

# Pathmakers

June 2025

## Gateways to the Broads National Park: A Vision for the Future

Prepared by Pathmakers CIO  
In Partnership with the Broads Authority

---

### Executive Summary

The Broads National Park is Britain's largest protected wetland and an area of national ecological and cultural significance. This report, commissioned by the Broads Authority and prepared by Pathmakers CIO, examines barriers to active travel and public access in the park, highlighting the importance of walking, cycling and wheeling for sustainability, health, and the local economy. Stakeholder engagement, local audits and best practice review reveal urgent issues including fragmented and poorly maintained routes, safety hazards, and a lack of joined-up infrastructure.

There is a clear need for greater political will, sustained funding and innovative volunteer models. The report recommends strengthening the evidence based on user needs, fostering collaboration, prioritising improvements that address safety and accessibility, and empowering local people through volunteer networks and training. Developing accessible promotional materials, supporting low-impact tourism, integrating routes with public transport, and enhancing youth involvement are also key priorities. While the Broads faces significant challenges in providing accessible and well-maintained active travel routes, coordinated action and partnership working offer clear opportunities to create a more inclusive, sustainable and vibrant future for everyone who lives in, works in or visits the Broads.

# Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	3
PROJECT OBJECTIVES.....	6
METHODOLOGY .....	7
BEST PRACTICE REVIEW.....	12
CURRENT STATE OF ACTIVE TRAVEL IN THE BROADS .....	14
POLICY AND PLANNING CONTEXT .....	19
VOLUNTEER NETWORK FEASIBILITY.....	26
WALKING FESTIVAL PROPOSAL .....	29
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....	49
APPENDIX .....	51

# Introduction

In April 2025 Pathmakers was commissioned by The Broads authority, to produce a report and the barriers to access to the Broads National Park and explore the opportunity for volunteering to help improve access.

The Broads is Britain's largest protected wetland and has national park status. It has 28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, many National and Local Nature Reserves and is home to a quarter of the UK's rarest species. The Broads Authority looks after this magical water land with responsibility for conservation, maintaining the waterways, recreation, tourism and planning. They need to consider all these interests together to manage the Broads now and for the future. They are responsible for the integrated management of land and water in the Broadland area. This includes conserving local wildlife, improving habitats, maintaining visitor facilities and their award-winning work in dredging. The Broads Authority Integrated Access Strategy, which was first produced in 2019 and then updated in 2023<sup>1</sup>, aims to address the issue of maintaining and improving access routes, including over land and between land and water, and their connections to key visitor facilities and sustainable transport links. In common with other national park authorities the Broads Authority has an access responsibility regarding the placement of notices indicating boundaries, restrictions and exclusions and appointing wardens. It can also decide applications from landowners and others with legal interests to exclude or restrict access.

The Broads Local Access Forum has a key role in advising the Broads Authority on access functions and are consulted on applications<sup>2</sup>.

Pathmakers is a charitable organisation based in Norfolk, whose purpose is improving public access to the countryside within Norfolk.

Pathmakers current activities include arranging monthly walks and the annual walking festival in October each year. These are particularly aimed at groups of people who would not normally get out and about within the countryside for whatever reason. The charity also has a well-being programme working with disadvantaged groups to arrange activities within the countryside

Most of the Broads National Park lies within Norfolk and therefore many of Pathmakers activities happen within the park. Therefore, Pathmakers already has some knowledge

---

<sup>1</sup> Broads Authority. (2024) *Integrated access strategy for the Broads*. Norwich: Broads Authority. Available at: [https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/181134/Integrated-Access-Strategy-2023.pdf](https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/181134/Integrated-Access-Strategy-2023.pdf) (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Broads Authority. (n.d.) *Broads Local Access Forum*. Available at: <https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/about-us/committees/local-access-forum> (Accessed: 2 June 2025)

about accessibility within the park and is very much interested in promoting ways of improving access.

A report of this nature would normally involve formal consultation with local authorities, local businesses and other organisations with interest in public access to the park. Such a consultation would take several weeks if not months complete however this report was required within a time scale which would not allow for a full consultation.

Some form of informal consultation with organisations was however deemed necessary and therefore Pathmakers has undertaken consultation with representatives of these bodies to seek opinions about accessibility to properly inform this report.

The scope of this informal survey responses bar included as an appendix to this report.

Pathmakers has for several years commissioned research projects with UEA student researchers into aspects of public access ability.

Whilst these are not necessarily site specific, the results can be quite often be applied to issues within the park.

Consequently, Pathmakers has drawn on these projects to inform this report.

### **The Importance of Active Travel within the Broads National Park**

Active travel—encompassing walking, cycling, and wheeling—plays a vital role in shaping the future of sustainable access and engagement within the Broads National Park. As a unique and ecologically sensitive landscape, the Broads offers a rich tapestry of waterways, wetlands, and rural communities that are best experienced at a slower, more immersive pace. Promoting active travel in this context is not only a matter of transportation but a strategic approach to conservation, community wellbeing, and economic resilience.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Encouraging active travel reduces reliance on motor vehicles, thereby lowering carbon emissions and minimising the environmental footprint of tourism and local travel. This aligns with broader climate action goals and helps preserve the fragile ecosystems that define the Broads.

## **Health and Wellbeing**

Walking and cycling offer significant physical and mental health benefits. By improving access to safe, scenic routes, the National Park can support healthier lifestyles for both residents and visitors. The tranquil environment of the Broads enhances the restorative effects of outdoor activity, contributing to reduced stress and improved mental health.

## **Enhanced Visitor Experience**

Active travel allows for a deeper connection with the landscape. Visitors who explore on foot or by bike are more likely to engage with local heritage, wildlife, and communities. This slower pace of travel fosters appreciation and stewardship of the natural environment.

## **Economic Opportunities**

Improved active travel infrastructure can stimulate local economies by increasing footfall in rural villages and supporting businesses such as cafés, accommodation providers, bike hire services, and local attractions. Walking festivals and themed trails can further boost tourism and create seasonal economic uplift.

## **Community Engagement and Ownership**

Active travel initiatives provide a platform for local communities to take pride in and responsibility for their surroundings. Through volunteering, route auditing, and event participation, residents become active stewards of the landscape, strengthening social cohesion and local identity.

## **Accessibility and Inclusion**

By investing in well-maintained, clearly marked, and accessible routes, the Broads can become a more inclusive destination. Active travel infrastructure that accommodates a range of mobility needs ensures that more people can enjoy the park's natural beauty.

# Project Objectives

## **Objective 1: Community and Stakeholder Engagement**

This objective focuses on engaging with a wide range of local stakeholders—including communities, Parish Councils, land managers, and businesses—to gather insights and suggestions for improving the footpath network. The aim is to ensure that any enhancements reflect local needs and priorities, fostering a sense of ownership and long-term commitment to the active travel infrastructure.

## **Objective 2: Volunteer Network Scoping**

The second objective is to explore the feasibility of establishing a network of volunteers who can help audit walking routes and identify areas for improvement. This includes assessing how volunteers might contribute to maintaining paths and enhancing connections to public transport, thereby supporting a more integrated and sustainable travel network.

## **Objective 3: Capacity Building and Training**

This objective addresses the need to equip volunteers and partner organisations with the skills and confidence to act as walk leaders. It involves identifying training needs and developing resources or programs that can build local capacity, ensuring that community-led initiatives are safe, effective, and sustainable.

## **Objective 4: Walking Festival Potential**

The final objective is to investigate the potential for launching a Broads-themed walking festival. This includes exploring the concept, identifying logistical and resource requirements, and evaluating how such an event could promote active travel, celebrate the local landscape, and engage both residents and visitors.

# Methodology

## Research and Analysis Approach

The methodology employs a structured and comprehensive stakeholder consultation process to ensure there was a comprehensive understanding of the footpath network needs with secondary sourced research to supplement the report throughout. A total of 42 organisations were included across five categories, comprising 16 Parish Councils as primary governance bodies with statutory consultation rights, 16 businesses representing tourism, hospitality, and retail in gateway communities, 3 community groups including local access forums and civic societies, 3 land managers consisting of major conservation organisations and significant landowners, and 4 other organisations encompassing accessibility organisations and educational institutions (see *Appendix 2*)

A key element of the methodology was the deliberate matching of businesses with their corresponding Parish Council areas. This approach ensured that for each Parish Council included, there was a directly related business or group of businesses from the same locality. This practice is recognised in sector best practice as a means of facilitating more place-based and contextually relevant consultation, enabling a clearer understanding of local needs and opportunities from both governance and economic perspectives<sup>3</sup>. By aligning the number and type of businesses with each Parish Council, the consultation process was able to capture a balanced view, supporting more effective partnership working and reflecting the interconnected roles of councils and local enterprises in shaping active travel provision.

Stakeholders were initially contacted by email and invited to complete a detailed survey, which was developed using Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) principles<sup>4</sup>. The survey was designed to identify barriers and opportunities for active travel within the Broads National Park, focusing on existing strengths and local capacity. Topics included access barriers, network connectivity, infrastructure needs, volunteering interest, and community event participation.

