

Integrated Access Strategy for the Broads

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Executive summary

The Broads is the UK's premier wetland and a member of the UK family of National Parks, internationally recognised for its landscape, nature conservation and cultural features. It is a popular recreational destination, with miles of open water space and a rich variety of natural, historic and cultural assets to be explored and enjoyed.

Provision of public access points, routes and services is key to sustainable recreation and tourism. Historically, the strategic management of access in the Broads has tended to focus on single elements such as moorings or rights of way. While access improvements have been achieved, a need was identified to consider the access network in a more integrated way.

The long-term aim for tourism, recreation and access in the Broads Plan states that:

“Access on land and between land and water is sensitively managed to maximise the social, educational and health benefits of open space to all, while ensuring the resource itself is not degraded. Where possible, improvements are made to the connectivity and use of access routes, linked to visitor destination points and sustainable transport.”

This integrated access strategy seeks to deliver this long-term aim and meet the following key objectives:

- To improve links between land and water and to the water's edge
- To improve access links to local facilities, settlements and visitor destination points
- To encourage sustainable travel choices such as public transport, walking, cycling and non-powered boating, and improve links between public transport provision and visitor destination points and access routes
- To provide appropriate information and interpretation on access to recreational opportunities

The Broads Authority will work with partners and local communities towards the long-term aim and objectives of this strategy, seeking to make the best use of shared knowledge and resources. The strategy will be delivered through an annual action plan and monitored in line with the Broads Plan review process.

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Strategic aim

The Broads is renowned as the UK's premier wetland – a mosaic of interconnected rivers, shallow lakes, fens, marsh, woodland and agricultural land set between the urban surrounds of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. A member of the UK family of National Parks, the Broads has a range of national and international designations in recognition of its landscape, nature conservation and cultural features. It is a popular recreational destination, with over 200km of lock-free rivers and open water bodies, an extensive public rights of way network and a rich variety of natural, historic and cultural assets to be explored and enjoyed.

Adequate and appropriate provision of public access points, routes and services is vital to sustainable recreation and tourism. Historically, the strategic management of access in the Broads has been based on standalone plans that focus on a single type of access, such as moorings, small boat slipways or rights of way. While such plans have delivered considerable access improvements, they did not necessarily consider how individual access points fitted into the overall network of access provision in the Broads. In addition, these plans were not fully coordinated with other strategies and initiatives covering interrelated themes such as sustainable tourism, landscape and cultural heritage, angling, water space management and public transport.

The last Broads Plan review¹ identified a need to consider and develop the network of access provision in a more holistic manner. This was recognised in the long-term aim for tourism, recreation and access in the Broads Plan, that:

“Access on land and between land and water is sensitively managed to maximise the social, educational and health benefits of open space to all, while ensuring the resource itself is not degraded. Where possible, improvements are made to the connectivity and use of access routes, linked to visitor destination points and sustainable transport.”

Following the adoption of the Broads Plan, the Broads Authority carried out a scoping exercise to inform an integrated access plan. The process involved consulting a wide range of user groups and bodies including the Broads Local Access Forum, Broads Forum, Broads Angling Strategy Group, Broads Tourism, Broads Hire Boat Federation and the Authority's Navigation Committee.

Scope

The scope of the integrated access strategy is:

- The collation and mapping on GIS² of all available baseline data on access provision in the Broads, covering:
 - Moorings
 - Public rights of way
 - Permissive paths

¹ The Broads Plan is the key strategic management plan for the Broads. The current plan was adopted in 2011.

² A Geographic Information System (GIS) analyses and displays (e.g. through diagrams and mapping) geographically referenced information.

- Slipways and other launching facilities
 - Staithes (landing stages)
 - Ferries
 - Angling access points
 - Public transport links
 - Private transport facilities
 - Land designated as open access land under the CROW Act 2000
 - National Nature Reserves and Local Nature Reserves
 - Land protected by conservation designations
- A review of the Broads Mooring Strategy (2009), Small Boat Slipway Strategy (2008), and Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan,³ all of which are now replaced by this Integrated Access Strategy. This strategy also takes account of other relevant local and regional strategies for interrelated topics such as recreation, climate change adaptation, landscape and cultural heritage, community health and wellbeing, local transport and biodiversity.

The mapping and strategy review work is being used to inform:

- A gap analysis to identify priority sites for new or improved access provision.
- The identification of access hubs where it would be appropriate to focus access development. Access hubs are locations where a range of recreational facilities and local amenities are linked together and easily accessible from the public transport network.
- GIS mapping of priority sites for access development.

This strategy provides the framework to deliver the long-term aim for sustainable, integrated access in the Broads. Actions will be guided by the following key principles and objectives, and informed by the GIS mapping and gap analysis.

