of usage and interest is the number of times a page on our website is visited. For example, between April 2014 and March 2015, there were approximately 217,000 visits to the SSCP website. In the same period, the highest visited countryside walks page on the Council's website was the Cuckoo Trail with over 20,000 visits. This is over double the number of visits to the Forest Way page, which received just under 9,000. Our webpage detailing information on circular walks was visited over 13,000 times and visits to Camber Sands and beaches together totalled over 19,000.

Current Legislation, Guidance, Policy and Practice

There is a wide range of national legislation, guidance and regional policy that affects how PRoW and countryside sites are managed. This ranges from planning policy on development to conservation policy on how works can be completed. It also includes local policy such as the Transport Plan and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). A strategy map is shown in appendix 5 and anyone working in this field must be aware of this information.

The Council has key areas of responsibility in its role as Highways Authority, landowner and Declaring Authority. These are set out in Table A2.

There are three areas where future legislation change will affect the Council:

- **Finalising the Definitive Map.** The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 states that any unrecorded PRoW in existence before 1949 and not on the map by 2026, will be extinguished. This is likely to generate an increase in requests to have new paths recorded in the lead up to 2026. Public Inquiries are often necessary to resolve disputed requests.
- **Coastal Path.** Under the Marine and Coastal Access Bill 2009, the path must be completed by 2020 with East Sussex sections being timetabled by Natural England for 2016-2018. This will require some resource to map, formalise and create.
- **High Level Stewardship (HLS) funding.** The HLS provides a significant income for some of the countryside sites. The fund is issued by Natural England and due to be replaced in 2016 by a new scheme, Countryside Stewardship. It is anticipated, but not certain, that once our HLS ends we will be successful in applying for Countryside Stewardship.

Table A2: Summary of key responsibilities in legislation and guidance.

	Responsibility
Countryside site landowner 	As a landowner of countryside sites the Council has a range of responsibilities which broadly involve the following actions: • Wildlife/heritage conservation in line with its designation (see tables A4 and A5). This involves managing the land in a way that conserves and enhances its wildlife value. In addition we must ensure our work, and that of others, does not damage the habitats. • Ensuring all assets (such as access structures, car parks, buildings, etc) on the countryside sites are monitored and maintained to a suitably safe standard. • Enforcement, e.g. making sure all bylaws are followed. • Providing suitable access for all users. These are set out in various legislation including: Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006.

(Continued on the opposite page.)

Table A2 (Continued): Summary of key responsibilities in legislation and guidance.

	Responsibility
Highways Authority 	The Council, as Highway Authority, has a statutory duty to assert and protect the public's right to use the 2,000 miles of footpaths, bridleways and byways in East Sussex. These public highways run predominantly across private land. The Highways Act 1980, along with other legislation, places obligations on both the Council and landowners. - Landowners are responsible for preventing the obstruction of a path. They must maintain stiles or gates (as they enable a user to pass over or through a fence), adjacent vegetation or structures and crops. - The Council is responsible for the maintenance of a path, i.e. the surface (including vegetation), signage, bridges and legal records. If the Council owns the land that the PRoW passes over, it is responsible for both areas. The Council is required to provide a 25% contribution to the upkeep of gates and stiles. Also, if the stile or gate is on a walk promoted by the Council, we will usually maintain it on the landowner's behalf. The Council must maintain legal records, these are: - the Definitive Map (DM), which sets out all PRoW - the Common Land (CL) Register - Town and Village Green (TVG) Register. These records are essential to a range of duties in relation to maintaining the network, such as completing property searches, temporary closure orders, diversions and responding to planning applications. Requests for paths to be added to the DM must be considered. The Council must also provide a Rights of Way Improvement Plan and facilitate a Local Access Forum.
Countryside site Declaring Authority 	A Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a statutory designation made under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. We, as a Local Authority, have powers to acquire, declare and manage LNRs. To qualify as an LNR a countryside site must be of importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment. As Declaring Authority we have a responsibility towards the management of Chailey Common LNR and Weir Wood LNR.

The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council to have “due regard” to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations. We have completed an Equality Impact Assessment on this Strategy which can be found in appendix 6 of the Technical Appendix. The assessment also includes further information on the Equality Act 2010.