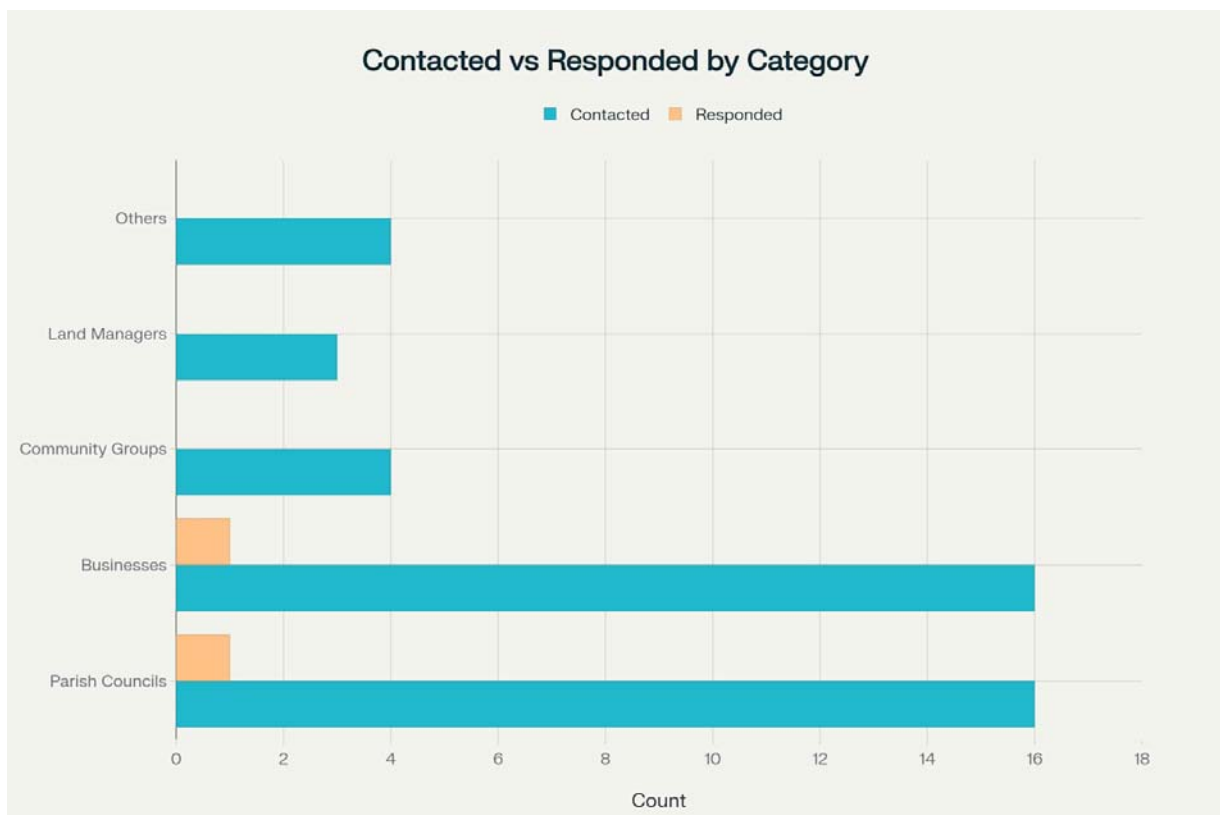
---

<sup>3</sup> D. Mears, *is there a need to improve relationships between local councils and the local businesses they represent? Dissertation submitted in partial completion of a BA Honours degree in Community Governance*, De Montfort University, 2023. Available at: <https://www.slcc.co.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/David-Mears-Dissertation-Collaboration-between-Local-Councils-and-Local-Businesses-Research-Project.pdf> (Accessed: 5 June 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Woodward, J., South, J., Coan, S., Bagnall, A.-M. and Rippon, S. (2021) *Asset Based Community Development: a review of current evidence*. Project Report. Leeds Beckett University, Leeds. Available at: <https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/7641/1/AssetBasedCommunityDevelopmentAReviewOfCurrentEvidencePV-SOUTH.pdf> (Accessed: 6 June 2025).

To maximise response rates, a structured follow-up process was implemented. Weekly reminder emails were sent to organisations that had not yet replied, and telephone calls were made to key contacts to encourage participation and address any queries. Despite these efforts, the consultation did not result in high levels of engagement, with only 2 responses received across the stakeholder categories (see *Figure 1*). This outcome has been documented in the attached survey response data and although low, key insights are found.

**Figure 1: Consultation Outreach and Response Rates by Stakeholder Category**



### Stakeholder Consultation Process

The consultation process utilised a variety of engagement methods tailored to different stakeholder groups, with email consultation serving as the primary channel to reach all 42 targeted organisations. Weekly follow-up emails and phone calls were made to encourage participation and clarify any queries, but the project's limited timeframe further constrained opportunities for engagement. The structured question framework

addressed a broad range of topics within the survey, including infrastructure gaps and connectivity, specific concerns about path conditions, requirements for public transport integration, improvement priorities, volunteer capacity and willingness, interest and capacity for walking festivals, training needs, and open-ended comments (see *Appendix 1*). Despite these comprehensive outreach efforts, the report highlights the significant engagement challenges in rural areas with outreach. This low response rate reflects both the broader difficulties documented in rural community engagement literature<sup>5</sup> and ongoing post-COVID impacts on volunteer capacity and community engagement, as explicitly noted by the responding organisations (see *Appendix 2*).

### **Stakeholder Engagement Findings**

The most substantive response came from Wroxham Parish Council, providing detailed insights into local infrastructure challenges and community capacity issues. The response highlighted critical infrastructure gaps: "Lack of joined up infrastructure. We have individual footpaths, but you have to travel on busy roads to get between them". This fundamental connectivity issue represents the core challenge facing the footpath network, requiring strategic intervention to create linked routes serving both recreational and practical transport needs.

Specific safety hazards were identified with particular urgency, including "Wroxham FP7 - the gate at the top of the path obstructs access and then the path is steep and poorly surfaced, which is a shame because it goes to a delightful spot next to the water". The western end of Wroxham FP2 is "often impassable in winter due to mud," while most critically, "The north end of FP4 ends on a blind bend on a busy A road with pedestrians having to cross a railway bridge to come into Wroxham. It's a death wish". This latter issue represents an immediate life-threatening hazard requiring urgent intervention. The response revealed significant historical context regarding previous improvement efforts: "We would like to see a footpath connect the south of Wroxham with Salhouse and have researched a route."

Additionally, "Several years ago Councillors also worked on a scheme they called the 'green loop', linking with Hoveton and taking pedestrians and cyclists off of the A115. The landowner objected and there was no political support or funding, so the idea was abandoned". These previous efforts indicate both local knowledge and ambition that could be leveraged for future development. Regarding political and funding challenges, the response was frank about systemic barriers: "There needs to be political will and

---

<sup>5</sup> Urban Institute (2020) *In Search of "Good" Rural Data*. Available at: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102134/in-search-of-good-rural-data.pdf> (Accessed: 6 June 2025)

funding to create linked routes. These then need to be maintained, signposted and promoted. Pigs are currently flying past my window". This scepticism about political support reflects broader challenges in rural infrastructure development and highlights the need for robust business cases demonstrating economic and social benefits. The volunteer capacity situation revealed significant post-COVID impacts: "We are an 11-seat council with 5 councillors. I would love to say yes to this question, but the reality is that people are just not volunteering since Covid. I can't even get somebody to maintain a small flowerbed!". This stark assessment of local capacity highlights the need for alternative volunteer models, with the suggestion that "you would probably get more support via a group such as The Ramblers or U3A walking group" providing potential pathways for engagement.

### **Business Stakeholder Response**

The Hungry Otter, a small food establishment at Salhouse Broad, provided a brief but constructive response indicating business willingness to support footpath development. While noting "none in my area (Salhouse Broad)" regarding current path issues, they expressed interest in supporting festival development: "I am a tiny little food hut so could provide refreshments if people passed through Salhouse Broad". This response demonstrates business recognition of economic opportunities from increased footfall and suggests potential for broader business engagement in route development and festival planning.

### **Identified Needs and Suggestions**

The stakeholder feedback revealed five critical themes requiring strategic intervention. Maintenance of the footpath network currently represents the most fundamental and highest challenge recorded (see *Figure 2*), with existing footpaths failing to connect into coherent networks enabling practical journey-making between communities and key destinations.

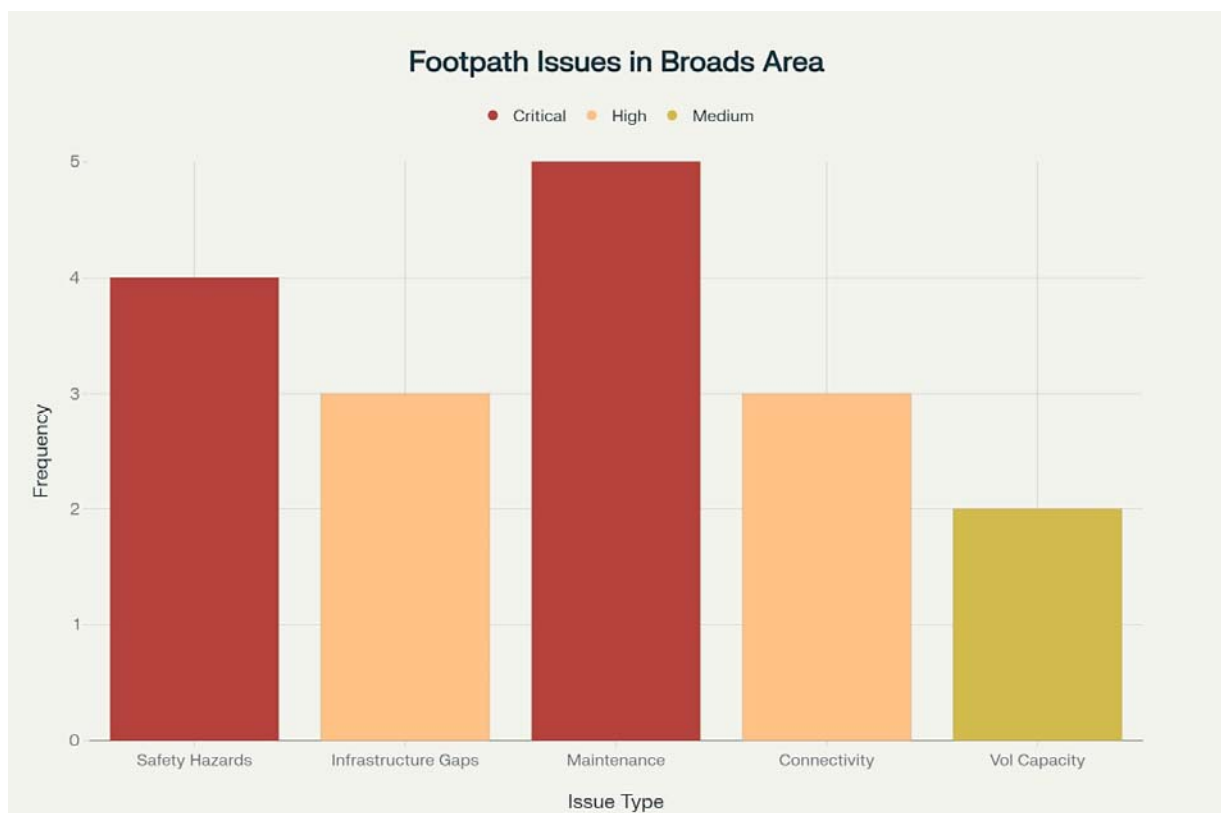
- **This fragmentation requires strategic intervention to create linked routes serving both recreational and practical transport needs, as highlighted by Wroxham Parish Council's call for improved connectivity.**

Safety hazards emerged as the second most urgent priority through the word frequency analysis (see *Figure 2*) from the stakeholder engagement survey, with FP4's blind bend crossing described as "a death wish" representing immediate life-threatening conditions. Multiple dangerous road crossings with insufficient warning signage create significant barriers to network use and require coordinated action with highway authorities. These

safety issues represent clear priorities for immediate intervention given their potential consequences.

