

## Integrated Access Strategy for the Broads

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## Executive summary

The Broads is the UK's premier wetland, internationally recognised for its landscape, nature conservation and cultural features and a member of the UK National Park family. More than seven million people a year visit the area to enjoy a range of outdoor activities from boating, walking, angling and cycling to wildlife watching, photography and visiting historic and cultural assets such as mills and churches. The area has more than 200km of inland, navigable, lock-free waterways and over 300km of public rights of way, including three county long distance trails and part of the England Coast Path.

The strategic action for access identified in the Broads Plan 2017 that informs this strategy is for the “development and implementation of schemes to upgrade and improve the network of access points and routes (where adverse effects can be prevented) that are linked to visitor facilities and include easier access for people with mobility and sensory needs.”

In line with the Broads Plan, this integrated access strategy seeks to meet the following key objectives:

- (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 improve access for all in the Broads
- (4) 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
- (5) To deliver the River Wensum Strategy through the River Wensum Strategy Partnership
- (6) To encourage provision of access routes that relieve visitor pressure on internationally designated sites, avoid disturbance of protected species and help to accommodate growth
- (7) To provide appropriate information on access to recreational opportunities and interpretation about recreational sites.

The Broads Authority will continue to work with partners and local communities towards the objectives of this strategy, seeking to make the best use of shared knowledge and resources. The strategy will be delivered through an outline three-year action plan and subsequently a detailed annual action plan of priority projects which will be monitored in line with the Broads Plan review process.

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## **Review of Broads Integrated Access Strategy 2013**

Historically, the strategic management of access in the Broads was based on standalone plans that focused on a single type of access, such as moorings, slipways or rights of way. The consultation exercise for the Broads Plan 2011 identified a need to consider and develop the network of access provision in a more holistic manner.

Following the adoption of the Broads Plan, the Broads Authority consulted a wide range of user groups and bodies and developed an Integrated Access Strategy which was adopted in 2013.

Since its adoption the Integrated Access Strategy has delivered a range of access improvements in the Broads including:

- New visitor moorings and safety moorings
- New canoe launch sites and the promotion of canoe trails
- New angling platforms
- New permissive access routes linked to moorings and visitor destinations
- New public rights of way
- Phase 1 of the 3 Rivers Way shared use (cycling and walking) route in partnership with Norfolk County Council

The Strategy is now being reviewed following the adoption of the Broads Plan 2017. Consultation on the strategy review has taken place with the Broads Local Access Forum, and through an open public consultation event called Broads Engage on the subject of accessing the Broads which was held in November 2018.

Since the Broads Engage event Norfolk County Council has adopted the new Norfolk Access Improvement Plan (NAIP) in 2019. The NAIP recognises the importance of the Broads for recreation in the county. It also identifies a need to work with the Broads Authority to improve access in the National Park. This is reflected throughout the statement of actions in the NAIP which includes the aims of identifying shared objectives for access development in the Broads with the Broads Authority and developing joint action plans to deliver projects across the themed areas of the NAIP.

In particular the NAIP presents opportunities for partnership working with the County Council in the following areas:

- Improving access for all
- Provision of cycle routes
- Provision of bridleways and shared use routes
- Provision of routes to improve network connectivity
- Access to water
- Provision of green infrastructure to deal with growth
- Development and promotion of circular walks from hubs linked to the Norfolk Trails

The Suffolk Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) presents similar opportunities for partnership working and the Broads Authority will also seek to identify projects that deliver shared access goals in Suffolk.

Following cuts in funding from central government the ability of local authorities to fund access projects has reduced. The Broads Authority has limited funds to deliver capital works for access projects and a reduced capacity to maintain access infrastructure. The Broads Authority will therefore seek opportunities to work with partner organisations and other local authorities, including parish councils, to prioritise and fund projects that meet the aims and objectives of this Integrated Access Strategy, as resources allow.

### **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 the UK National Parks family, 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. This strategy aims to manage and develop the access network in the Broads in an integrated way considering how individual access points and routes fit into the overall network of access provision in the Broads. The strategy will also take account of other strategies and plans covering interrelated themes such as sustainable tourism, growth, landscape and cultural heritage, angling, water space management and public transport.

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

“The value of the Broads as a place for escape, adventure, enjoyment, inspiration and reflection for people of all ages and abilities is recognised and treasured. The area continues to offer a wide range of high quality, distinctive and memorable activities and events on water and on land, in suitable locations and in harmony with the special status and qualities of the Broads National Park and its communities. The long-standing tradition of boating remains integral to the Broads recreational offer, alongside other popular pursuits of angling, walking, cycling and experiencing the rich natural and Cultural assets of this wetland landscape. Year-round tourism is managed at environmentally and socially sustainable levels, contributing to a thriving local economy and secure employment base and meeting green tourism business standards. Physical access on land and between land and water is managed sensitively to maximise the social, educational and health benefits of open space to all, while ensuring the resource itself is not degraded. Where possible, improvements have been made to the network, connectivity and use of access routes, linked to visitor destination points and sustainable transport.”