Provision, Resource and Financial Analysis

Provision

We have 2,000 miles of public rights of way (PRoW) across East Sussex covering both rural and urban areas. Many PRoW were created for rural travel – typically between towns, farms, pubs and churches. Since the 1950's, these routes have largely become recreational in nature – allowing people to access the countryside for personal enjoyment as well as their day-to-day activities.

Whilst PRoW are often rural, around 50 miles of the PRoW network runs through urban areas. This urban network is typically made up of twittens – providing routes between shops, schools and housing. Map one, on the next page, shows the distribution of PRoW across the County.

There are four different types (or status) of PRoW and they are usually marked by different symbols, most commonly found on wooden signs (or fingerposts).



1. Footpath

Where you can walk



2. Bridleway

Where you can walk and ride a horse or bicycle



3. Byway

Where you can walk, ride a horse or bicycle and drive a motor vehicle



4. Restricted byway

Where you can walk, ride a horse or bicycle and drive a carriage

Table A3. Summary of PRoW designation at other authorities (miles)

	Footpath	Bridleway	Byway	Restricted Byway	Total PRoW
East Sussex County Council (ESCC)	1,563	364	45	28	2,000
Hampshire County Council (HCC)	2,060	471	178	146	2,855
Kent County Council (KCC)	3,622	472	143	96	4,190
Surrey County Council (SCC)	1,388	690	123	1	2,079
West Sussex County Council (WSCC)	1,722	727	8	78	2,535

PRoW are used by a range of people who want to access the countryside in different ways. Walking is the main activity, and bridleways are often the only off-road access for horse riders and cyclists.

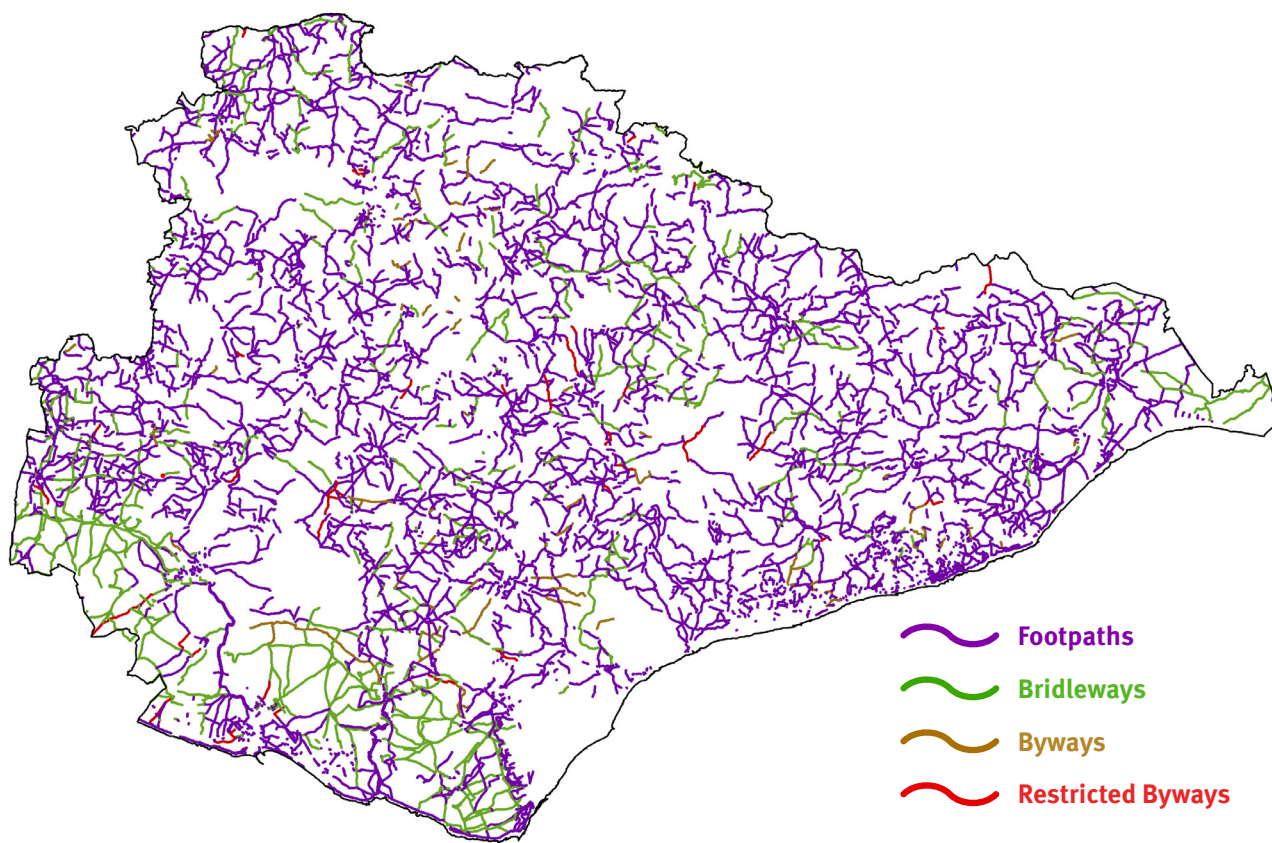
The Council's website provides an online PRoW map, showing paths, gates, stiles and bridges. This map can be used by the public to find paths in their areas, or to report issues to the Council.