- **Further investigation and proactive communication with parish councils is essential to both enhance accessibility and address safety concerns. The low response rate to initial outreach highlights the urgency of this matter, as additional safety issues may exist but remain unreported. Strengthened engagement will help identify and resolve barriers, ensuring that connectivity and user safety are prioritised in line with stakeholder feedback.**

**Figure 2: Footpath Issues in Broads Area Identified Through Word Frequency Analysis**



# Best Practice Review

## Parish Paths Partnership Models

The Essex Parish Paths Partnership (P3) represents an effective model that utilises the community for footpath management and promotion. This partnership involves the collaboration voluntarily between Essex County Council, parish/ town councils, landowners, and local voluntary groups<sup>6</sup>. The scheme provides grants to participating parishes to cover additional costs involved and carrying out maintenance and improvement on Public Rights of Way (PRoW) networks<sup>6</sup>.

The Essex P3 scheme highlights clear objectives for capacity building at the local level to “give local people the resources and skills to enable them to actively look after their local rights of way network”, “promote local awareness” and “promote community involvement”<sup>6</sup>. Through this agreement signed by both the local P3 group and Essex County Council it outlines:

- Background to the scheme
- The grant
- Support and advice – what help is expected from Essex County Council
- Responsibilities of the Parish

**By keeping a record of this written agreement, it outlines the commitments of both parties and their objective, in turn creating a governance framework of accountability with local autonomy.**

Funding through the P3 scheme covers a wide range:

- Purchase of tools/ sundries
- Additional insurance costs
- Training for volunteers
- Safety equipment
- Contractor costs for maintenance work
- Volunteer travel expenses
- Administration costs (stamps, photocopying etc)
- Design and printing of promotional material (up to 50%)

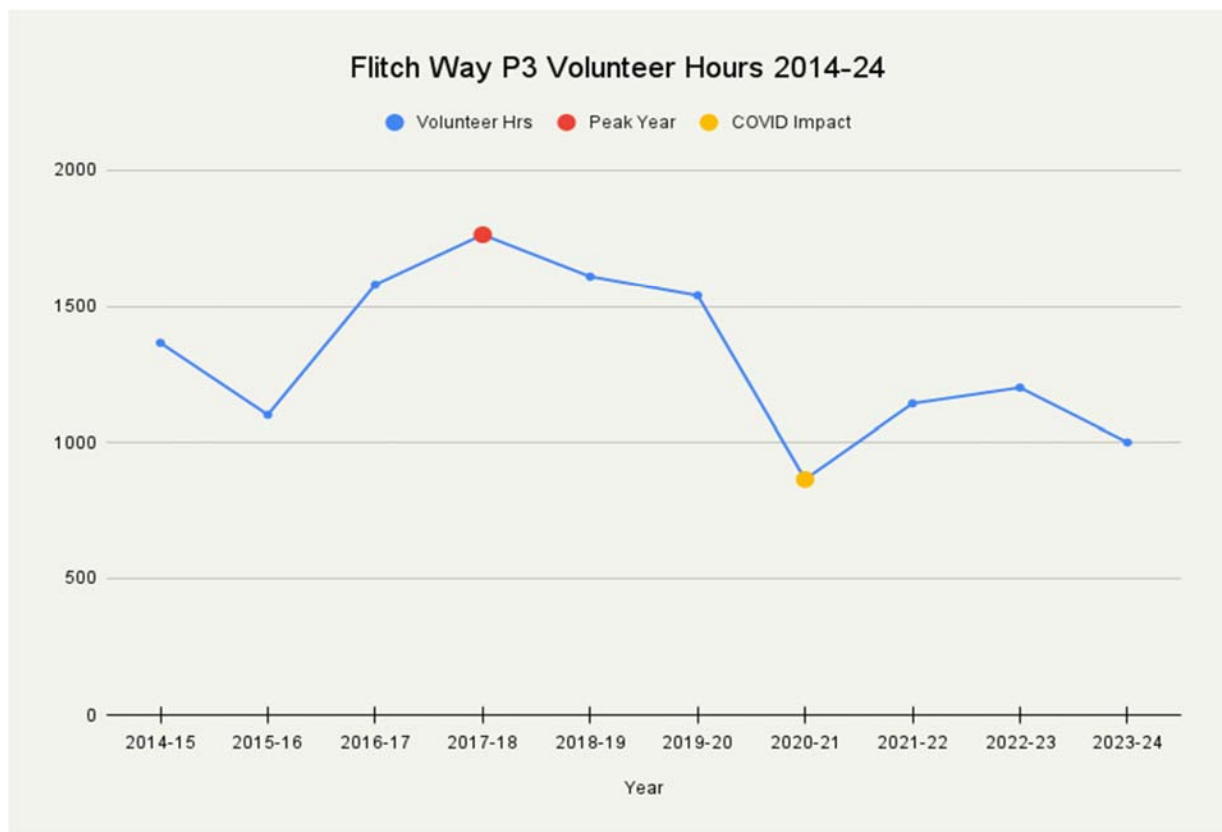
---

<sup>6</sup> Essex County Council. (2011) *Parish Paths Partnership Manual*. Available at: [https://www.essexhighways.org/uploads/files/parish\\_paths\\_partnership\\_manual.pdf](https://www.essexhighways.org/uploads/files/parish_paths_partnership_manual.pdf) (Accessed: 9 June 2025).

Through this approach to path management, has enabled successful implementation across multiple parishes such as Danbury, where volunteers are supported to coordinate with Essex Highways to maintain the public rights of way network<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, the group utilises local available resources to “install new way marker posts, clear vegetation, replace signs on posts and repair bridges”<sup>7</sup>.

Success of the scheme is further shown through the Friends of the Flitch Way P3 group which has contributed **13,813 volunteer hours over an 11-period between 2014-15 to 2024-2025** (see *Figure 3*). The data shown reflects consistent volunteer participation, even during challenging periods like the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings directly address some mentioned previously from the community stakeholder engagement as a model for **strategic intervention to create linked routes** and the **challenge in having volunteers for the path network post-covid by utilising a similar funding model for the Broads Authority**.

**Figure 3: P3 Volunteer hours contributed by Friends of the Flitch Way group**



<sup>7</sup> Danbury Parish Council. (n.d.) *Parish Paths Partnership (P3)*. Available at: <https://www.danbury-essex.gov.uk/parish-paths-partnership-p3/> (Accessed: 9 June 2025).

# Current State of Active Travel in the Broads

## Existing Active Travel Infrastructure

- **Footpaths and Cycle Routes:** The Broads National Park has an extensive network of footpaths and cycle routes, including the Wherryman's Way and the Three Rivers Way
- **LCWIP Development:** The Broads Authority is developing a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to enhance active travel within the park

Access to Footpaths, cycle routes and permissive paths, relies heavily on general condition and maintenance.

Is there a way for a better maintenance regime for public access routes within the broad National Park?

Access routes into the Broads National Park are largely by public footpaths or privately owned permissive paths. Public footpaths are within the statutory responsibility of County Councils as the Highway Authority. However, both Parish Councils and District Councils as well as the Broads Authority itself, also have an interest to ensure that access routes are well maintained.

Along with the statutory obligation to maintain footpaths, the County Councils also have a statutory responsibility for public safety on footpaths along with landowners. The responsibility for safety is a complicated issue as is the responsibility for carrying out maintenance and how it should be done.

The current financial climate in which councils operate it is becoming increasingly difficult and providing sufficient budget to carry out level of maintenance which communities and walkers find acceptable. Organisations such as parishes have issues maintaining access routes within their borders but with no statutory responsibility for carrying out work often passing responsibility back to the County Council. The impending Local Authority reorganisation could further complicate regarding the issue about who has responsibility for these access routes.

It is possible that maintenance within the National Park could be undertaken by maintenance agreements between the County Councils, District Councils and local Parishes to share the responsibility for maintenance.

Public access to the Broads National Park could be improved by a better maintenance regime for dealing with seasonal vegetation. This could be achieved by agreements between local authorities and interested organisations groups coordinated by the Broads Authority. However, the Broads authority is not the highway authority for the Broads National Park. This is responsibility shared by the two county councils Norfolk and Suffolk. The Broads Authority does, however, have some access responsibilities and works in partnership with these councils to manage and improve access routes within the park.

Maintenance that is carried out within the Broads National Park is therefore heavily influenced by the policies of the two councils. As highway authority each council has statutory responsibilities and obligations for public rights of way which includes public liability for the safe provision of the footpaths. This means the cooperation of these authorities is fundamental to the formation of any localised maintenance agreement. The two councils also have their own budgets for maintenance of public rights of way however these are not exclusive to the Broads National Park, and it is their responsibility to cover all public rights of way in their area. Councils have funds allocated for maintenance of public rights of way, but there is considerable demand on this resource, and this is likely to mean that in some cases the public will not be happy with the standard of maintenance.

The imminent Local Government reorganisation may give an opportunity to look at whether it is time to consider applying for proposals that just one of the new authorities become the highway authority for the Broads National Park. Local government reorganisation could lead to yet another authority becoming the responsible authority for part of the park leading to the Broads authority having to deal with three separate authorities about access issues. If the broader authority took on this responsibility this could lead to a more standardised approach across the park and would lead to more focused approach to maintaining public rights of way throughout the whole park.

While the Broads Authority is not currently the highway authority for public rights of way within the Broads National Park, it is theoretically possible for this to change. Achieving this would likely require legislative amendments and collaboration between various stakeholders.

