

3 Use, Demand and Reasons for Access

3.1 Population Pressure

- 3.1.1 The current proposal for housing allocation in East Sussex is for 27,000 new homes to be built between 2006 and 2026. This is a rate of 1,350 per year. During the same timescale the county's population is expected to increase from 504,833 in 2006 to 530,467 in 2026.
- 3.1.2 The East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan (see 2.5) makes provision for 10,400 new homes in East Sussex between 2006 and 2011. This growth is concentrated in the main coastal towns, including an extension to Bexhill, but 3,300 dwellings will need to be provided on new land allocations in Wealden district, focused on the Low Weald towns such as Hailsham, Uckfield and Polegate.
- 3.1.3 East Sussex also has several towns (Tunbridge Wells in Kent and East Grinstead, Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill in West Sussex) and one city (Brighton & Hove) immediately adjacent to the county. The combined population of these four towns and one city is nearly 374,000 and equivalent to 75% of the total population of East Sussex.
- 3.1.4 This puts two pressures on the rights of way network. First of all, the future of the rights of way directly affected by development needs to be properly secured. Too often in the past, paths that at one time crossed open fields have, after new development, become narrow alleyways enclosed between high garden fences. This makes paths unattractive for the public to use and can, in some cases, attract unwanted or criminal activity. The principles of Secured by Design (see 2.6) seek to address this and should, wherever possible, be followed where new developments take place.
- 3.1.5 The second pressure on the rights of way network is from the increased use of the path network, in particular of edge of town paths, often for dog walking, but also other forms of recreation. Contributions from developers of new housing sites can help the County Council make any modest improvements required to existing routes that are likely to be affected by increased use from new developments.

3.2 Socio-Economic Profile

- 3.2.1 The 2002 UK General Household Survey found that walking was the most popular physical activity amongst all socio-economic groups, but there were large differences between the participation rates of adults within each group. Nearly half of those in the 'higher professional' group had gone for a two mile walk sometime during the four weeks prior to the survey. This group was also the largest participant in cycling at 13%. By contrast, less

than a quarter of respondents in the 'never worked and long term unemployed' group had walked during the same period.

- 3.2.2 These figures suggest that those people in higher socio-economic groups are more likely to go walking than those in lower groups. The responses from the East Sussex General User Satisfaction Survey (see 3.3 below) reflect this. There was a greater interest in 'access to nature' in more affluent districts such as Wealden than in less-affluent districts like Rother and Hastings.
- 3.2.3 In East Sussex, annual average household income is estimated to have increased by 32% from 2000 to 2005. Annual household income in the county, at £31,100 is slightly lower (by around 3%) than the Great Britain average.
- 3.2.4 However, East Sussex contains some of the most deprived areas in the South East of England, especially in Hastings. In a measure of deprivation for 'super output areas' (or SOAs – statistical areas which contain around 1,500 people) in 2004, there were 327 SOAs in East Sussex, and 13 of these fall amongst the 10% most deprived in England. Of these, twelve are in Hastings and one in Eastbourne. Altogether, just over one-third of all SOAs in Hastings are amongst the most deprived 20% in England, and the borough contains the highest proportion of deprived SOAs of any area in the South East.
- 3.2.5 The high proportion of elderly people in East Sussex makes the county different from most other parts of the UK. East Sussex has the highest proportion of residents aged over 85 of any county in England at 3.7%, and ranks second for the percentage aged over 65 at 22% compared with 16.5% for South East England as a whole or 16.2% for England & Wales.
- 3.2.6 The Black and Minority Ethnic population of East Sussex is comparatively small. According to the 2001 census, 2.3% of the population of the county were described as 'non-white' compared to 9.1% in the whole of England. However, the Black and Minority Ethnic population in East Sussex is concentrated in urban areas such as Eastbourne and Hastings.

3.3 Recreation, Leisure and Tourism

- 3.3.1 In 2003 the East Sussex General User Satisfaction Survey found that 3.8% of respondents felt that 'access to nature' was 'most in need of improvement' compared to a number of other local services in East Sussex. The figure was higher from those living in Lewes and Wealden districts, at 5.5% and 5.3% respectively. However, only 1.7% in Rother agreed.
- 3.3.2 In the same survey, 'Access to nature' was described as making East Sussex a 'good place to live', compared to other factors, by over a quarter (25.9%) of respondents. The highest figures were in Wealden (35.9%) and Eastbourne (31.3%). The lowest were 13.7% of respondents in Lewes and 19.7% in Rother.

