

**Broads Local Access Forum draft response to Norfolk Access Improvement
Plan consultation**

Report by Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer

Summary: This report provides members with a summary of Norfolk County Council's draft Norfolk Access Improvement Plan (NAIP) which covers the period 2018-2028. The report identifies that there are significant opportunities for the County Council to work in partnership with the Broads Authority on a range of access projects particularly regarding cycling, horse riding, "access for all", access to water and access to biodiversity and the historic environment. The report also highlights that there is an opportunity to emphasise the importance of the Broads National Park to countryside access in the county of Norfolk.

Recommendation: That members support the partnership working opportunities identified in the report and the proposal to raise the profile of the Broads National Park through the Norfolk Access Improvement Plan.

1 Background

- 1.1 It is a requirement of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 for access authorities to produce a rights of way improvement plan. Norfolk County Council's last plan covered the period 2007-2017 and focused solely on improvements to rights of way in the county. The plan has been reviewed and the County Council is currently consulting on a new draft plan which is called the Norfolk Access Improvement Plan (NAIP) as its scope has been widened to consider other forms of access such as access to water and how access can contribute to caring for the environment (natural and historic), economy and public health and wellbeing. The draft NAIP document is available online at www.norfolk.gov.uk/naip and the consultation closes on the 15th of June.
- 1.2 Members will recall that a presentation on the plan was given to the meeting of the Broads Local Access Forum on March the 7th 2018. At that meeting members suggested that there was an opportunity for the NAIP to emphasise the importance of the Broads National Park to countryside access in the county and the many opportunities that exist for partnership working with the Broads Authority to meet the future needs of users in a number of areas. This report summarises the areas where the Broads Authority could be identified as a key partner for project delivery in the plan and suggests that the Broads National Park should be highlighted for its importance to countryside access, tourism and the health and wellbeing of local communities.

2 The draft NAIP

2.1 The draft plan document identifies a number new of aims and objectives. The County Council's stated aim is "to create an easy to use, safe, healthy and sustainable way to enjoy the Norfolk coast and countryside" by delivering:

- A well- managed access network
- A well connected access network
- A well-protected natural and historic Environment
- A well promoted access network
- A well informed access network
- A community access network
- A healthy access network
- A valuable access network

2.2 The document is divided into thematic sections looking at the needs of future users of the access network in the county including walkers, cyclists, equestrians, drivers of mechanically propelled vehicles, people with mobility or visual impairments, infrequent users, landowners, young people and businesses. The NAIP also identifies the importance of encouraging active travel, the historic and natural environment (both preserving and providing access to it) and the need for community engagement.

2.3 Importantly for the Broads National Park the NAIP also identifies the opportunities for recreational and health-enhancing activities that are provided by the county's water bodies and it includes a section on access to water bodies including the Broads navigation area. Each chapter then goes on to look at the current situation on the ground regarding the identified issues, opportunities for development (highlighting partnership working opportunities) and recommendations for priority actions.

3 Opportunities for partnership working

3.1 The aims and objectives of the NAIP align well with the aims and objectives of a number of the Broads Authority's key plans and strategies, notably the Broads Plan, Integrated Access Strategy (IAS) Biodiversity Strategy and Sustainable Tourism Strategy. These shared aims provide multiple opportunities for the County Council to work in partnership with the Broads Authority on project delivery. While the NAIP does identify the Broads Authority as a potential partner organisation in some of its sections there are a number of areas where the importance of the Broads National Park could be emphasised in the future user needs sections of the draft document and the priority actions in the plan could be expanded to mention projects in the Broads and opportunities for partnership working to deliver shared objectives.

3.2 In relation to cycling the NAIP identifies a priority action of promoting access to the Broads National Park and North Norfolk AONB as an alternative to car travel but could also mention the importance of routes in the Broads such as the delivery of phases 2 and 3 of the 3 Rivers Way as phase 1 of the 3RW

has already received significant funding from the Broads Authority County Council and Department for Transport. In addition there is scope for promoting cycling access in the Broads through a Sustrans initiative for signing a Broads Cycling Country Network which is currently being developed.

- 3.3 There are limited opportunities for horse riding in the Broads and the BLAF has previously identified a need for developing the horse riding offer of the National Park by creating new bridleways and improving safety for riders by negotiating with landowners to establish new multi-use routes that would allow riders and cyclists to avoid dangerous road riding. Working in partnership with the County Council to achieve these aims would help meet the future needs of horse riders in an area of the county which has a lack of bridleways.
- 3.4 The Broads Authority has previously worked to encourage infrequent users and users from diverse ethnic backgrounds to enjoy the National Park through projects like the Mosaic project and projects engaging with school children from deprived areas of Norwich. The Authority would therefore be happy to be involved with future projects that encouraged participation from infrequent user groups.
- 3.5 Engaging with young people is also an area where the Broads Authority has had some success through the Broads Education Strategy and Broads Curriculum. The Water, Mills and Marshes HLF funded Landscape Partnership Scheme also has projects that seek to involve young people with their local landscape and there would seem to be considerable scope for partnership working with the County Council to re-engage young people with the natural and historic environment in the Broads through the Broads Education Strategy and Broads curriculum.
- 3.6 The biodiversity value of the Broads is pre-eminent amongst the English National Parks and one of the most important reasons that people come to visit the area. Well managed access to open access land and the maintenance and creation of routes in the National Park that provide people with opportunities to experience the natural environment without placing it under threat of disturbance or damage are therefore essential for the future of the Broads. The Broads Biodiversity Strategy and IAS provide a framework for working with the County Council to achieve many of the priority actions under this section of the plan.
- 3.7 The inclusion of a section on access to water bodies in the NAIP presents a major opportunity for the Broads Authority to work with the County Council to achieve new opportunities for future users to access the rivers and broads in the National Park. The draft NAIP states "*The provision of good, safe and low cost access for launching and using boats is a key requirement of our strategy.*" The Broads Authority is under constant pressure to provide new slipways and moorings and it is also one of the most difficult demands for the Authority to meet. The NAIP proposes a priority action of approaching landowners to improve boat launching and angling access and it is essential that these approaches focus on landowners in areas where there would be a proven user benefit of providing new facilities. Therefore it is essential that any plan to provide such facilities is informed by the experience and

knowledge of the Broads Authority. The opportunity to work in partnership with the County Council to deliver new facilities for boaters, canoeists and anglers is welcomed.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 The fact that Norfolk County Council is consulting on a draft NAIP and is seeking the views of the Broads Authority and the BLAF on the draft plan is to be welcomed. The plan proposes many priority actions that would meet the aims and objectives of the Broads Authority's strategies and presents an opportunity to identify and take forward projects that will deliver mutual benefits for both authorities. Moreover, the opportunity to include projects identified in the Integrated Access Strategy, Sustainable Tourism Strategy or linked to themes included in the Broads Plan with commitment to partnership working on the part of both authorities gives the potential to deliver improvements across the Broads Authority's three purposes. The document should therefore also recognise the importance of these strategies and plans.
- 4.2 Further, the NAIP presents an opportunity to raise the profile of recreational access in the Broads National Park through co-branding of the document and the inclusion of more information about the Broads as a high quality landscape for recreation. Norfolk County Council has indicated that it would be prepared to discuss this approach.
- 4.3 Members are invited to support the opportunities for partnership working identified in this report and the promotion of the Broads National Park through the NAIP.

Background papers:	Nil
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Broads Plan Objectives:	6.1, 6.2, 6.4
Appendices:	None