

# Interpretation & Information

*A Strategy for the*

# **SUSSEX DOWNS**

*Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*

*Revised 1997*

*The great hills of the south country  
They stand along the sea:  
And it's walking there in the high woods  
That I would wish to be,  
And the men that were boys when I was a boy  
Walking along with me.  
I never get between the pines,  
But I smell the Sussex air;  
Nor I never come on a belt of sand  
But my home is there;  
And along the sky the line of the Downs  
So noble and so bare.*

Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) from *The South Country*

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# Acknowledgments

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Also thanks to the Centre for Environmental Interpretation for their involvement in the Hove Interpretive Plan and, with the South East Museums Service, their input into 'Working Together'; the Countryside Commission for developing the Welcome Initiative and allowing us to reproduce the text in Appendix 3; Dartmoor National Park for their work on interpretive media, reproduced in Appendix 2; John Ververka for his thought provoking lectures and book *Interpretive Master Planning* (1995); East Sussex County Council, including The Landscape Group for graphic design work and Louise Holloway for their contributions.

*This strategy has been developed as a framework to guide interpretation within the AONB, promoting interpretive planning and good practice. Our aim is to give good, clear information and interpretation to those enjoying and learning about the Sussex Downs.*

*To achieve this aim, interpreters within the AONB must work together. To this end, an AONB Interpretive Forum, comprising key agencies working in the area, is being set up to implement the strategy and deliver appropriate action on the ground.*

Julian Gray

Information and Interpretation Officer



Sussex Downs Conservation Board  
Winner of a Special Category Award for Access in the 1997 *Interpret Britain* Awards

## Summary

This strategy provides a framework for provision of interpretation and information within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Apart from editorial and design changes, the structure of the document remains as in earlier drafts. The main updates to the strategy are: more examples of interpretive work within the Sussex Downs and the addition of new action points.

The document is set out in three main sections:

**Section one** defines interpretation and information; asks why we need to interpret and to plan interpretation; and sets out the scope of the strategy.

**Section two** discusses information and interpretation provision within the structure of the five themes of the AONB Management Plan. These are:

- Conserving Natural Beauty
- Towards a Sustainable Economy
- Living in the AONB
- Enjoying the Landscape
- Partnerships in Practice

**Section three** outlines a structure for Local Interpretive Planning and looks at the development of Regional Interpretive Planning across the AONB.

The appendices include:

- The Local Interpretive Plan Methodology - a community-based interpretive planning structure promoted by the Board for use within the AONB.
- The Dartmoor Tourism Initiative Interpretive Media List - a useful guide to a variety of interpretive media.
- The Countryside Commission's Welcome Initiative - a tool for site managers.

## Introduction

The Sussex Downs Conservation Board was set up in 1992 with the following objectives:

- to protect, conserve and enhance the natural beauty and amenity of the Sussex Downs AONB, including its physical, ecological and cultural landscape;
- to promote the quiet informal enjoyment of the Sussex Downs AONB by the general public but only so far as is consistent with the first objective.
- generally to promote sustainable forms of economic and social development, especially working with farmers and landowners to encourage land management which supports the two objectives above.

The aim of this strategy is to facilitate the co-ordination, planning and production of high quality information and interpretation within the Sussex Downs AONB to help fulfil the three guiding objectives outlined above.

A guiding principle in the provision of information and interpretation is 'access for all'. Thought should be given to ensuring physical access to services and means of communication, for disabled users and for other groups who may in one way or another be marginalised from services and information about services. Information and interpretation providers need to be aware of gender, ethnic, age and other socio-economic differences between and within groups of people.

### 1.1 What is interpretation?

*'Interpretation is a communication process, designed to reveal meanings and relationships of our cultural and natural heritage, to the public, through first hand involvement with objects, artifacts, landscapes, or sites.'*

Peart and Woods, 1976

*'...an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects by first hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.'*

Freeman Tilden, 1957

Within this strategy the term 'interpretation' refers to all action and media which helps people in their discovery of the Sussex Downs AONB. The term includes pure interpretation (as defined by Tilden and Peart and Woods) and general information provision, two components which should be considered wherever possible. In combination they can enhance an individual's receptivity to interpret experiences by engendering a sense of safety and well-being. Poorly planned or sited information can confuse people, and possibly negate all interpretive efforts.

## 1.2 Why interpret?

Interpretation means many things to different people. It can provide an education and information service for users of the AONB, potentially enhancing countryside experiences. For the countryside or heritage manager, it can be a cost-effective management technique enabling careful distribution of visitor pressure to minimise environmental impacts. For the local community it can be used as a marketing tool in local tourism initiatives. It can also develop a sense of place, helping people to get more enjoyment from the area in which they live.

In increasing visitor awareness of environmental issues, interpretation can often have more impact than the use of regulatory measures to change behaviour in the countryside. Information can raise awareness which, in turn, can lead to a greater appreciation of the value of the local environment.

## 1.3 Scope of the plan

This interpretive strategy had been produced by the Board for all those involved in the provision of interpretation within the AONB. It is a non-statutory document and links into the AONB Management Plan.

### Who is the strategy aimed at?

The strategy is aimed at all those involved in the provision of interpretation and information within the Sussex Downs AONB. This includes countryside services, heritage sites, educational establishments, local attractions, tourism providers and local amenity societies.

### What is the strategy?

The strategy examines the issues involved in the provision of interpretation and information, and promotes a structured approach to planning interpretation and information provision. In other words, the strategy gives a framework within which guiding principles for the development of logical, coherent and consistent interpretive provision can be set down.

The aim of the strategy is to guide interpretive development within the AONB, encourage the production of structured local interpretive plans and help with the formulation of a regional interpretive strategy.