- 3.3.3 Given the expected population increases (set out in 3.1 above) the demand from East Sussex residents for improved access to the countryside is likely to continue to increase.
- 3.3.4 Dog walking is a popular reason for people to access the countryside and is often the only occasion when some people go walking. There is a need for circular routes close to population centres that do not conflict with land management, with provision of dog bins and dog gates where needed.
- 3.3.5 The Countryside Agency's 'State of the Countryside 1999' summary estimated that in 1996, 1.3 billion day visits were made to the English countryside (a day visit being one of over three hours duration). This enormous number of visits for tourism and recreation purposes equates to around 22 day visits to the countryside per year per head of the UK population.
- 3.3.6 Such visitor numbers are often concentrated on popular sites. For example, one of the most visited sites in South East England is Beachy Head, near Eastbourne, which is estimated to receive over one million visitors each year.

Objective 3.e.

Seek the addition of new paths to the rights of way network to improve opportunities for users.

Objective 6.b.

Improve access and facilities on popular dog-walking routes.

3.4 Rural Economy

- 3.4.1 According to 'The Volume and Value of Walking and Cycling in the South East Region' report by Tourism South East in 2006, there are estimated to be nearly 143 million walking trips for leisure made annually in South East England. The expenditure associated with these trips is in the region of £2.7 billion. The same report estimates that nearly 18 million cycling trips are made in South East England, generating an estimated £345 million.
- 3.4.2 Away from the popular tourist areas, much of the rest of the county offers local attractions which encourage use of public rights of way. At the most local scale, the County Council's 'Paths to Prosperity' initiative (see 4.8) promotes attractive short circular walks aimed at boosting the rural economy. These have public houses, tea rooms or farm shops along the route and have proved to be very popular with walkers and businesses alike.
- 3.4.3 As already described in 1.1 above, the closure of the public rights of way network during the foot and mouth disease crisis of 2001 demonstrated the importance of access to the countryside for tourism and the rural economy in East Sussex. It is envisaged that the ROWIP will build on the success of

the 'Paths to Prosperity' initiative in encouraging more people out of urban areas and into the countryside, making use of rural businesses such as village shops and public houses.

- 3.4.4 In the four years since the start of the 'Paths to Prosperity' initiative the County Council has recorded a 25.6% increase in users of the 47 circular walks included in the project. This was well above the original target increase of 8% and shows that, given improvements on the ground and proper promotion, much more use of public rights of way can be achieved.

3.5 Healthy Living

- 3.5.1 It is widely acknowledged that as part of a healthy lifestyle, moderate exercise is necessary. Compared with more structured activities like aerobics or swimming, walking and cycling have always been popular methods of keeping fit. Little specialist equipment is needed (though any amount is available), only basic skills and confidence are required, and the countryside is generally free to use and the rights of way network is available 24 hours a day.
- 3.5.2 East Sussex County Council is working in partnership with the South Downs & Weald Primary Care Trust and other organisations to promote health and well-being amongst the local community. The partnership has produced specialised leaflets, organised training for health walk leaders, raised awareness and organised events for people of different ages and abilities.
- 3.5.3 According to the Walking for Health Initiative (WHI), 'green exercise' (which is described as being any energetic activity undertaken in the natural environment) can have a beneficial effect on up to twenty chronic diseases or disorders including heart disease, type two diabetes, cancer and obesity. It is also highlighted that relaxing pursuits such as walking, cycling and conservation activities help to reduce stress and improve mental well-being.
- 3.5.4 Those taking part in the outdoor activities (such as WHI health walks and the County Council's 'Exploring East Sussex' programme) gain benefit in terms of physical and mental well-being, as well as having an enjoyable time in good company with a well informed leader. The WHI has also found that training volunteer leaders to plan, publicise and lead walks is a more effective way to get people out exercising rather than simply telling them to do more.
- 3.5.5 It is therefore fair to assume that as the population becomes increasingly health conscious, demand for access is likely to increase, especially within urban areas and on the urban fringe.

3.6 Commuting and Utility Use

- 3.6.1 The County Council's Walking Strategy 'Stepping Out' aims to promote walking and increase the proportion of all journeys made on foot, emphasising the benefits to personal health and the environment.

- 3.6.2 The Walking Strategy is in the process of being rewritten and will take into consideration utility and recreational trips. It will also be strongly linked to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The revised Walking Strategy will also include, for the first time, a target to measure existing walking trips, and these will be monitored and measures implemented to encourage a higher proportion of pedestrian movements.
- 3.6.3 Although most of the use of the public rights of way network is leisure use, there is some utility use and potential for more. Rights of way within built up areas have an obvious utility benefit. There is much less utility demand on rural (unsurfaced) paths. However, there are a number of cases across the county where communities are separated from local facilities, be they pubs, shops, churches, schools, and so on. A survey of town and parish councils in 2006 highlighted several rural paths which, given improvements, could help improve these links.