Whilst many PRoW users prefer to plan their own routes, either using the online PRoW map or Ordnance Survey maps, the Council also provides 38 self-guided circular walks. These routes provide walkers with a range of well-maintained walks around the County, which are typically accessible via public transport. Leaflets providing maps and walk directions as well as gates, stiles and road crossing information, can be downloaded from our website.

There are ten long distance linear paths that run through East Sussex – for example, the South Downs Way or Weald Way. Long distance routes typically run across county boundaries. Where PRoW pass through farms or cross water, bridges, gates and stiles are installed so that the path can be used safely and livestock are controlled. In East Sussex, there are:

2,803 bridges, **4,954** gates, **1,164** steps, **6,103** stiles, **10,853** fingerposts.

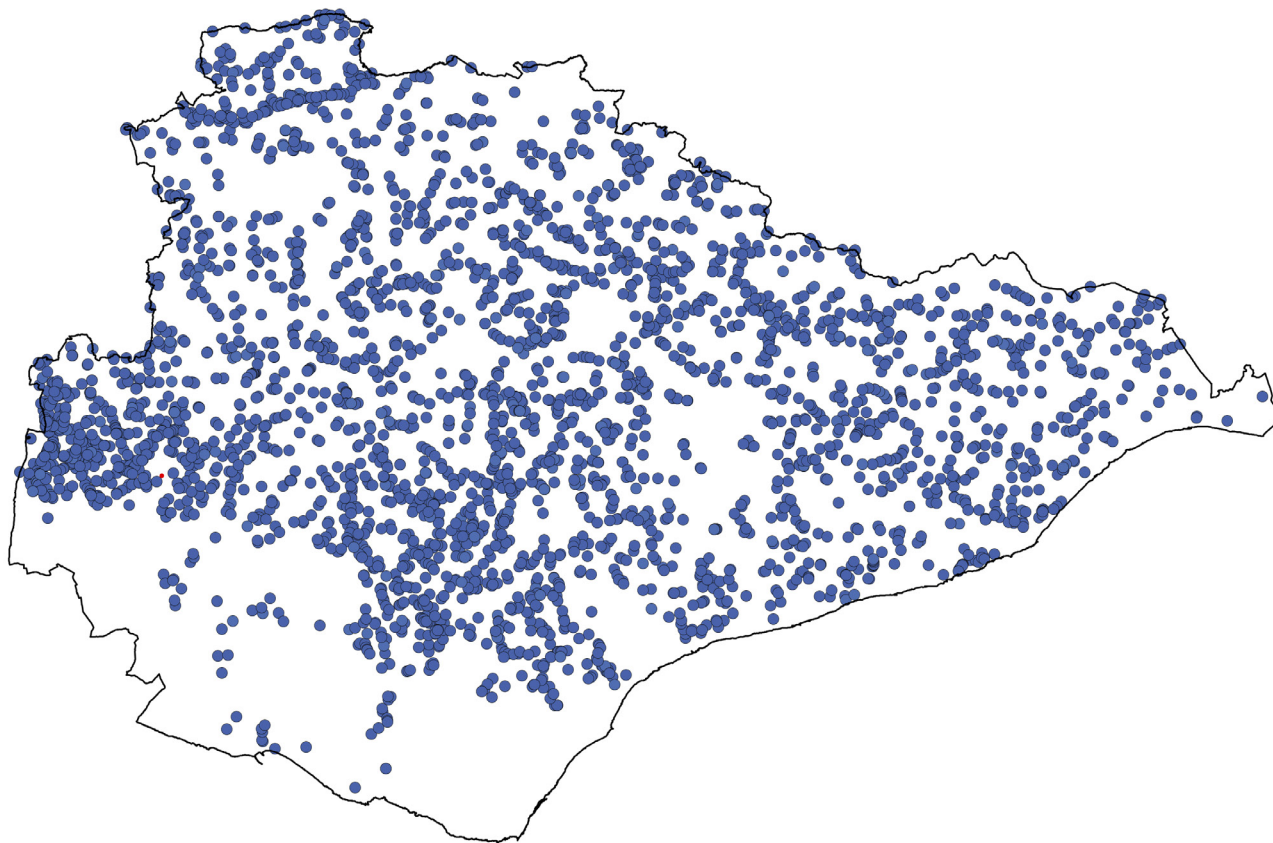
Map 1:
Distribution of different PRow in East Sussex