Here are some steps that might be involved:

1. **Legislative Change:** The primary step would be to amend existing laws to designate the Broads Authority as the highway authority for public rights of way

2. within the park. This would involve lobbying and working with government bodies to pass the necessary legislation<sup>8</sup>.
2. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** The Broads Authority would need to work closely with local county councils (Norfolk and Suffolk), landowners, and other relevant organisations to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities<sup>2</sup>.
3. **Resource Allocation:** Adequate resources, including funding and personnel, would need to be allocated to the Broads Authority to manage and maintain the public rights of way effectively<sup>2</sup>.
4. **Public Consultation:** Engaging with the local community and stakeholders through consultations to gather input and support for the change<sup>8</sup>.
5. **Implementation Plan:** Developing a detailed implementation plan outlining how the Broads Authority would take over the responsibilities, including timelines and milestones<sup>2</sup>.

If the Broads Authority were to become the highway authority for public rights of way within the Broads National Park, several financial and administrative challenges could arise:

### Financial Problems

1. **Funding Allocation:** The Broads Authority currently receives funding primarily for its National Park responsibilities, not for maintaining public rights of way [3]. Securing additional funding to cover these new responsibilities could be challenging and might require significant lobbying and negotiation with government bodies<sup>9</sup>.
2. **Increased Costs:** Managing public rights of way involves substantial costs, including maintenance, signage, and enforcement. These costs could strain the Broads Authority's budget, especially if existing funding sources are insufficient<sup>9</sup>.
3. **Revenue Generation:** The Broads Authority might need to find new ways to generate revenue to support the maintenance of public rights of way, such as

---

<sup>8</sup> Lean, J. (2020) *Access to National Parks and the Broads: Rights of Way*. London: Landmark Chambers. Available at: <https://www.landmarkchambers.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Access-to-National-Parks-and-the-Broads-Rights-of-Way.pdf> (Accessed: 7 June 2025)

<sup>9</sup> Inland Waterways Association. (2024) *IWA responds to Broads Authority briefing on navigation charges*. Available at: <https://waterways.org.uk/about-us/news/iwa-responds-to-broads-authority-briefing-on-navigation-charges> (Accessed: 8 June 2025)

introducing tolls or seeking grants. This could be met with resistance from the public and stakeholders<sup>9</sup>.

### **Administrative Problems**

1. **Resource Management:** The Broads Authority would need to allocate additional resources, including personnel and equipment, to manage public rights of way. This could require restructuring and expanding its current operations<sup>10</sup>.
2. **Coordination with Local Councils:** Transitioning responsibilities from local county councils to the Broads Authority would require extensive coordination and collaboration. Ensuring a smooth transition and maintaining effective communication channels could be complex<sup>10</sup>.
3. **Regulatory Compliance:** The Broads Authority would need to ensure compliance with various regulations and standards related to public rights of way. This could involve navigating complex legal frameworks and adapting existing policies<sup>10</sup>.
4. **Public Engagement:** Engaging with the local community and stakeholders to gather support and address concerns would be crucial. This could involve extensive consultation processes and managing differing opinions<sup>9</sup>.

However, if the Broads Authority were to become the highway authority for public rights of way within the Broads National Park, several benefits could arise:

### **Enhanced Local Management**

1. **Focused Management:** The Broads Authority, being dedicated to the park, could provide more focused and tailored management of public rights of way, ensuring that they align with the park's conservation and recreational goals<sup>11</sup>.
2. **Improved Coordination:** Having a single authority manage both the park and its public rights of way could lead to better coordination and more cohesive planning and development<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> Broads Authority. (2025) *Financial performance and direction: Agenda item 10, 9 May 2025*. Available at: [https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0039/569748/Financial-performance-and-direction-May-2025.pdf](https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0039/569748/Financial-performance-and-direction-May-2025.pdf) (Accessed: 8 June 2025)

<sup>11</sup> Broads Authority. (n.d.) *Transport – Local Plan for the Broads: Preferred Options*. Available at: <https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/planning/planning-policies/local-plan-for-the-broads/preferred-options/transport> (Accessed: 8 June 2025)

## **Environmental and Recreational Benefits**

1. **Sustainable Practices:** The Broads Authority could implement more environmentally sustainable practices in maintaining and developing public rights of way, enhancing the park's natural beauty and ecological health<sup>11</sup>.
2. **Enhanced Access:** Improved management could lead to better access for visitors, including the creation of new footpaths and cycleways, promoting outdoor activities and tourism<sup>8</sup>.

## **Community and Stakeholder Engagement**

1. **Local Engagement:** The Broads Authority's closer ties with local communities could facilitate better engagement and responsiveness to local needs and concerns regarding public rights of way<sup>11</sup>.
2. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Enhanced collaboration with stakeholders, including local businesses and conservation groups, could lead to more effective and innovative solutions for managing public rights of way<sup>11</sup>.

## **Economic Benefits**

1. **Tourism Boost:** Improved access and management could attract more visitors, boost local tourism and benefit the economy<sup>11</sup>.
2. **Funding Opportunities:** The Broads Authority might be able to secure specific grants and funding aimed at enhancing national parks, which could be used to improve public rights of way<sup>11</sup>.

# Policy and Planning context

## Local Authorities Covering the Broads National Park and Their Responsibilities

The Broads National Park, a unique network of rivers and lakes in Norfolk and Suffolk, is overseen by a combination of local authorities and a dedicated statutory body. This collaborative governance ensures the protection of its natural environment while supporting local communities and sustainable development.

### 1. The Broads Authority

The primary body responsible for the Broads is the **Broads Authority**, a special statutory authority established under the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988, but with the added status equivalent to a national park authority with responsibilities for navigation<sup>12</sup>.

#### Responsibilities:

- **Conservation and Enhancement:** Protecting the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the Broads.
- **Public Enjoyment:** Promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Broads by the public.
- **Navigation:** Maintaining and improving navigation on the Broads' waterways, including dredging, signage, and safety.

### 2. Local District and County Councils

The Broads National Park spans across several local authority areas, each with distinct responsibilities:

#### a. Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council

- **Highways and Transport**
- **Education**
- **Social Services**
- **Waste Disposal**
- **Strategic Planning**

---

<sup>12</sup> Broads Authority. (n.d.) *Legislation*. Available at: <https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/about-us/how-we-work/legislation> (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

## **b. District Councils:**

These include:

- **Broadland District Council**
- **South Norfolk Council**
- **North Norfolk District Council**
- **Great Yarmouth Borough Council**
- **Norwich City Council**
- **East Suffolk Council**

Each district council is responsible for:

- **Local Planning (outside the Broads Authority area)**
- **Housing**
- **Environmental Health**
- **Waste Collection**
- **Leisure and Recreation Services**

## **3. Planning Responsibilities**

The **Broads Authority** is the **local planning authority** for the area within the Broads Executive Area. This means it handles:

- Development control
- Local plan preparation
- Conservation area designation

However, outside the Broads Executive Area, planning responsibilities fall to the respective district councils.

## **Broads Plan 2022-2027: Objectives for Enhancing Public Access**

The Broads Plan 2022-2027 outlines several strategic objectives aimed at improving public access to the Norfolk Broads National Park. These objectives are part of Theme E: Promoting Understanding and Enjoyment<sup>13</sup>.

### **1. Improve Integrated Access Routes**

- **Objective:** Enhance the network of access routes and points, ensuring easier access for people with mobility and sensory needs.
- **Actions:** Develop and maintain pathways, bridges, and access points that connect visitors to key areas and facilities.

### **2. Year-Round Visitor Activities**

- **Objective:** Offer a coordinated program of activities that promote the unique Broads experience throughout the year.
- **Actions:** Organise events and activities that highlight the natural and cultural heritage of the Broads, while mitigating any adverse environmental impacts.

### **3. Multimedia Interpretation**

- **Objective:** Upgrade and maintain multimedia interpretation tools to provide visitors with information about the special qualities of the Broads.
- **Actions:** Implement interactive displays, mobile apps, and informational signage at key locations.

### **4. Enhance Local Tourism Offer**

- **Objective:** Strengthen the quality and distinctiveness of the local tourism offer, including careers and skills training.
- **Actions:** Support local businesses and tourism operators in improving service standards and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

**These objectives aim to create a more accessible, engaging, and sustainable experience for all visitors to the Norfolk Broads National Park**

---

<sup>13</sup> Broads Authority. (2022) *Broads Plan 2022–27*. Norwich: Broads Authority. Available at: [https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0033/443877/Broads-Plan-2022-27.pdf](https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0033/443877/Broads-Plan-2022-27.pdf) (Accessed: 8 June 2025).

## Challenges

Creating better public access to the Norfolk Broads National Park faces several barriers:

### 1. Environmental Sensitivity

- **Impact on Habitats:** Enhancing access routes can disturb sensitive habitats and wildlife.
- **Conservation Conflicts:** Balancing public access with the need to protect and conserve the natural environment.

### 2. Funding and Resources

- **Financial Constraints:** Limited funding for developing and maintaining access infrastructure.
- **Resource Allocation:** Competing priorities for available resources within the park management.

### 3. Infrastructure and Facilities

- **Existing Infrastructure:** Upgrading old or inadequate infrastructure to meet modern accessibility standards.
- **Maintenance:** Ongoing maintenance of access routes and facilities to ensure safety and usability.

### 4. Land Ownership and Permissions

- **Private Land:** Negotiating access rights with private landowners.
- **Legal Restrictions:** Navigating legal and regulatory frameworks that govern land use and access.

### 5. Accessibility

- **Physical Barriers:** Ensuring that access routes are suitable for people with disabilities and other mobility issues.

- **Inclusive Design:** Designing facilities and services that cater to a diverse range of visitors.

## 6. Seasonal and Weather Conditions

- **Weather Impact:** Seasonal weather variations affecting the usability of access routes.
- **Flooding and Erosion:** Managing the impact of flooding and erosion on pathways and facilities.

## 7. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- **Local Opposition:** Addressing concerns and opposition from local communities and stakeholders.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Ensuring effective collaboration and communication among various stakeholders.

Addressing these barriers requires careful planning, adequate funding, and strong collaboration among all stakeholders to ensure that public access improvements are sustainable and beneficial for both visitors and the environment.

## Opportunities

Opening up more of the Norfolk Broads National Park to public access can be most straightforward in areas where there is existing infrastructure and minimal environmental impact. Here are some key areas and strategies to achieve this:

### 1. Existing Access Points and Routes

- **Focus Areas:** Enhance and expand existing access points such as moorings, footpaths, and cycle paths.
- **Strategy:** Upgrade facilities at these points to improve accessibility for all visitors, including those with disabilities.