Guiding principles

The following principles will be used to help guide the development and delivery of access projects in the Broads.

Landscape and environmental impact

The Broads is treasured as a place for escape, quiet enjoyment, inspiration and reflection. It is important that access provision is managed in ways that maximise opportunities for visitor enjoyment without degrading this natural or cultural resource. Project proposals for new or improved access provision will need to demonstrate that negative impacts on the environment and designated sites can be minimised. Projects that have the potential to affect Natura 2000 designated sites will therefore be assessed to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Regulation 1994. Where possible, access schemes should be designed to deliver biodiversity and habitat improvements.

³ Part of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Norfolk 2007 - 2017

Climate change adaptation

Project design should consider the potential impacts of climate change, including changes in water levels. For example, when designing mooring projects it may be appropriate to consider installing pontoon moorings that adapt to changes in tide levels, rather than piled moorings that are set at a fixed height.

Partnership working and community involvement

Project proposals should demonstrate partnership and community involvement in planning, delivery and ongoing maintenance liability. Stakeholders will be consulted on the scope and design of project proposals to maximise opportunities for collaborative working. This will also foster the development of a wider range of local stakeholder groups and public sector interests willing to be involved in access provision and the future maintenance of projects.

Multiple benefits

Project proposals should, where possible, provide multiple benefits for users with differing interests, needs and abilities (e.g. creating a new mooring to link to the existing rights of way network and local shops, or improving surfaces and removing barriers to open up an access point or route to people with mobility problems). The project design process should therefore consider how project plans could maximise user benefit, foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities and deliver additional gains for biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage.

Quality and sustainability standards

Project proposals should seek to conserve and enhance the character of the area through the use of materials and construction techniques appropriate to a member of the National Park family. Projects should also demonstrate a sustainable approach to materials use and be supported with robust and well documented plans for the future management of the project.

Strategic objectives

The key objectives for meeting the long-term aim for integrated access in the Broads are:

- (1) To improve links between land and water and to the water's edge
- (2) To improve access links to local facilities, settlements and visitor destination points
- (3) To encourage sustainable travel choices such as public transport, walking, cycling and non-powered boating, and improve links between public transport provision, visitor destination points and access routes
- (4) To provide appropriate information on access to recreational opportunities and interpretation about recreational sites.

The strategy also aims to ensure that the benefits of access and recreation in the Broads are recognised in local and regional planning policy frameworks and given adequate weight in the planning process.

Objective 1: To improve links between land and water and the water's edge

In some areas there are gaps in mooring provision, or limited opportunities for boaters to access the wider countryside from mooring locations. In other cases, people are unable to see or get to the water's edge or onto the water because of a lack of land access routes and/or facilities such as slipways and canoe portages.

This objective will seek to:

- Map the provision of access points and links between land and water and to the water's edge
- Improve access points between land and water, including visitor moorings, demasting moorings, safety moorings, isolated moorings, canoe portages and slipways.
- Improve links from moorings to land-based facilities and visitor destinations
- Improve pedestrian access to the water's edge and alongside water for the purposes of walking, angling (including angling platforms) and bird watching
- Extend access to new areas of navigable water space where appropriate
- Protect, and where possible reinstate, ferries and staithes
- Identify appropriate locations where improved car parking would benefit users (e.g. at slipways)

Objective 2: To improve access links to local facilities, settlements and visitor destination points

There are areas where improved access links to destination sites such as designated open access land, nature reserves and sites of historic or cultural interest would be beneficial, enabling people to experience and appreciate the special qualities of the Broads. The provision of a well maintained and functional access network will also contribute to the sustainability of the environment, communities, health and well-being and the local economy.

This objective will seek to:

- Determine where access improvements to land designated as open access land under the CROW Act 2000 would be appropriate
- Identify and promote the development of new access routes to improve the connectivity of the existing public access network, including rights of way, permissive paths and long distance routes
- Identify opportunities for new or improved access to designated sites and visitor destination points, e.g. National Nature Reserves, historic buildings

Objective 3: To encourage sustainable travel choices such as public transport, walking, cycling and non-powered boating, and improve links between public transport provision and visitor destination points and access routes

The strategy places emphasis on sustainable travel choices such as public transport, walking and cycling. With the vast majority of visitors to the Broads currently using private cars, it is vital to consider how recreational access can be linked to public transport and car use minimised to make it more sustainable. Improving links to visitor facilities and services also boosts local economic development and tourism generally.