Like main highway networks, the mileage and status of PRow varies between counties – often due to geographical or historical reasons. For example, the South Downs of East Sussex features a higher percentage of bridleways than the rest of the County. There are also very few bridges in the South Downs area compared to the Weald.

These differences can affect the type of work required in a particular parish or area of the County. For example, a bridge on a bridleway will require more resource to replace compared to a footpath. Table A3 shows a comparison of PRow in East Sussex with other authorities.

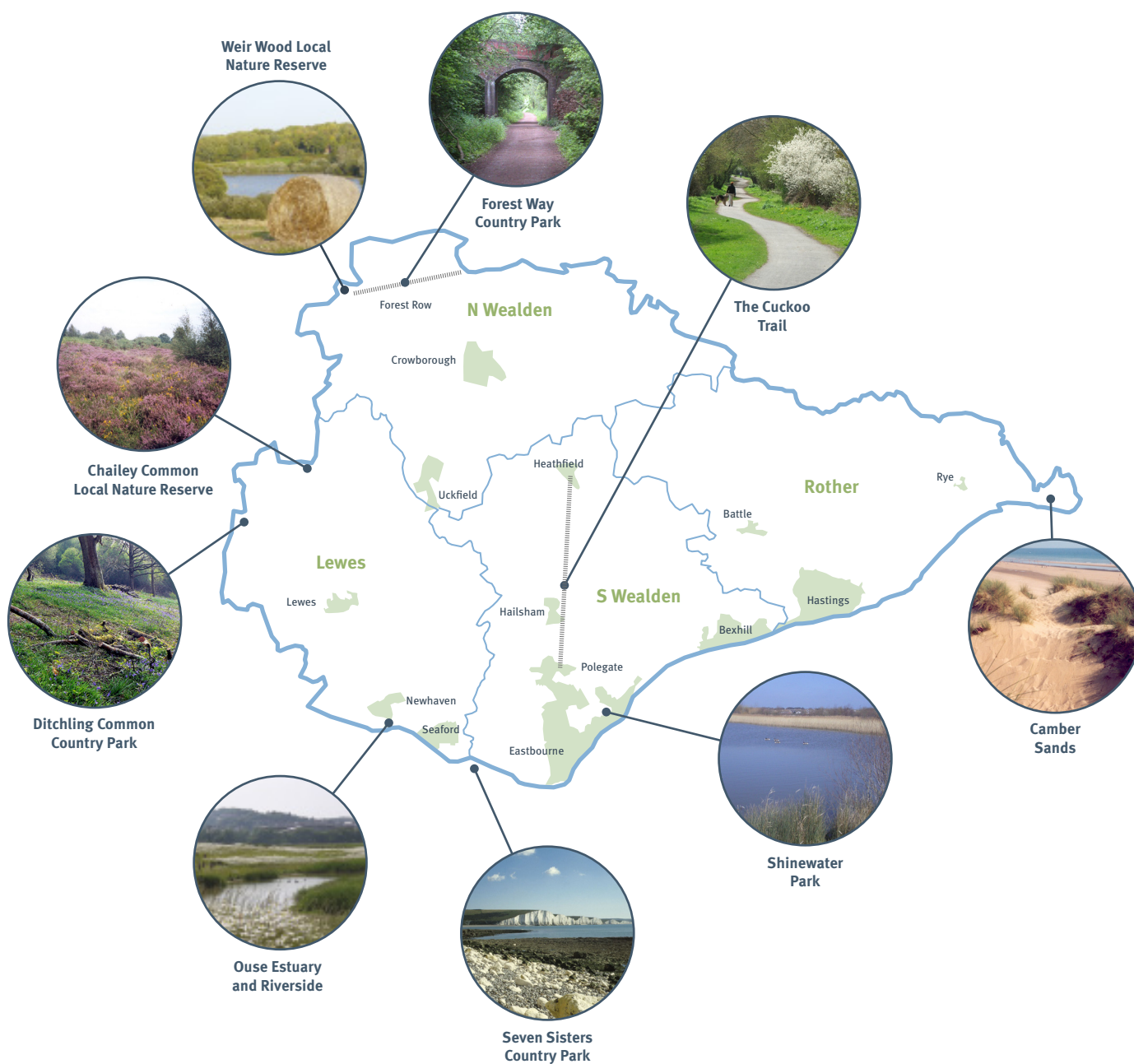
Map 2:
2,803 bridges in East Sussex



Map 2 gives an overview of the 2,803 bridges in the County – each blue circle is a bridge. Our Rights of Way Asset Management System (RAM) records each item of furniture as well as its condition. This is informed by the definitive map, our network survey and reports from path users or landowners.

The Rights of Way and Countryside Team are involved in the management of ten countryside sites in East Sussex; their location in the County is shown in map three. The countryside sites have become the responsibility of the County for a range of reasons, such as conservation importance or development requirement. The countryside sites are open spaces where visitors are free to follow paths or roam the area. You can walk all of them and ride a bike at two, the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way Country Park.

Map 3:
Countryside sites managed by the Rights of Way and Countryside Team