### 2. Public Rights of Way

- **Focus Areas:** Utilise and improve public rights of way, including footpaths and bridleways.
- **Strategy:** Work with local authorities and landowners to maintain and enhance these routes, ensuring they are well-signposted and accessible.

### 3. Community and Visitor Facilities

- **Focus Areas:** Develop access routes that connect to key visitor facilities such as visitor centres, car parks, and public transport hubs.
- **Strategy:** Implement integrated access strategies that link these facilities with popular destinations within the park

### 4. Sustainable Transport Options

- **Focus Areas:** Promote and improve sustainable transport options such as cycling, walking, and public transport
- **Strategy:** Create and enhance cycle paths and walking trails, and improve public transport links to and within the park

### 5. Collaboration with Landowners

- **Focus Areas:** Engage with private landowners to negotiate access agreements and easements

**Strategy:** Develop partnerships and agreements that allow for public access while respecting private property rights

### 6. Environmental Considerations

- **Focus Areas:** Identify areas where access improvements can be made with minimal environmental impact
- **Strategy:** Conduct environmental impact assessments and implement measures to protect sensitive habitats and species

## 7. Community Engagement

- **Focus Areas:** Involve local communities in the planning and implementation of access improvements
- **Strategy:** Conduct public consultations and gather feedback to ensure that access improvements meet the needs and preferences of residents and visitors

By focusing on these areas and strategies, the Broads Authority and its partners can effectively enhance public access to the Norfolk Broads National Park while preserving its natural beauty and biodiversity.

## Volunteer Network Feasibility

Evidence shows access to green space helps to achieve significant reductions in physical health conditions, improves quality of life, reduces stress, anxiety and depression and leads to better levels of mental health and wellbeing<sup>14</sup>. However, people lack confidence and knowledge about how to get out and need support with good accessible information. The Norfolk County Council Access Improvement Plan in consultation with local communities has identified in Theme 6 the need for a community led access network in Norfolk working with Parish Councils, volunteers and other community organisations<sup>15</sup>.

The Broads Authority has a range of volunteering opportunities from practical volunteering including repairs to quay headings, fen management and management of invasive plant species, to survey volunteering to assist with surveys of species and habitats and education volunteering working with schools and young people. They are managed by a volunteer coordinator. However, the opportunities are limited to specific roles which can be supervised by relevant Broads Authority staff. Footpath management is not one of these roles, but the Authority is keen to see better management of the footpath network particularly where it links with the waterways and is interested in scoping partnership arrangements.

Pathmakers aims to improve countryside access, protect our heritage and engage new audiences by working with volunteers, land management partners and walk leaders to create safe routes with good information; organising high quality activities and walks, providing transport and actively address barriers to access including an annual Walking Festival and monthly walks.

Pathmakers most recent project Walk Norfolk has identified a need for better information for those supporting people out walking. Support workers in voluntary organisations need to know where to go and what to look for; walk leaders need information about leading a group safely, land managers need to know how to provide walks for vulnerable groups.

---

<sup>14</sup> Senn, N., Berset, N. and Michel, S. (2024) 'Greenspaces and Health: Scoping Review of Studies in Europe', *Public Health Reviews*, 45. Available at: <https://www.ssph-journal.org/journals/public-health-reviews/articles/10.3389/phrs.2024.1606863/full> (Accessed: 9 June 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Norfolk County Council. (2023) *Norfolk Access Improvement Plan*. Available at: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/43034#:~:text=We%20have%20created%20a%20new%2010%20year%20plan%2C,enjoyment%20of%20Norfolk%E2%80%99s%20public%20rights%20of%20way%20network> (Accessed: 11 June 2025)

Pathmakers is proposing the development of “walking hubs” for volunteers in market towns such as Wroxham and Acle with local information and a place where volunteers can receive training, meet, exchange experience, network and form relationships. They can work with local Parish Councils, the Broads Authority, Local Authorities and others to identify local need and develop services and support for the path network be it maintenance, better information or to actively engage with local communities leading walks and talking about the local environment. Pathmakers is planning to create good accessible information on the Pathmakers website and on social media and creating an online volunteer hub.

Pathmakers, Broads Authority and Norfolk Community Rail Audit – Pathmakers and the Assist Trust (a day service for adults with learning disabilities) made an audit of selected routes around the Community Rail network on the Broads

A number of issues were highlighted by the audits. The biggest impediment to access encountered on each walk has been the overgrown state of the paths which are not being kept clear. In all cases the grass was long obscuring the paths but, in some cases, it was difficult to even see the route of the paths.

It was also concluded that the current route descriptions are too wordy - with not enough useful information, e.g. distance in metres between key points or change in route direction to help users follow the route. Next to each number there should be a photo or image of a key point or feature. And the whole trail could be made more concise into 1 page.

It was assessed that the volunteers would need the physical strength and equipment to clear the paths and maintain them. The signage on the paths was poor and is not maintained and has deteriorated to a point where they cannot be read or are non-existent. One of the audits was abandoned before completion as it involved crossing the A47 at a location where there was no adjacent safe crossing point for walkers with learning difficulties or mobility issues.

To undertake the work volunteers would need close supervision, be provided saws and cutting equipment, safety clothing, and have the necessary qualifications to use the equipment.

## Conclusions

- As they currently exist the paths audited are not attractive to walkers and not suitable for those with some mobility impairment or wheelchair users. Most of the issues identified could be addressed by a well-resourced volunteer network.
- Currently volunteers and walkers were not aware of the existence of these routes and so more publicity is needed to encourage access.
- Marketing and introducing some interactive support tools such as apps so people can decide themselves if a route is suitable and accessible would encourage use.
- Significant and regular maintenance is needed on footpaths for them to be accessible and attractive to walkers.
- Signage also needs maintaining and, in some cases, replacing.
- Alternative signed routes should be considered where the crossing of the A47 is involved. In all cases this should be highlighted on any route guides.
- The use of volunteers alone cannot in first instance reclaim these paths but may be able to maintain them in the future.

# Walking Festival Proposal

Before considering the potential for launching a Broads-themed walking festival, it is first necessary to examine the effectiveness of existing festivals. There are already two annual festivals which take place in or include events within the National Park. These are the Broads Outdoor Festival, which takes place in Spring each year and Walk Norfolk, a month-long walking festival, organised by Pathmakers in October each year.

Several weeks of the year are therefore already covered by Festivals and an analysis of the effectiveness of both these festivals was undertaken first, before considering the need for a further festival

**This includes exploring the concept, identifying logistical and resource requirements, and evaluating how such an event could promote active travel, celebrate the local landscape, and engage both residents and visitors.**

## Analysis of Pathmakers Walking Festival

Pathmakers is a UK-based charity dedicated to improving access to the Norfolk countryside for people of all abilities and backgrounds. Their flagship event, Walk Norfolk, is a month-long walking festival held every October, celebrating Norfolk's rich natural landscapes, heritage, and history. The festival features guided walks across the county, with many events being subsidised or free, thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund<sup>16</sup>.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<p><b>Accessibility Focus</b></p> <p>Emphasises inclusivity, offering walks that are wheelchair-accessible, buggy-friendly, and suitable for families.</p>	<p><b>Weather Dependency</b></p> <p>As an outdoor event, the festival is susceptible to weather, impacting attendance and participation.</p>

---

<sup>16</sup> Pathmakers. (n.d.) *About us*. Available at: <https://pathmakers.org.uk/about-us/#:~:text=Pathmakers%20are%20a%20charity%20dedicated,ways%20%2D%20that%20improve%20countryside%20access> (Accessed: 8 June 2025)

<p><b>Diverse Activities</b></p> <p>Events range from nature walks and historical tours to sensory experiences like biofluorescent night walks.</p>	<p><b>Limited Reach</b></p> <p>Despite growth, the festival may still be limited to certain demographics and regions within Norfolk.</p>
<p><b>Community Engagement</b></p> <p>Collaborations with local councils, landowners, and community groups enhance local involvement and support.</p>	<p><b>Resource Constraints</b></p> <p>As a charity, Pathmakers faces financial and logistical challenges in expanding the festival's scope and impact.</p>
<p><b>Support for Vulnerable Groups</b></p> <p>Initiatives like the MONUMENT project provide dementia-friendly and carer-supported walking events, promoting social inclusion.</p>	

### Analysis of Broads Outdoor Festival

The Broads Outdoor Festival is an annual event celebrating the natural beauty and heritage of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads. It offers a range of outdoor activities, including guided walks, boat trips, and nature-based workshops, aiming to engage both locals and visitors with the Broads National Park<sup>17</sup>.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><b>Variety of Activities</b></p> <p>The festival offers a mix of land and water-based activities, appealing to a broad audience.</p>	<p><b>Seasonal Timing</b></p> <p>The festival's timing may coincide with other local events, leading to potential</p>

<sup>17</sup> Visit East of England. (2023) *Festival to celebrate Broads life comes to Beccles*. Available at: <https://www.visiteastofengland.com/post/festival-to-celebrate-broads-life-comes-to-beccles> (Accessed: 8 June 2025).

	scheduling conflicts and divided attendance.
<p><b>Family-Friendly</b></p> <p>Events are designed to be accessible and enjoyable for all ages, with many free activities.</p>	<p><b>Resource Limitations</b></p> <p>As with many community-based festivals, there may be constraints in funding and volunteer support, affecting the scale and diversity of events.</p>
<p><b>Local Collaboration</b></p> <p>Partnerships with local businesses and organisations enhance the festival's offerings and community involvement.</p>	<p><b>Accessibility Concerns</b></p> <p>While efforts are made, some activities may not be fully accessible to individuals with mobility challenges or other disabilities.</p>

## Strengthens & Weaknesses of both festivals

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><b>Community Engagement</b></p> <p>Both festivals actively involve local communities, fostering a sense of ownership and pride.</p>	<p><b>Weather Dependency</b></p> <p>Both festivals are vulnerable to adverse weather conditions, which can impact attendance and the feasibility of certain activities.</p>
<p><b>Promotion of Outdoor Activities</b></p> <p>They encourage physical activity and connection with nature, contributing to public health and well-being.</p>	<p><b>Limited Accessibility</b></p> <p>Despite efforts, some events may not be fully accessible to all individuals, particularly those with mobility impairments.</p>
<p><b>Educational Opportunities</b></p> <p>Participants gain knowledge about local history, wildlife, and conservation efforts.</p>	<p><b>Resource Constraints</b></p> <p>Funding and volunteer support limitations can affect the scale and diversity of events offered.</p>

### Is there a need for an additional festival?

While both festivals serve important roles in promoting outdoor activities and community engagement, there may be room for an additional festival that focuses on specific underserved groups, such as individuals with disabilities, low-income families, or marginalised communities. This could help bridge gaps in accessibility and ensure that all members of the community have opportunities to participate in outdoor experiences.