3.7 Use of Rights of Way in East Sussex

- 3.7.1 There are two sources of information on the use of public rights of way in the county. As part of the Environmental Statement for the proposed Bexhill to Hastings Link Road there was a study carried out in 2006 on the effects of the scheme on pedestrians, cyclists and recreational users. This study includes counts of path users in both urban and rural areas of Bexhill affected by the scheme and some interviews. More basic information on path use has come from stile counters at a number of locations across the county installed as part of the Paths to Prosperity project (see 4.8).
- 3.7.2 In 2003 stile counters were installed at fifty locations across rural East Sussex – excluding the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In 2006/07 there were 159,267 walking trips recorded by the stile counters. The stile counters only give information on the use of promoted paths which may be more popular than other paths. Also, there were no counters installed on unimproved, non-promoted paths which could have acted as a control to compare the use of Paths to Prosperity routes with ordinary paths.
- 3.7.3 However, the vast majority of these counters are situated away from centres of population, and as a result, do not reflect the number of users that many paths near population centres may receive.
- 3.7.4 Although these are very basic sources of information they can give some idea of the level of use of public rights of way in the county outside the Sussex Downs AONB. The table below shows the estimated level of rights of way use in East Sussex based on these sources of information:

Estimated Use of Public Rights of Way in East Sussex			
	Users Per Mile Per Day	Users Per Mile Per Year	Total Users Per Year
Rural Weald & Levels (1,660 miles)	2.08	758.42	1,258,973.78
Urban Towns & Boroughs (214 miles)	279.00	101,835.00	21,813,057.00
*East Sussex (1,873 miles)	28.60	10,437.23	23,072,030.78
*Does not include 338 miles of paths in the Sussex Downs AONB as there are no figures currently available.			

3.7.5 These sources of information suggest that there were just over 23 million separate journeys during 2006/07 on public rights of way in that part of East Sussex outside the Sussex Downs AONB, although the vast majority of these were in urban areas.

SD 3.7.6 Although there are no reliable statistics for rights of way use within the Sussex Downs AONB there are some reasonable estimates of use of the South Downs Way. The South Downs Way National Trail attracts around 20,000 long distance users per annum (long distance users are those who use the Trail over two consecutive days). Around 20 Million people per year are short distance users of the South Downs Way if it can be assumed that about two thirds of the 33 million visitors to the South Downs AONB each year spend at least some time on the Trail which seems very likely as it runs through all the main honey-pot sites. The use of the South Downs Way is likely to be much higher than most rights of way in the Downs.

SD 3.7.7 The Seven Sisters Country Park gets about 350,000 visitors per year, the vast majority of whom are likely to use the part of the South Downs Way or another public right of way which passes through the park. It is also estimated that around 1 million people visit Beachy Head each year. Again, it can be assumed that the majority will use some of the public rights of way in the area.

3.8 Latent Demand

3.8.1 The 2003 Rights of Way Use & Demand Survey (a report to the Countryside Agency prepared by Public Rights of Way Services Ltd) found that 70% of households said that they would undertake more activity if more paths and tracks were available. Of these, just under a half would walk more and about a third would cycle more.

3.8.2 However, the anticipated increase was greater amongst those who already undertook an activity compared to those who did not. Also, the anticipated increase in cycling in households with children was double that in households without children. Nevertheless, the survey strongly suggests that an increase in activity could be achieved through promoting a better awareness of existing provision.

3.8.3 The evidence from this survey ties in with the evidence found during the County Council's development of the Paths to Prosperity series of self-guided walks. There was a noticeable increase in the number of path users once a route had been improved on the ground, and again once the publicity was available.

3.8.4 This would tend to suggest that there is some unsatisfied demand for accessing the countryside which could be met by improving key paths in conjunction with providing well presented and targeted information.

3.9 Conflicting Interests

- 3.9.1 The attitudes of those who are responsible for the day-to-day management of the land over which most public rights of way cross is clearly illustrated in 6.2. There is obvious landowner and farmer frustration with at least some rights of way users, although some perceived problems seem to have merged with other concerns not directly related to countryside access. This is, of course, mirrored by user frustration with some farmers and landowners who obstruct public rights of way or make their use difficult.
- 3.9.2 There is also an occasional conflict between different types of path user. This is often the result of a perceived lack of consideration by one group for another. For example, walkers will sometimes complain about horse riders 'churning up' bridleways during wet weather making them difficult for walkers. In return, some horse riders will complain that walkers have exclusive use of nearly three-quarters of the path network and therefore shouldn't complain about equestrians using the few rights of way available to them.
- 3.9.3 Recreational motor vehicle users are sometimes unwelcome users of public rights of way for both land holders and other path users. Much of the antipathy towards recreational motorists is based on a belief held by some that they do not belong in the countryside. There have also been several cases of byways open to all traffic being damaged by inconsiderate recreational motorists. These have then become difficult or impossible for others to use. There is more on the needs of recreational motor vehicle drivers in 5.5.
- 3.9.4 Fortunately, whilst these conflicts can become high profile issues, they are relatively few and far between and there is a great deal of respect and understanding between those representing the interests of all these groups on both the East Sussex Local Access Forum and South Downs Access Forum. Through this close cooperation, areas of common interest and concern can be identified and areas of conflict can be resolved.

Objective 2.b.

Improve working with land managers