There are a number of protected species at the countryside sites. Our responsibility and management varies depending on the countryside site designation and how we are involved. Countryside sites are usually managed by a plan which sets out what our priorities are and how they will be achieved. In some cases, due to the importance of species on the countryside site, this is in agreement with Natural England. This is summarised in Table A4 (each countryside site name links to our website with more information).

There are other countryside sites which the Council has some involvement in, such as Ashdown Forest and Rye Harbour Nature Reserve (RHNR). These are not managed by the Rights of Way and Countryside Team and are not included in this Strategy.

Table A4. The countryside sites

Countryside Site	Wildlife Conservation Designations (More information on table A5)	Area (Hectares)
Camber Sand Dunes/Johnson's Field	SSSI, SNCI, SPA	27
Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve*	LNR, SSSI, ANA	450
Cuckoo Trail*	Part of NCN21	39
Ditchling Common Country Park	Country Park, SSSI, ANA	78
Forest Way Country Park	Country Park, Part of NCN21, AONB	30
Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve	SNCI, NR, SDNP	43
Riverside Park	SNCI	18
Seven Sisters Country Park	Country Park, SSSI, SDNP, ANA	280
Shinewater Park	ANA	43 (part water)
Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve*	LNR, SSSI, ANA , AONB	152 (mostly water)

*Chailey Common LNR and Weir Wood LNR are not owned by the Council, the Cuckoo Trail and Shinewater are part owned by the Council.

The Council works closely with government agencies and non-governmental organisations, to ensure that the protection of its important assets is consistent with national and international environmental policy and associated land designation. The designations are set out in more detail in Table A5.