The key strategic action identified in the Plan that informs this strategy is for the “development and implementation of schemes to upgrade and improve the network of

access points and routes (where adverse effects can be prevented) that are linked to visitor facilities and include easier access for people with mobility and sensory needs.”

This strategy is also informed by Defra’s 8 Point Plan for England’s National Parks which states that National Park Authorities with the Environment Agency and Natural England will champion integrated management of the natural environment, showcasing the benefits that designated landscapes can bring and realising the immense potential for outdoor recreation in National Parks. Further, Defra’s 25 Year Environment Plan includes the joint aims of connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing and creating more green infrastructure.

## Scope

The scope of the integrated access strategy is:

- A review and mapping on GIS<sup>1</sup> of all current available baseline data on access provision in the Broads, covering:
  - Moorings
  - Public rights of way
  - Permissive paths
  - 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 previous strategy action plan and the outputs from the Broads Engage workshop held in November 2018 to identify viable projects that meet strategy objectives.
- This strategy also takes account of other relevant local and regional strategies for interrelated topics such as recreation (including the Norfolk and Suffolk rights of way improvement plans), climate change adaptation, landscape and cultural heritage, community health and wellbeing, local transport and biodiversity.

The mapping and strategy review work will inform:

- The identification of priority sites for new or improved access provision.

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<sup>1</sup> A Geographic Information System (GIS) analyses and displays (e.g. through diagrams and mapping) geographically referenced information.

- The development of access hubs where it would be appropriate to focus access provision. 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 including moorings, permissive paths and public rights of way, potential easy access routes, canoe launch sites and slipways.
- The development of an outline three-year action plan and subsequently a detailed annual action plan identifying key activities and priority projects for improving access in the Broads.

This strategy provides the framework to deliver the long-term aim for sustainable, integrated access in the Broads. It is for anyone with an interest in access in the Broads including users, landowners and managers and stakeholders. Actions will be guided by the following guiding principles and strategic 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.

### Climate change resilience and 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

Where possible, 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 facilities, 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 National Parks UK. 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 improve access for all in the Broads
- (4) 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
- (5) To deliver the River Wensum Strategy through the River Wensum Strategy Partnership
- (6) To encourage provision of access routes that relieve visitor pressure on internationally designated sites, avoid disturbance of protected species and help to accommodate growth
- (7) To provide appropriate information on access 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.

#### Priorities:

- Improve access points between land and water, including visitor moorings, demasting moorings, safety moorings, isolated moorings, canoe portages and slipways. (The strategy will apply the principles set out in the Broads Authority's Mooring Strategy 2009 as regards mooring provision)
- 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-connected, maintained and functional access network will also contribute to the sustainability of the environment, communities and the local economy.

#### Priorities:

- 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 potential new bridleway routes that will allow riders to avoid dangerous road riding
- Develop new access routes through the Water, Mills and Marshes Landscape Partnership Scheme to form Mills Trails
- Establish/re-establish and promote circular routes from key access hubs
- Work with Norfolk County Council to deliver key Green Infrastructure projects that accommodate growth in Norwich and the Broads and relieve visitor pressure on sensitive sites
- Work with Norfolk County Council on the completion of the 3 Rivers Way and other strategic cycle routes in the Broads
- Identify opportunities for new or improved access to designated sites and visitor destination points, e.g. National Nature Reserves and historic buildings

#### Objective 3: To improve access for all in the Broads

Provision of safe, barrier free access is key to encouraging and enabling people of all ages and abilities to experience the Broads' countryside and waterways. Sometimes only minor works are required to make routes and access points easily accessible to a wide range of users



including people with disabilities, the elderly and families with small children. The nature of the Broads' landscape also lends itself to the provision of "access for all". The provision of a range of easy access routes linked to hubs will also contribute to the health and well-being of local communities in the Broads.

Priorities:

- Audit the access network in the Broads to identify and map routes where minor works can be carried out to deliver National Parks England's "Miles without Stiles" targets and remove barriers from the Trails in the Broads
- Identify and map priority routes for carrying out works to improve "access for all" including for people with sensory needs
- Identify works required to improve priority routes (surface, signage, infrastructure) for potential partnership funding bids
- Explore the potential for providing all-terrain vehicles for hire and changing places at key strategic hubs
- Provide appropriate information on sites to encourage new users

Objective 4: 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

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.