### **Could Pathmakers walking festival be enhanced by including more Broads-centered activities?**

Incorporating more Broads-centered activities into the Pathmakers Walking Festival could enrich the experience for participants. This could include guided walks focusing on the unique ecosystems of the Broads, educational sessions on local conservation efforts, or partnerships with Broads-based organisations to offer diverse perspectives and expertise. Such collaborations would not only diversify the festival's offerings but also strengthen the connection between the two regions.

### **Could Broads Outdoor Festivals be enhanced by additional events run in conjunction with Pathmakers aimed at groups who miss out on mainstream events, due to accessibility, affordability, and any other reason?**

Integrating additional events aimed at groups who miss out on mainstream events due to accessibility, affordability, or other reasons could enhance the Broads Outdoor Festival. For instance, offering subsidised or free activities for low-income families, providing transportation for individuals with mobility challenges, or organising culturally inclusive events could broaden participation and foster a more inclusive community.

### **Inclusivity Enhancement Strategies**

Establishing a successful walking festival in the Broads National Park will require a well-coordinated combination of **human, financial, promotional, and logistical resources**, alongside strong collaboration with local communities and businesses. The aim should be to design an inclusive, accessible, and environmentally sustainable festival that enhances the walking offer, encourages active travel, and strengthens the connection between residents, visitors, and the unique landscape of the Broads.

- **Staffing and Volunteer Coordination** - A dedicated **Festival Coordinator** will be essential to oversee planning, stakeholder liaison, volunteer management, route coordination, marketing, and evaluation. This could be a part-time or contracted role, possibly hosted by the Broads Authority or a partner such as Pathmakers CIO. Additionally, a network of **trained volunteer walk leaders** will be required to guide walks, support accessibility needs, and ensure health and safety compliance. Investment in **basic training (e.g., navigation, first aid, disability awareness)** and risk assessment tools will be essential to equip volunteers effectively.

- **Marketing, Promotion, & Community Engagement** - A clear and inclusive promotional strategy will be necessary to reach a diverse audience, including residents, tourists, families, older adults, and underrepresented groups. Resources will be needed for:
  - **Design and printing** of posters, maps, and accessible digital materials.
  - **Social media and PR campaigns**, possibly in partnership with Visit the Broads, local councils, and transport providers.
  - Production of **inclusive imagery and multilingual content** to ensure wide accessibility and cultural relevance.
  - Outreach through **community centers, GP surgeries, schools, and local charities** to target lower-income and socially excluded groups.
  
- **Logistics and Infrastructure** - Walks should start and finish at **transport-accessible locations**, ideally near public transport hubs or with temporary shuttle services. Resources will be needed for:
  - Temporary **signage, waymarking, and route maintenance**.
  - **Public liability insurance** and risk assessment support.
  - **Event equipment** such as gazebos, portable toilets, first aid kits, high-visibility vests, and radios.
  - A small fund for **contingency costs**, such as weather-related changes or last-minute accessibility needs.
  
- **Partnerships** - Local businesses (e.g. cafés, outdoor retailers, tour operators) can be engaged as **sponsors, refreshment providers, or route hosts**. Their contributions — whether financial or in-kind — can help offset costs and build local pride. Partnering with health organisations or charities (e.g., Walking for Health, Active Norfolk) can offer additional funding, volunteers, or access to specific audiences.
  
- **Budget Estimate & Finding Sources** - While the exact cost will depend on the scale of the festival, an initial pilot event could run on a budget of **£10,000–£20,000**, with support sought from:
  - Broads Authority or DEFRA access funds.
  - Active Travel England grants.
  - The National Lottery (e.g., Awards for All).
  - Local authority or LEP regeneration funding.
  - Sponsorships from transport providers and local businesses.

## Themes to Explore

### A. Community Ownership and Stewardship

- Promote local pride by naming trails after local history, heritage, or figures.
- Encourage "Adopt-a-Path" schemes where individuals, families, schools, or community groups take stewardship of a segment of trail.
- Offer local recognition schemes (certificates, signs, annual volunteer awards).

### B. Volunteer Coordination and Management

- Develop a **volunteer strategy** including:
  - Clear roles (e.g., route auditing, waymarking, vegetation management, guiding walks).
  - A centralised database for volunteers.
  - Volunteer agreements and insurance guidance.
  - Tool kits (GPS, maps, route forms).

### C. Long-Term Maintenance Resources

- Establish a **Community Access Fund** to support tools, training, and minor works.
- Develop partnerships with local businesses (sponsorship of paths, tools, branded signage).
- Use **Section 106 agreements** or developer contributions in areas of new development.

## Practical Resources to Be Developed

Resource Type	Description
<b>Volunteer Handbook</b>	Orientation material on path auditing, health & safety, and local ecology.
<b>Digital Map Portal</b>	Interactive, mobile-friendly map showing trails, updates, hazards, and volunteer needs.
<b>Path Maintenance App</b>	For reporting issues, logging inspections, sharing photos and GPS data.

<b>Training Packages</b>	Modular training in walk leading, risk assessment, navigation, and first aid.
<b>Local Walk Toolkits</b>	For parishes to design, promote and maintain circular routes (template leaflets, signage, route ideas).
<b>Walking Festival Toolkit</b>	For event planning, branding, promotion, volunteer recruitment.

### **Encouraging Local Participation**

- School & Youth Engagement: Partner with local schools for “young rangers” or Duke of Edinburgh volunteering hours.
- Intergenerational Walks: Organise events bringing together older residents and families to build community cohesion.
- Local Business Involvement: Incentivise businesses to promote walks (e.g., walking reward cards redeemable in cafés).

### **Partnership and Funding Opportunities**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Potential Use</b>
<b>National Lottery Heritage Fund</b>	Community engagement, trails linked to heritage and nature.
<b>Active Travel England</b>	Support for infrastructure or training linked to walking.
<b>Local councils and LEAs</b>	Economic and wellbeing benefits justify co-investment.
<b>Pathmakers CIO</b>	Existing experience and structure for volunteer support.
<b>Corporate Sponsorships</b>	Local business branding of waymarks or events.

## “Best Practice” Examples

- **South Downs ‘Take the Lead’ campaign:** Promoted responsible walking with dogs and community engagement.
- **Yorkshire Dales Ranger Volunteers:** Structured volunteer schemes including training and uniform, aiding pride and visibility.
- **Cumbria’s Fix the Fells:** Public donations and volunteering used to maintain path networks sustainably.

## Potential Enhancement Outline

1. **Establish a central volunteer coordination system** with a named staff lead or partner organisation (e.g., Pathmakers).
2. **Create community trail resource kits** tailored to each parish to build capacity for local engagement.
3. **Develop a small grants scheme** to support micro-projects for signage, benches, or community walks.
4. **Integrate digital tools** (maps, reporting apps, newsletters) to streamline communication and engagement.
5. **Launch an annual "Broads Walking Champions" programme** to reward contributions and showcase success stories.
6. **Pilot a legacy plan** in one Gateway community (e.g., Coltishall) as a replicable model for others.

## Case Study 1: Mosaic Outdoors (UK National Parks)

### Empowering Diverse and Low-Income Communities to Access National Parks

#### Overview:

Mosaic Outdoors worked with National Parks in the UK (e.g., Lake District, Peak District) to engage low-income and ethnic minority communities who had little access to green spaces.

#### Challenges Identified:

- Travel costs to parks were a key barrier.
- Lack of confidence in accessing "rural" and unfamiliar environments.
- Absence of targeted information and cultural relevance in promotion.

#### Solutions Implemented:

- Trained "Community Champions" within urban communities (e.g., Bradford, London) to promote outdoor visits.
- Funded transport and offered guided walks and experiences for first-time visitors.
- Worked with park authorities to adapt signage and materials to be more inclusive.

#### Outcomes:

- Over 100 champions trained.
- Sustained increase in community-led walks.
- Demonstrated that long-term engagement requires embedded community roles and low-barrier entry points.

### **Case Study 2: Miles Without Stiles – Lake District National Park**

#### **Improving Path Accessibility for Physical and Economic Barriers**

##### Overview:

This initiative created over 40 accessible routes without stiles or steep gradients, designed for wheelchair users, families with pushchairs, and those with limited mobility – including those without access to expensive equipment or transport.

##### Low-Income Relevance:

- Publicised low-cost, car-free routes via bus/train connections.
- Promoted through libraries, community centres, and social services to reach low-income users.
- Worked with affordable accommodation providers and family support charities.

##### Outcomes:

- Increased visits by people with physical disabilities and low-income families.
- Provided a blueprint for inclusive and accessible trail design that supports multiple needs.

### **Case Study 3: Walking for Health – England**

#### **Free, Local Walking Groups for Health and Inclusion**

##### Overview:

This nationwide scheme, funded initially by Natural England and the Ramblers, supports free, volunteer-led walks designed to improve health, especially for those at risk of social isolation or poor physical health.

##### Accessibility for Low-Income Participants:

- Walks are short, free, and local — no transport or equipment needed.
- Groups often based in low-income communities (e.g., urban estates, post-industrial towns).
- Walk leaders receive free training and are often local residents.

##### Outcomes:

- High participation from those aged 50+, low-income, and long-term unemployed.
- Often participants progressed from walking to volunteering, creating sustainable community-led initiatives.

### **Case Study 4: Transit to Trails – Los Angeles, USA**

#### **Removing Transportation Barriers for Underserved Communities**

##### Overview:

Transit to Trails is a program by the National Parks Conservation Association and community partners that provides free transportation from low-income neighbourhoods in LA to nearby natural areas.