Table A5. Countryside site designation and legislation

Designation	Legislation
Local Nature Reserve (LNR) As Declaring Authority we have a responsibility towards the management of Chailey Common LNR and Weir Wood LNR.	A Local Nature Reserve is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. As a Local Authority, the Council has powers to acquire, declare and manage LNRs. To qualify as an LNR a countryside site must be of importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment.
Country Parks (CP) We currently own and manage the Forest Way Country Park, Seven Sisters Country Park and Ditchling Common Country Park.	Country Parks are designated under the 1968 Countryside Act with the purpose of providing a green space for the public for quiet recreation. They are normally situated on the edge of urban areas.
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Relevant at Ditchling Common Country Park, Camber sand dunes, Weir Wood LNR, Seven Sisters Country Park and Chailey Common LNR.	A Site of Special Scientific Interest is designated under the Countryside & Wildlife Act 1981 and the regulations covering these areas were strengthened under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Natural England is responsible for overseeing the positive management of SSSIs and under this designation the Council has a responsibility to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSIs both in carrying out its operations and in exercising its decision making functions.

Further designations include:

• SNCI – Site of Nature Conservation Importance • SPA – Special Protected Area • NCN21 – National Cycle Route 21	• ANA – Archaeological Notification Areas • AONB – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty • SDNP – South Downs National Park
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Resources

We are very proactive in how we manage our workload. When a report is received from the public, the relevant Officer will assess how quickly a response is needed. The Rights of Way Priority Statement (see appendix 7) details how maintenance is prioritised. In summary, dangerous problems on the most popular paths are given the highest priority for inspection and resolution. (For example, a fallen tree hanging over a town-centre route to school.) Total path obstructions, where no alternative route is available, are also usually given a high priority, particularly on well-used or potentially useful paths.

At the other end of the scale, inconveniences (for example, minor problems where no risk is caused to the public) are regarded as a lower priority. This is especially the case where a suitable alternative route around the problem is available or if the path is not well-used due to its location in the network.

As well as employing staff and contractors we have 15 PRoW Parish volunteer groups with a total of over 220 members, over 110 volunteers working on our countryside sites (including SSCP Visitor Centre) and 10 PRoW Path Warden Volunteers.

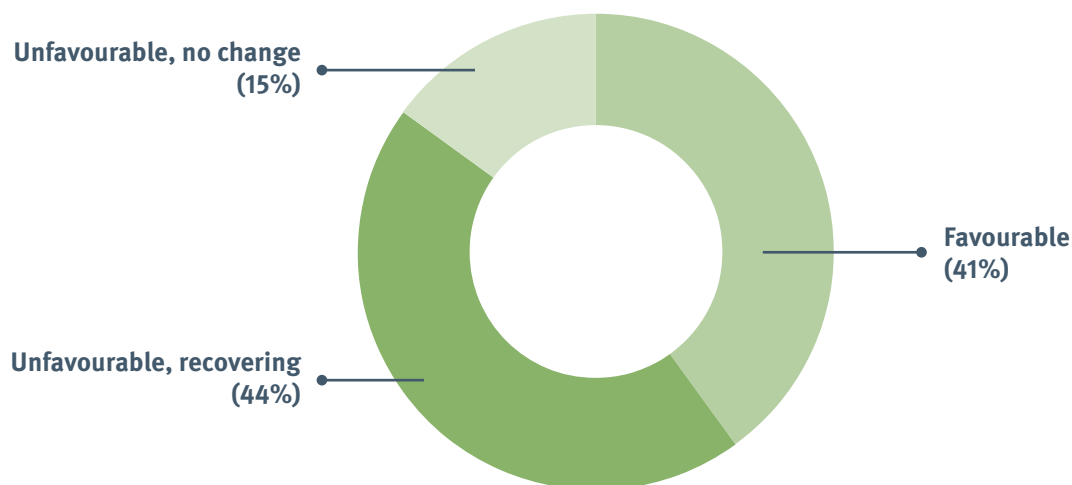
From the budget for PRoW and countryside sites the Council completes a range of work, including:

- Receipt, investigation and response to reports from members of the public, user groups and organisations
- Monitoring of PRoW and countryside sites
- Working with landowners to understand and meet their responsibilities
- Maintaining PRoW (that are either promoted, our responsibility or as enforcement action)
- Maintaining the countryside sites
- Working with volunteers
- Maintaining, reporting and updating our legal records for the Definitive Map, Town and Village Greens and Common Land registers
- Responding to property searches and planning applications
- Network management – for example, temporary closures or path diversions.