Priorities:

- Identify the key access hubs that will be promoted by the Broads Authority
- Identify opportunities to improve access hubs and existing links between facilities and public transport provision
- Identify opportunities to provide new shared use routes suitable for horse riding, cycling and walking
- 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 5: To deliver the River Wensum Strategy through the River Wensum Strategy Partnership (RWSP)

The River Wensum Strategy was adopted by the RWSP in 2018. Aside from the Broads Authority, the RWSP includes Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council, the

Environment Agency and the Norwich Society. The strategy is a ten-year project that seeks to improve access in the River Wensum corridor (on land and water) and connections between the key access routes that run out of Norwich into the Broads. The strategy also aims to help deliver the Broads Sustainable Tourism Strategy's aim of encouraging and promoting the use of the southern Broads.

Priorities:

- Work through the RWSP to provide new moorings and boat launching facilities to encourage recreational use of the Wensum and Yare
- Work through the RWSP to encourage the completion of the riverside walk in Norwich city centre
- Work through the RWSP and local planning process to encourage marina development downstream of Trowse swing bridge
- Work through the RWSP to encourage links between the riverside walk and Whitlingham Country Park

Objective 6: To encourage provision of access routes that relieve visitor pressure on internationally designated sites, avoid disturbance of protected species and help to accommodate growth

The Broads has a high number of sites and species that are protected under international and European legislation like the EU Habitats Directive and Birds Directive. Some sites and species are particularly sensitive to visitor pressure. Visitor pressure is also likely to increase from growth in the Norwich area. It is therefore important that adequate access routes, green infrastructure and suitable alternative sites are made available in the Broads area or close to it to relieve this pressure.

Priorities:

- Audit known sensitive sites to assess the viability of providing alternative routes at their periphery to avoid disturbance
- Encourage appropriate provision of green infrastructure routes and sites through the local planning process and Greater Norwich Infrastructure Plan
- Work with the county councils through the NAIP and Suffolk ROWIP to prioritise and agree shared goals for route creation and management

Objective 7: 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.

## Priorities:

- Provide information on how to access recreational opportunities, using sustainable travel options wherever possible
- Improve information and interpretation available at moorings and access hubs, on nearby facilities and visitor destination points
- 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

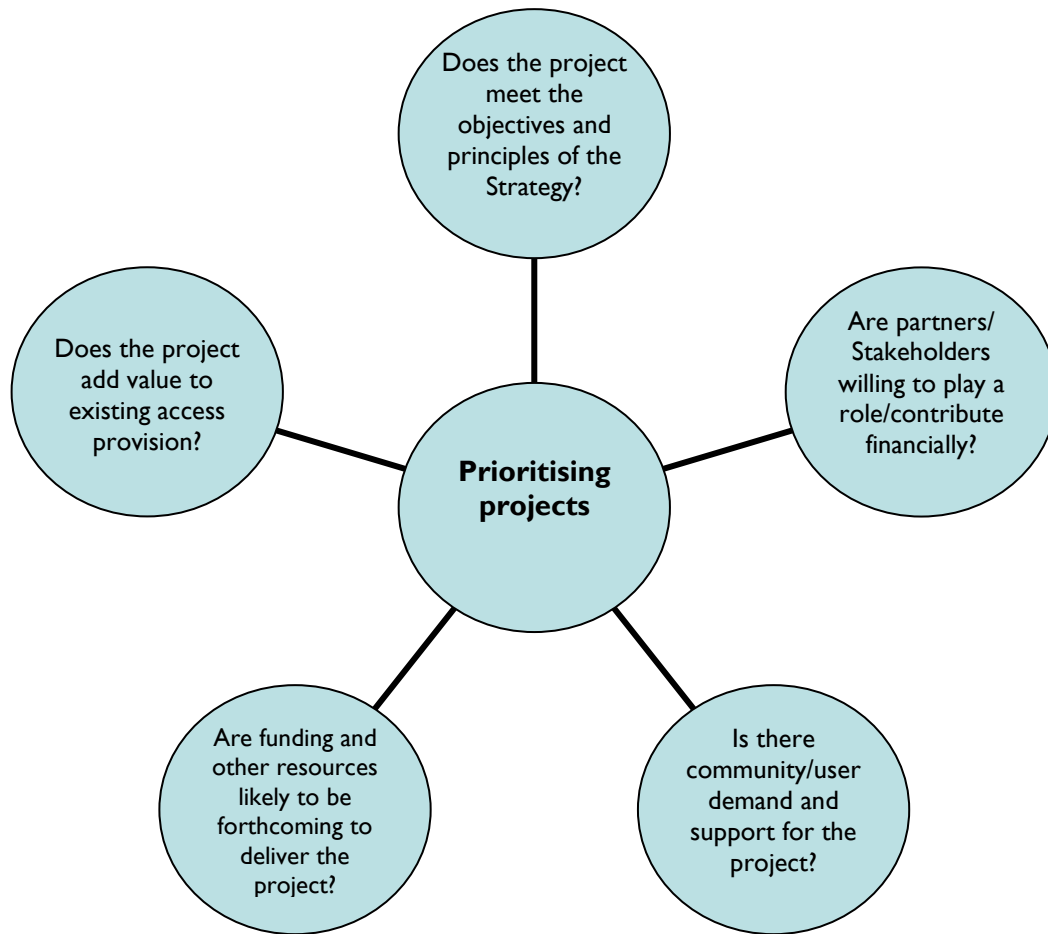
## Implementation

Given the current constraints on funding across local government, 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.