This objective will seek to:

- Map and identify opportunities to improve key visitor hubs and existing access links between facilities and public transport provision
- Encourage and support the development of cycle hire facilities and routes in new locations for the benefit of boaters and land-based visitors
- Encourage and support the development of canoe trails with appropriate facilities in suitable areas
- Encourage local transport authorities and others to maintain, improve and promote public transport provision in and to the Broads

Objective 4: To provide appropriate information on access to recreational opportunities and interpretation on recreational sites

Easily available, up-to-date information on public access to land and water and to natural, historic and cultural assets and other attractions helps people to learn about, and get the most from their visit to, the Broads. Good information and interpretation on the Broads landscape also encourages responsible tourism, safeguarding the environment that people have come to enjoy.

This objective will seek to:

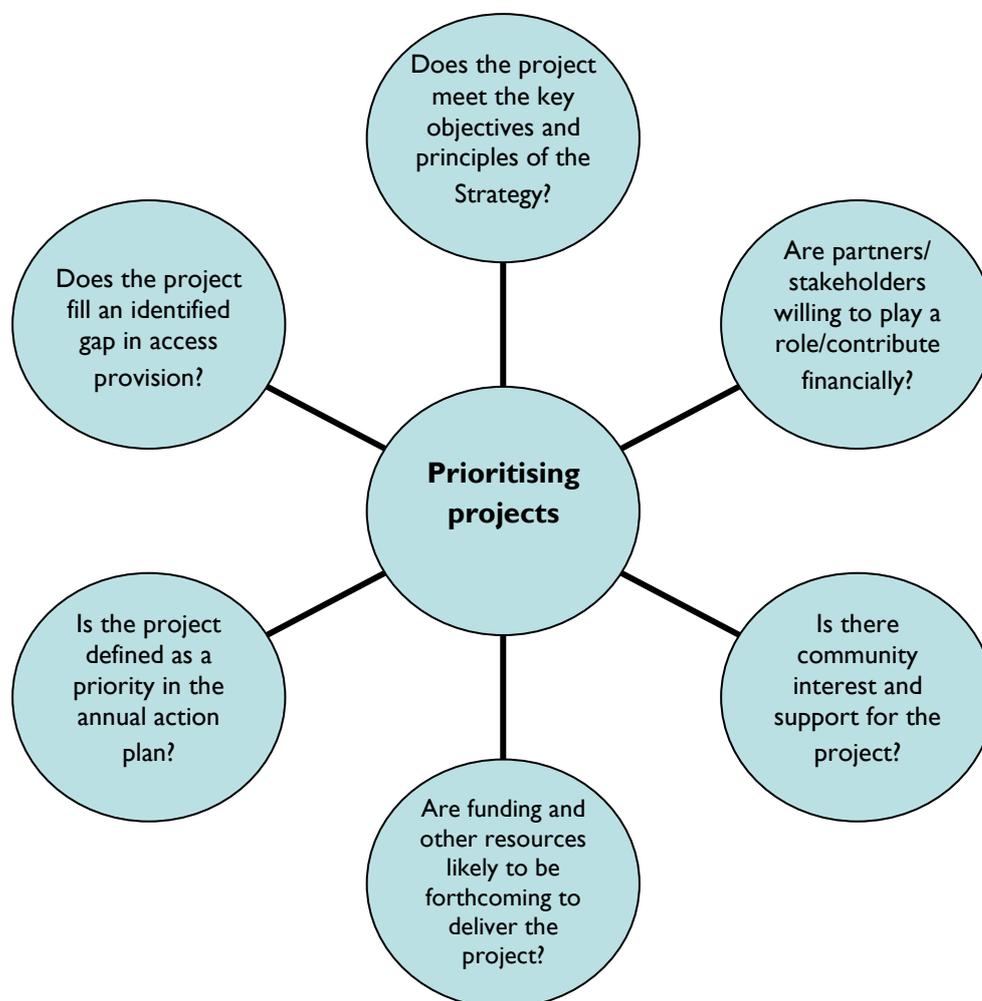
- Provide information on how to access recreational opportunities, using sustainable travel options wherever possible
- Improve information and interpretation available at moorings, on nearby facilities and at visitor destination points
- Provide public access to the Broads Authority's Integrated Access Strategy GIS system (map information)
- Coordinate and promote information on walking, cycling, horse riding and canoeing routes and trails in the Broads
- Develop codes of conduct for various recreational activities and locations in the Broads to promote environmentally responsible behaviour

Implementation

The Broads Authority will work in collaboration with partner organisations and local communities to deliver the long-term aim and objectives of this integrated access strategy, seeking to make the best use of shared knowledge and resources.