##### Accessibility Barriers Addressed:

- Cost and lack of public transport to parks.
- Limited awareness and cultural relevance.
- Safety and social concerns.

##### Interventions:

- Organised free bus trips to trails with interpreters, guides, and healthy food provided.
- Engaged local youth in trail maintenance and advocacy.

Outcomes:

- Participants reported higher connection to nature and willingness to revisit.
- Provided a replicable model for urban-to-nature transport access.

## **Case Study 5: Walking Festival – Peak District (Inclusive Focus)**

### **Reducing Economic Barriers to Participation in Outdoor Events**

Overview:

The Peak District Walking Festival trialled inclusive approaches to reach lower-income families and individuals.

Inclusion Strategies:

- Offered free-to-join walks with public transport-friendly meeting points.
- Partnered with food banks and community support services to promote events.
- Some festivals included free lunch or gear lending for participants without appropriate kit.

Outcomes:

- Higher attendance from low-income participants than previous years.
- Demonstrated that transport costs and gear access were more significant barriers than motivation or interest.

### **Key Takeaways**

1. **Transport is often the biggest barrier** – consider shuttle buses or “walks from the station” approaches in Gateway communities.
2. **Free and localised events are essential** – focus on micro-festivals or weekly group walks based in low-income areas.
3. **Community champions and local leaders** can act as trusted connectors between institutions and underserved communities.
4. **Gear access (e.g., boots, jackets)** matters – consider a loan scheme or donation partnerships with outdoor brands.
5. **Cultural relevance and confidence** – not everyone may see walking in the countryside as “for them.” Inclusive language, imagery, and leadership can help bridge this.

## Specific Local Businesses the Broads Could Utilise for Walking Network Support

Leveraging local businesses can help with sponsorship, volunteer support, in-kind contributions, or promotional partnerships. Here are several **Broads-based businesses and organisations** that could be strategic partners:

### A. Outdoor Gear & Retail

- Norfolk Outdoor Adventures (Wroxham) – Although more water-based, they are passionate about outdoor access and may support land-based initiatives through cross-promotion or staff volunteering.
- Cotswold Outdoor (Norwich) – National brand with local branches that regularly support conservation and walking events through gear sponsorship or community funds.
- Go Outdoors (Norwich) – Offers community partnership schemes, ideal for equipment loan banks or event gear sponsorship.

### B. Transport & Access

- Bure Valley Railway (Aylsham–Wroxham) – Could promote walking trails starting or ending at stations; opportunity to create walking + rail circulars.
- Bittern Line (Greater Anglia) – Railway service between Norwich and Sheringham; has previously supported community walking initiatives.

### C. Cafés, Pubs, and Accommodation

- The River Kitchen (Wroxham) or The Recruiting Sergeant (Coltishall) – Popular with walkers and could serve as trail hubs, offering discounts to festival participants or sponsoring way markers.
- Broads Tours (Wroxham) – Offers boat trips but could partner to offer “walk one way, boat back” experiences; cross-promotional packages.
- Whitlingham Adventure Centre Café – Situated at a key gateway, ideal for signage, volunteer briefings, or walk festival gatherings.

### D. Local Tourism & Experience Providers

- Visit the Broads/Norfolk Broads Direct – May assist with wider promotion and branding of events.

- Pathmakers CIO – Local organisation already working on access; could provide training and coordination for volunteers.

## How Branding Can Enrich the Events?

### 1. Increased Awareness & Recognition

- Consistent branding across marketing materials, signage, and social media makes events instantly recognisable.
- Helps build brand loyalty among attendees and stakeholders year over year.

### 2. Boost in Attendance

- A polished, professional look and feel attracts new demographics (tourists, families, influencers, funders).
- Helps events stand out among a crowded landscape of seasonal outdoor offerings.

### 3. Better Engagement Across Platforms

- Branded visuals and stories can drive social media sharing, user-generated content (e.g., #WalkNorfolk2025).
- Merchandise (badges, shirts, maps) can double as branding tools and souvenirs.

### 4. More Effective Inclusion Campaigns

- A unified message and look helps reach underserved groups by tailoring inclusive messaging (“Nature for Everyone”, multi-language guides, Easy Read versions).
- Helps reinforce commitment to accessibility, affordability, and inclusion.

### 5. Easier Partnerships and Funding

1. Funders, councils, and sponsors are more likely to support events with clear branding and messaging.
2. Co-branding strategies increase collaborative potential with other nonprofits or accessibility advocates.
3. A thoughtful, inclusive branding system can **transform both festivals from seasonal events into recognisable movements.**
  - Drives awareness
  - Encourages broader participation

- Attracts partnerships
- Reinforces the festivals' missions of community, access, and nature

## **Current Partnerships**

### **Pathmakers Walking Festival Partnerships**

The Pathmakers Walking Festival, particularly WalkNorfolk, collaborates with several organisations to deliver its events<sup>18</sup>:

- The Broads Authority: Supports events within the Broads National Park, promoting sustainable exploration.
- Norfolk Rivers Trust: Provides expertise on local waterways and conservation efforts.
- The Brecks Fen Edge & Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme: Offers insights into the Brecks region's unique landscapes.
- Reveal Nature: Assists in organising nature-focused walks and activities.
- Norfolk Archaeological Trust: Contributes to heritage-themed walks and educational sessions.
- Central Norfolk Ramblers: Leads guided walks and promotes walking as a recreational activity.
- Friends of Thetford Forest: Facilitates forest-based walks and conservation initiatives.
- Swaffham Museum: Provides historical context for walks in the Swaffham area.

These partnerships could be leveraged for co-branded initiatives, such as:

- Joint Marketing Campaigns: Collaborate on promotional materials and social media campaigns to increase event visibility.
- Themed Walks: Organise walks focusing on specific themes, like heritage or conservation, with input from relevant partners.
- Community Engagement Initiatives: Develop programs targeting underrepresented groups, ensuring inclusivity.

### **Broads Outdoor Festival Partnerships**

---

<sup>18</sup> All Things Norfolk. (2024) *Walk Norfolk 2024*. Available at: <https://allthingsnorfolk.com/walk-norfolk-2024/> (Accessed: 9 June 2025).

The Broads Outdoor Festival engages with various organisations to enhance its offerings:

- Richardsons Leisure Limited: Serves as the launch sponsor for the Discovery Hubs, promoting sustainable exploration<sup>19</sup>.
- Norfolk Wildlife Trust: Provides expertise on local wildlife and conservation efforts.
- Norfolk Wherry Trust: Offers insights into traditional boatbuilding and maritime heritage
- Museum of the Broads: Contributes to educational programs and exhibits.
- Nancy Oldfield Trust: Facilitates water-based activities for individuals with disabilities.
- Hunter's Yard: Offers traditional sailing experiences
- Broads Society: Promotes the conservation and appreciation of the Broads.
- Whitlingham Adventure: Provides outdoor adventure activities.
- Water Mills and Marshes: Broads Landscape Partnership: Focuses on preserving the Broads' unique landscapes.
- RNLI, HM Coastguard, BroadsBeat, Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service, Norfolk County Council: Collaborate on water safety demonstrations and educational programmes.

Potential co-branded initiatives include:

- Inclusive Water Safety Programs: Develop programs that cater to individuals with disabilities, ensuring accessibility.
- Cultural Heritage Walks: Organise walks that highlight the Broads' rich cultural history, in collaboration with local museums and heritage organisations.
- Sustainable Tourism Campaigns: Promote responsible tourism practices through joint marketing efforts.

By aligning with these existing partnerships, both festivals can create a cohesive and inclusive branding strategy that resonates with a broader audience. Co-branded initiatives can enhance the festivals' visibility, attract diverse participants, and foster a sense of community engagement.

---

<sup>19</sup> Richardsons Leisure Limited. (2024) *Discovery Hubs Sponsor*. Available at: <https://richardsonsholidays.com/discovery-hubs-sponsor/> (Accessed: 11 June 2025).

## Mock-up Marketing Efforts

Current Outreach Materials:



**Colour Scheme:**

- Greens (various shades)
- Blues (various shades)
- Whites

**Typography:**

- Clean and modern font styles
- Clear headings and body text

**Imagery:**

- Nature-inspired images (woodland, windmill, sky)
- People engaging in outdoor activities (walking)

**Layout:**

- Balanced composition
- Use of negative space

**Graphics and Icons:**

- Compass icon (used as a logo element)
- Simple, illustrative graphics (e.g., windmill)

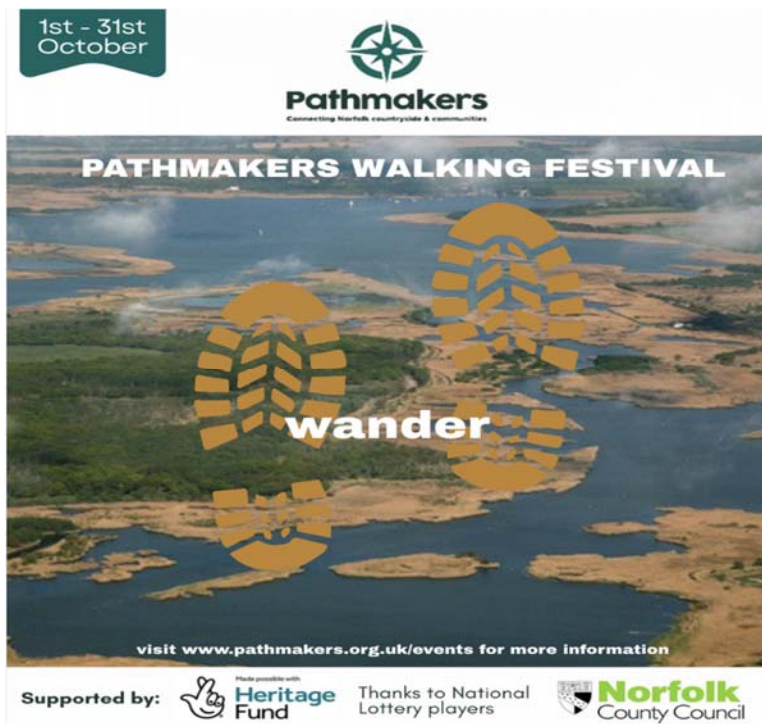
**Branding:**

- Consistent use of the Pathmakers logo
- Clear branding messaging (e.g., "creating healthier, happier communities")

**\*Visual Hierarchy: \***

- Clear headings and subheadings
- Use of size and color to draw attention to important information

**Proposed Outreach Materials:**



Characteristics:

**Visual Theme:** Aerial view of a natural landscape with visible water and grassy patches, emphasising exploration and terrain.