The Broads Authority will develop partnership projects with other local authorities, including parish councils to prioritise and fund projects that meet the aims and objectives of this Integrated Access strategy, as resources allow. The Authority will also agree shared goals for access provision with Norfolk County Council through the new NAIP.

Project proposals from the Broads Engage workshop and BLAF have been recorded on GIS and additional initiatives for access improvements will be added to this list. From this, the Authority will prepare an outline three-year action plan and subsequently a detailed annual action plan of priority projects which will be delivered as resources allow. 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, 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 Local Access Forum and reported to the Navigation Committee and Broads Authority.

## Project information and guidance

For advice on project development, please contact [broads@broads-authority.gov.uk](mailto:broads@broads-authority.gov.uk). Information on the Integrated Access Strategy and its action plan is also available on the Broads Authority website [www.broads-authority.gov.uk](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk)

### Broads Authority

The Broads Authority is a Special Statutory Authority established under the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 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.

In managing the area, the Authority must also have regard to:

- The national importance of the Broads as an area of natural beauty and one which affords opportunities for open-air recreation;
- The desirability of protecting the natural resources of the Broads from damage; and
- The needs of agriculture and forestry and the economic and social interests of those who live or work in the Broads.

The Authority also has the duty to maintain the navigation area for the purposes of navigation to such standard as appears to it to be reasonably required, and take such steps to improve and develop it as it thinks fit.

### 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 2017, has three key principles:

- Principle 1  
Where there are likely threats of serious or irreversible damage to the environment, as a precaution, cost effective measures are taken to prevent environmental degradation in the absence of full scientific certainty of the outcome of such threats.  
Such precautionary action is based on assessment of the costs and benefits of action, taking into account both the proportionality between the costs and benefits and the degree of certainty in their calculation, and transparency in decision making. Gaps in knowledge are addressed by research and, where feasible, precautionary measures taken while such knowledge is outstanding;
- Principle 2  
We seek to understand and respect the complexity and biological limits of our ecosystems, and conserve their structures to maintain their health and productivity. Management is at a local scale, while recognizing the direct or indirect effects on wider, interconnected ecosystems and the public goods and services they provide.

We manage for long-term, multiple benefits, not just for short-term or single interest gains.

- Principle 3

We plan and work in partnership to make the best use of shared knowledge and resources and to avoid duplication of effort. People are involved from an early stage, and throughout, in decisions that may interest or affect them. Decisions are supported with robust evidence, including scientific and local knowledge, innovation and best practice.

### Planning policy

This long-term aim set out in the Broads Plan is supported in the Broads Local Plan, which sets out planning policy guidance for the Broads. Two policies are especially relevant in the Broads Local Plan (2018):

#### Policy MODSP8 Getting to and around the Broads

Improvements to transportation to access facilities, services and settlements within the Broads will be sought in a manner and at a level which is compatible with sustainability objectives and the special qualities of the Broads:

Integration between all modes of transport will be sought to encourage the community and visitors to arrive and travel within the Broads via sustainable modes of transport.

Within the area, particular improvements required include:

- i) The improvement of access to and views of the waterside by the introduction of additional footpaths and cycle ways;
- ii) The promotion of access to enjoy the built, historic and cultural landscape; and
- iii) The creation of links to/from settlements.

#### Policy MODSP9 Recreational access around the Broads

Safe recreational access to both land and water and between the water's edge and the water will be protected and improved through:

- i) Developing the Public rights of Way (PRoW) network in line with the recommendations of the Norfolk and Suffolk Rights of Way Improvement Plans, Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan and the Broads Integrated Access Strategy;
- ii) Developing and/or improving access to other areas of the Broads from land and water, where appropriate;
- iii) Identifying and safeguarding potential crossing points of land and water;
- iv) Protecting and improving moorings, staithes and slipways;
- v) Creating new moorings and slipways where there is good road access and provision for parking;
- vi) Protecting and creating waterside spaces for informal recreation; and
- vii) Incorporating and developing appropriate measures for disabled people.

## Broads Local Access Forum

The Broads Local Access Forum (BLAF), established as a statutory body under Sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, 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.