All the countryside sites are maintained to encourage wildlife. We work closely with government agencies and non-governmental organisations, to ensure that the protection of countryside sites is consistent with national and international environmental policy and associated land designation.

Natural England has a national target to ensure that 95% of SSSIs are in a 'favourable' or 'unfavourable and recovering' condition. The most recent data available from Natural England summarises the five Council owned or managed countryside sites within a SSSI. It indicates that 85% (839 ha) of countryside sites the Council owns or manages are in a favourable or recovering condition. See chart one.

However, the remaining 15% (148 ha) includes an anomaly; a large body of water at Weir Wood LNR that the Council is not responsible for. The water body accounts for 74% of the 'unfavourable – no change' rated area. If this area is excluded, the Natural England target of 95% is met.

Chart 1. Countryside site SSSI condition summary

All the countryside sites require a range of other management, depending on where they are placed and how they are used. This work can include partnership working, litter picking, visitor engagement, managing leases as well as repairing and maintaining property. Rare and protected species continue to be recorded across all the countryside sites. 80% of assets on all countryside sites are in a 'good' condition.

As part of the commissioning review we have spoken with other councils to understand how they manage their PRow and countryside sites, the table below shows a comparison.

Table A6. Summary of delivery at neighbouring councils

	Public rights of way		Countryside sites	
	Office staff	Maintenance	Office staff	Maintenance
BHCC	In-house	In-house	In-house	In-house
ESCC	In-house	In-house	In-house	In-house
HCC	In-house	In-house	In-house	In-house
KCC	In-house	Out-sourced	In-house	In-house
SCC	In-house	Out-sourced	In-house	Long-term lease
WSCC	In-house	Out-sourced	In-house	Mix

In this review we found that we have different focuses which determine our respective spend and outputs. Some authorities are beginning an asset management review similar to the one we began in 2008, while others have completed an assessment of their unit cost and are exploring contract arrangements. The discussions were useful to understand how our unit cost compared to others, both locally and in the commercial market.

Financial Analysis

Income is collected from a range of sources including:

- Various rents and licensing for those using our land
- Ranger agreements for work on the Cuckoo Trail and at Weir Wood LNR
- Sale of stile kits to landowners
- Property searches for PRoW, TVG and Common Land and landowner depositions
- PRoW diversions in a landowner's interest
- Temporary path closures
- Car parking charges and pass schemes

Each year £55k is secured from grants from Natural England in the form of Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) funding.

Table A7 summarises the total budget for the management of PRoW and countryside sites in 2015/16. The total budget for managing the functions is £1,384,100 per year. The team are able to realise a range of income opportunities totalling £565,900. This creates an overall cost to the Council of £818,200.

In addition to the annual revenue spend a short term capital budget is used to fund one-off large pieces of work. Each year a bid is submitted to the central capital programme, in 2015/16 the budget allocated was £418,000.

Table A7. Summary of the Council's costs and income for PRoW and countryside sites (2015/16)

	PRoW/C Site Maintenance	PRoW Officer	SSCP	Total
Net Revenue Budget	£557,100	£284,900	-£23,800	£818,200
External income and one-off projects	£284,300	£62,500	£219,100	£565,900
Total Budget	£841,400	£347,400	£195,300	£1,384,100

During the period 2010 to 2012, the delivery of the PRoW and countryside sites maintenance functions was subject to a series of changes which have improved service delivery and achieved financial savings. In this period there was an overall reduction in team size of 27% and revenue savings of £384,000 were achieved.

These savings were met whilst taking on the management of SSCP and an extra 311 miles of PRoW network in April 2011 due to the creation of the South Downs National Park. As a result of the reduced resources available, it has been necessary to more strictly prioritise activities in relation to routine maintenance and enforcement on both countryside sites and the PRoW network.

During the period of 2014 to 2016 further planned changes were implemented which saved £140,000. This was achieved by changing how we manage our vehicle fleet, a small reduction in staff and a stricter prioritisation of enforcement work.

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