Project proposals and initiatives for access improvements will be recorded on a database. From this, the Authority will prepare an outline three-year action plan and a detailed annual action plan of priority projects. They will also provide guidance and support to partners and communities in project development and delivery.

The objectives and guiding principles of this strategy, along with the GIS mapping and gap analysis, will be used to assess and prioritise project proposals. The Authority will consult stakeholders, local communities and its standing consultative committees (Navigation Committee, Broads Forum and Broads Local Access Forum) as required in the initial and ongoing stages of project development. Further development of projects and funding allocation will be assessed through the Authority's internal project development processes.



Evaluation

The Integrated Access Strategy provides a broad framework for the development of the recreational access network in the Broads. The strategy is a 'living' document that will evolve

over time to take account of changing priorities, circumstances and opportunities. Delivery of the strategy will be monitored and evaluated in line with, and to inform, the Broads Plan review process. Annual progress reports will be taken to the Broads Authority, Navigation Committee and Broads Forum.

Project information and guidance

Advice on project development is available from the Broads Authority's Waterways and Recreation Team. Contact Adrian Clarke adrian.clarke@broads-authority.gov.uk telephone 01603-756059, or Russell Wilson russell.wilson@broads-authority.gov.uk telephone 01603-756075, to discuss project proposals. Information on the Integrated Access Strategy and its action plan is also available on the Broads Authority website www.broads-authority.gov.uk

Broads Authority

The Broads Authority is a Special Statutory Authority with a duty to manage the Broads for the purposes of:

- Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Broads;
- Promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Broads by the public; and
- Protecting the interests of navigation.

Broads Plan

The Broads Plan is the key strategic plan for the management of the Broads. It is subject to review every five years. The current plan, adopted in 2011, has three key themes:

- Planning for the long-term future of the Broads in response to climate change and sea level rise;
- Working in partnership on the sustainable management of the Broads, and
- Encouraging the sustainable use and enjoyment of the Broads.

The long-term aim for tourism, recreation and access is that:

The Broads offers a wide range of high quality land and water based activities in suitable locations and in harmony with the special qualities of the area and its communities. The value of the Broads as a place for escape, adventure, enjoyment, inspiration and reflection is recognised and valued. Tourism is managed at environmentally and socially sustainable levels, contributing to a thriving local economy and meeting the standards of the Green Tourism Business Scheme.

Access on land and between land and water is sensitively managed to maximise the social, educational and health benefits of open space to all, while ensuring the resource itself is not degraded. Where possible, improvements are made to the connectivity and use of access routes, linked to visitor destination points and sustainable transport.

Planning policy

This long-term aim set out in the Broads Plan is supported in the Broads Local Development Framework, which sets out planning policy guidance for the Broads. The Core Strategy (2007) states that:

The Broads will continue to contain areas of true tranquillity and wildness that many come to visit it for. However, this will not be at the expense of those who come to use the Broads for more recreational pursuits, such as boating, sailing and other water sports. Indeed the

*important navigation resource will have been protected and where possible enhanced.....
The Broads, an area for renowned sustainable tourism, will have a network of facilities
around the waterways system complementing the range of moorings in urban and
rural areas.*

Broads Local Access Forum

The Broads Local Access Forum (BLAF) advises the Broads Authority and other organisations on improving public access and contributing to opportunities for open air recreation and enjoyment of the area. In providing advice, the BLAF must have regard to the needs of land management; the conservation of the natural beauty of the area; and the management and maintenance of recreational access, whilst balancing this against the needs of nature conservation, agriculture, the interests of landowners and managers, navigation and countryside management projects in the Broads.

The BLAF vision states:

The Broads is an unrivalled wetland of natural diversity, heritage and special character. It is a place where people come to explore, enjoy and find spiritual refreshment. Access to the Broads should be clear and easy to use, respectful of wildlife and land management, meet users' needs and promote responsible and harmonious behaviour. The Broads Local Access Forum will champion access improvements and management, represent a wide range of interests and contribute to sustainability for environment, communities and the economy.

Appendix 2: Glossary

Access hub	Location where a range of recreational facilities and local amenities are linked together and easily accessible from the public transport network.
CROW Act 2000	The Countryside and Rights of way act 2000
Local Nature Reserve	Places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
Mooring	Site formally managed for the purposes of mooring vessels
National Nature Reserve	Nationally important sites for nature conservation designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
Permissive path	A permissive path (sometimes called a 'concessionary path') is a path which the landowner permits the public to use, with the intention that it should not become a Public Right of Way.
Right of way	A public path recorded on the definitive map of public rights of way
Slipway	A ramp leading from the land into the water from which boats are launched.
Staithe	Any land which is adjacent to a waterway and which the inhabitants of the locality are entitled to use as a landing place.