**Typography:** Bold, sans-serif typeface with high contrast in size between “wander” and the other text, conveying clarity and simplicity.

**Overlay Graphics:** Large boot prints reinforce the walking/hiking theme, and the textured topographical pattern enhances the feeling of navigation and movement.

**Color Palette:** Earthy tones, ochres and forest greens, convey a grounded, rustic aesthetic.

**Inclusive Tone:** The term “wander” suggests flexibility and freedom, accessible to people of varying abilities and backgrounds.

**Sponsorship Highlighting:** Clearly positioned logos (Heritage Fund, National Lottery, Norfolk County Council) in a well-defined footer area for professional credibility.



#### Characteristics:

- **Visual Theme:** A scenic photograph of a windmill by a reflective waterway—an iconic and tranquil Broads landscape.
- **Typography:** "GO BEYOND" in bold white lettering stands out overlaid on water; the font is confident yet friendly.
- **Overlay Graphics:** Subtle topographic lines overlaid on the sky create texture without overwhelming the natural beauty of the photograph.
- **Colour Palette:** Cooler, more serene tones—blues, whites, and greys—evoking calm, openness, and breathability.
- **Inclusive Tone:** The phrase "GO BEYOND" suggests openness to everyone, encouraging people to push past limitations, both physically and symbolically.
- **Sponsorship Highlighting:** Partner logos (Broads Authority, RSPB, Access Unlimited) integrated seamlessly into the bottom of the design for balance and visibility.

## Recommendations and Conclusion

- Further increase the evidence base of user needs and expectations to and within the Broads, engaging with key stakeholders within the business, culture, heritage and community sectors.
- Encourage those key stakeholders to collaborate and share resources to support agreed active travel priorities
- Use all gathered evidence to agree priorities for attracting funding to deliver improvements which address gaps in provision.
- Reduce barriers to access and prioritise opportunities for all abilities and infrequent users of the walking and cycling network.
- Establish and support volunteer networks to help empower local people to determine and direct action to help manage, maintain and improve access to the countryside near to where they live and work.
- Audit routes to identify barriers to access, addressing the needs of those without access to a car or who have mobility problems, visual impairment or mental health difficulties.
- Develop targeted promotional programmes and materials to encourage active travel including good online and printed information, wide use of social media, volunteer led walks/rides, sponsored walks and rides, walking for health initiatives, walkers are welcome schemes.
- Identify win, win opportunities which benefit both the visitor economy and local communities to help encourage healthier and more active lifestyles and:
- Support low impact tourism by prioritising opportunities for integrating local off-road routes with public transport to help the Broads become a net zero carbon destination.
- Create opportunities for involving younger people as individuals or through their careers and the education system to become more physically active.
- Work closely with Pathmakers to further develop existing Pathmakers initiatives like the Norfolk Walking Festival and volunteering projects including a volunteer hub, and to jointly identify and collaborate on new projects in the future.

- Actively consider if Local Government review is the opportunity for the Broads Authority to take on the role of Highway Authority for public rights of way in the Broads National Park.

# Appendix

## 1. Broads National Park Active Travel Consultation Survey

## **Broads National Park Active Travel Consultation Survey**

### **Gateways to the Broads National Park: A Vision for the Future**

1. What are the main barriers your organisation feels people face when walking, cycling, or wheeling in your area of the Broads National Park?
2. Are there footpaths or publicly permissible routes within your parish or local area where access is restricted due to the need for improvement or better maintenance?
3. How well do you feel the current active travel network (walking, cycling, wheeling) connects key locations in your part of the Broads National Park? (such as Wroxham/Hoveton, Coltishall, and Whitlingham)
4. What suggestions do you have for improving access, signage, or safety on local footpaths and routes?
5. Would you or your organisation be interested in participating in a volunteer network to help audit and maintain walking routes? If yes, what support would you need?
6. Are there existing local groups or individuals you know who could be involved in volunteering for route auditing or improvements?
7. Would your organisation be interested in being involved with supporting or leading community walks?
8. What types of training or resources would make you or your group feel confident (e.g., first aid, navigation, working with diverse groups)?

Would you be interested in being involved with a Broads-themed walking festival? What activities or features would make such a festival appealing to you or your community?

1. To engage with local communities, Parish Councils, land managers, businesses and other local organisations to identify their needs and suggestions for improvement to the footpath network

Councils Information Table:

Councils	Organisation/Group	Area	Contact Form - No Email Listed	Email	Phone	Alternative Number	Name of Clerk
Hoveton Parish Council	Parish Council	Hoveton/Wroxham		clerk@hoveton-pcc.org.uk	07572349600		Ben Bethell
Wroxham Parish Council	Parish Council	Wroxham		clerk@wroxhamparishcouncil.org	0724187375		Clare Male
Coltishall Parish Council	Parish Council	Coltishall		clerk@coltishall-pc.gov.uk	07466 542156		Phil Chapman
Cantley, Limpenhoe and Southwood Parish Council	Parish Council	Cantley, Limpenhoe and Southwood		clerk@cantleylimpenhoesouthwood-pc.gov.uk	07842716165		Amie Tandy
Fleggburgh Parish Council	Parish Council	Fleggburgh		fleggburghpc@gmail.com	07502735991		Paul Johnson
Horning Parish Council	Parish Council	Horning		clerk@horningparishcouncil.gov.uk	01263733417		Jo Beardshaw
Ludham Parish Council	Parish Council	Ludham		ludhamparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk	01263733417	07973744029	Stephane Shackleton
Reedham Parish Council	Parish Council	Reedham		reedhampc@outlook.com	01493701325		Caroline Purdy
Ranworth and Panworth Parish Council	Parish Council	Ranworth and Panworth		clerk@woodbastwick-pc.gov.uk	01692566056		Sarah Martin
Salhouse Parish Council	Parish Council	Salhouse	<a href="https://thurne-parishcouncil.org.uk/contact/">https://thurne-parishcouncil.org.uk/contact/</a>	clerk.salhousepc@gmail.com	07761480102		Jane Beck
Thurne Parish Council	Parish Council	Thurne		clerk@thpc.uk	07725209037		Michaela McGoun
Outton Broad Parish Council	Parish Council	Outton		Paul.Cunningham@becclestoncouncil.gov.uk	01502580942		Paul Cunningham
Beccles Town Council	Town Council	Beccles		blundeston.flixton.parishclerk@gmail.com	01502712109		Anya Coleman
Blundeston and Flixton Parish Council	Parish Council	Blundeston and Flixton		clerk@caintoncolvilletowncouncil.gov.uk	0798380378		Alison Ayers
Carlton Colville Town Council	Town Council	Carlton		parish.clerk@ashwillares.org.uk	01502521959		S Read
Somerleyton, Ashby and Herringfleet Parish Council	Parish Council	Somerleyton, Ashby and Herringfleet			1502 349506		

Business Information Table:

<b>Broadland Cycle Hire</b>	Cycle Hire	Hoveton/Horning	<a href="https://notfolkbroadscyclehire.co.uk/contact-us/">https://notfolkbroadscyclehire.co.uk/contact-us/</a>	Info@wroxhambarrs.co.uk	07747 483154		
<b>Wroxham Barrs</b>	Retail	Wroxham		burevalleycyclehire@gmail.com	01603783762		
<b>Burevalley Cycle Hire</b>	Cycle Hire	Coltishall		lynnjillbanks@hotmail.com	07824 992513		
<b>The Reedcuter Inn</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Cantley/ Limpenhoe		hello@aclebridge.co.uk	01493701099		
<b>Acle Bridge Inn</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Acle/ Fleggsburgh		info@thevalleyhorning.co.uk	01493750288		
<b>The Galley at Horning</b>	Deli	Horning		ludhamtdc@gmail.com or	01692630088		
<b>The Dog</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Ludham		Info@thedogpub.co.uk	01692630321		
<b>The Reedham Ferry Inn</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Reedham		reedhamferry@aol.com	01493 700 999		
<b>The Millsters</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Ranworth		info@ranworthmillsters.com	01603270900		
<b>The Hungry Oler</b>	Coffee Shop	Salhouse		Thehungryoler1@gmail.com	07789984888		
<b>The Lion Inn</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Thurne		countryardsurefarm@gmail.com	01692671806		
<b>The Courtyard</b>	Hotel	Outton	<a href="https://www.thelionatthurne.com/contact-us">https://www.thelionatthurne.com/contact-us</a>	enquiries@wyaravenhousehotel.co.uk	01502 568724		
<b>The Wrenny House Hotel</b>	Hotel	Beccles		Info@blundestonparishcouncil.gov.uk	01502 712270		
<b>The Plough</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Blundeston		Info@lvythousecountryhotel.co.uk	01263735000		
<b>Crooked Barn</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Carlton		Info@lvythousecountryhotel.co.uk	01502501353		
<b>Dikes Head</b>	Pub/ Restaurant	Somerleyton		dikeshead@somerleyton.co.uk	01502730281		

Local Community Groups:

<b>Broads Local Access Forum</b>	Broads Authority - Statutory Advisory Group	Broads Authority executive area		BLAF@broads-authority.gov.uk	01603 610734		
<b>The Broads Society</b>	Community Group	Norfolk and Suffolk Broads		admin@broads-society.org	01603714172		
<b>Love the Broads</b>	Local Charity	Broads National Park		Info@lovethebroads.org.uk	01603 720276		
<b>Land Managers</b>				bernevmarshes@rsnb.org.uk	01603 715191		
<b>RSPB</b>	Conservation Charity/ Land Manager	Berney Marshes & Breydon Water Nature Reserve		Info@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk	01603 625540		
<b>Norfolk Wildlife Trust</b>	Conservation Charity/ Land Manager	Norfolk		teamwildlife@suffolkwildlifetrust.org	01473 890089		
<b>Suffolk Wildlife Trust</b>	Conservation Charity/ Land Manager	Suffolk					

## 2. Stakeholder Contact Information

### 3. Audit Walks completed by Pathmakers

