

Rural Strategy 2004 Fact Sheet:

Countryside recreation and use

Why does recreation matter?

- The countryside is of intrinsic value both to rural communities and to society in general. It contributes hugely to the social and economic well-being of the nation.
- Rural tourism supports around 380,000 jobs and 25,000 small and micro businesses in rural England, contributing around £13.8bn annually to the rural economy.
- Countryside recreation – ranging from walking, cycling, horse-riding, angling and water sports to visits to parks and gardens – can do much to improve physical and mental health, and general enjoyment of life.
- The beauty and tranquillity of the countryside has a huge emotional pull for very many of us.

What will be different?

- We are creating a large and powerful Integrated Agency, as an independent statutory public body, to champion access and recreation hand in hand with conserving and improving nature. It will:
 - have a strong voice in regional decision-making, to champion improvements in the quality and accessibility of England's countryside and coasts, and green spaces in our towns and cities;
 - ensure that sustainable use of the countryside is considered as an integral part of good land management;
 - work closely with local authorities and land managers to improve access and help develop local rights of way improvement plans;
 - build on the success of the Countryside Rights of Way Act in opening access to mountain, moor, down and registered common land; and
 - work with the Forestry Commission to ensure a comprehensive approach to promoting our natural heritage, including woodlands.
- We will also streamline the many funding streams used to protect and enhance our countryside, green space, woods and forests into a single fund for natural resource management.

What will be better?

- Enhancing the value and beauty of our countryside for rural communities and for the benefit of society in general will bring many benefits:
 - more people from both urban and rural backgrounds will be helped to enjoy the benefits of the countryside at first hand – this will come from a single body having all the levers available to encourage increased access to our green spaces, and through the closer partnership with local authorities that a single point of contact will permit;
 - rights of way improvement plans will provide better networks for a range of users, such as cyclists and horse-riders;

- there will be greater opportunities to develop links between the natural environment and education, health, community development and combating crime and anti-social behaviour¹;
- local access forums will bring land managers and users together and give them chance to have their say; and
- a growing leisure market will help to strengthen and diversify local rural economies, creating new job opportunities and reinvigorating rural communities.

¹ Such as the work English Nature do in partnership with Phoenix House (an organisation in the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve that helps substance misusers end their dependence and rebuild their lives) to help enhance the well-being of participants through working alongside a conservation officer on projects such as building dry-stone walls as part of recreating a hay meadow for people to walk through on a footpath and enjoy.

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