## Contexts

### 2.1 Conserving natural beauty

The main aim of the Board is to protect, conserve and enhance the landscape of the Sussex Downs AONB. To this end, interpretation that increases understanding, appreciation, and ultimately public support for the need to conserve the Downs will be prioritised.

#### Design

Design has an important role to play in interpretation: shape, siting, scale, materials, typography and colour are important considerations. Well designed interpretive media can aid the communication process, and, in the case of site interpretation, can enhance the landscape.

The Board accepts the importance of design in interpretation and will seek to co-ordinate the production of design guidelines for the AONB. These guidelines will focus on structures put into the landscape, such as interpretation boards, signing and other familiar countryside furniture (see High Weald example opposite).

Issues such as regional diversity and local distinctiveness will be taken into account; it is important to use designs and materials that reflect the special nature of the landscapes within the AONB.

Like landscape, design is organic and must be able to respond to change. Design guidelines should therefore be formulated in such a way as to allow regular updating. However, consistency of style, typeface and so on need to be reflected in these changes.

#### Action

- The Board will devise and disseminate design guidelines for use within the AONB.
- Tools such as the Landscape Assessment Report will be used to promote the AONB.

*'Diversity and distinctiveness in design - the way in which one place is distinguished from another - offer a powerful way of understanding a local environment and guiding the future of the wider countryside. The theme of regional diversity offers the opportunity to achieve this without recourse to pastiche or giving way to relentless standardisation. Local distinctiveness offers a set of questions for all involved in the development process, based on the understanding that our environment does not belong to any single group.'*

Countryside Commission, 1994



C. Godden

#### Example - Too Many Signs

Thirteen signs and an empty notice board produced by four different agencies were found at a small car park along the South Downs Way. The combination of Local Interpretive Planning and a Welcome Audit could be used to rationalise the signing and improve the use of the notice board in this case. Information for the visitor would then be more accessible, and therefore more likely to be used. The site would also be less cluttered. Rationalisation would also reduce production and maintenance costs.

# ABCDEFGG

## Eric Gill and Gill Sans

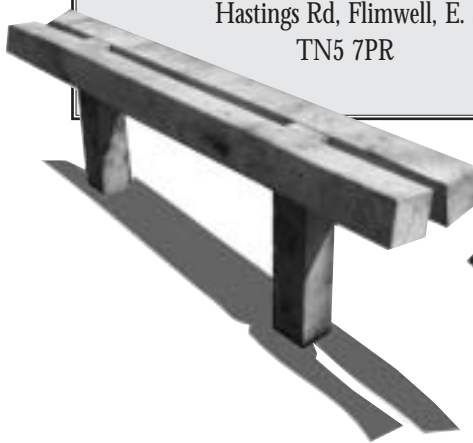
The Board uses the Gill Sans lettering in Rights of Way signs and as headings within Board Publications. The typeface was designed by Eric Gill (1882 to 1940), renowned for his sculpture, lettering, wood engraving and alphabets. He started the Ditchling community in 1907 with Douglas Peplar and other like minded artists. Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts Movement of William Morris, influenced their work.

**M** Eric Gill was responsible for popularising the sans serif and block letter forms so familiar to us today, and used in railway stations on motorways and wherever maximum clarity is required.

## Example - High Weald Design

The High Weald AONB Design Project produces landscape furniture (e.g. fences, benches and bollards) using local materials and techniques. They recognised at the outset that the power of such furniture '... to invade a landscape, for good or evil, is huge.' Rather than producing one-off sculptures, the craftsmen spoke with representatives of local woodland industries to see how their designs could be integrated with and develop those industries.

For further details and brochure, contact:  
High Weald AONB Unit, Corner Farm,  
Hastings Rd, Flimwell, E. Sussex.  
TN5 7PR



## 2.2 Towards a sustainable economy

*'development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'*

Brundtland Commission, 1987

*'...presenting more archaeological sites to the public can make a positive contribution to the long-term preservation of many vulnerable, irreplaceable sites. Any interpretation however must be appropriate to the needs and setting of each individual site or landscape.'*

East Sussex County Council, 1993

## Sustainable Development

A further aim of the Board is to promote sustainable forms of economic and social development. Within this context, the development of any interpretive project should consider method of production in relation to resource use, maximise energy efficiency and minimise potential environmental damage. The environmental costs of production, transport and implementation should be taken into account. For example, local timbers produced sustainably could be used instead of aluminium in the production of a sign because they have lower environmental costs attached to their use. Local sustainable working practices will be identified, encouraged and used.

## Sustainability

With the adoption of Agenda 21 at the Rio Summit in 1992 the idea of sustainability has been popularised. Although the term has been interpreted in numerous ways, a common understanding is that sustainability requires a sea-change in attitudes towards the environment. Interpretation can play a part in changing attitudes and behaviour. Interpreters should assess the impact of projects on behaviour and resource use.

Projects which promote sustainability will be given priority (e.g. projects which encourage recreation near to where people live or which are accessible by public transport). Information on how to enjoy the countryside in sustainable ways should be readily available and accessible to users.

## *Four Circular Walks in* Willingdon and Jevington



### *Discover the South Downs*

#### Action

- The Board will use local materials and services wherever practicable.
- Interpretation will be used as a tool to promote sustainable development of the AONB landscape.
- Access to local countryside, including links with public transport, will be promoted.
- Interpretive methods should have a minimal environmental impact (e.g. use of recycled, non-chlorine bleached paper for publications).

#### Example - Sussex Heritage Coast

The Sussex Heritage Coast Environmental Education Forum was set up in 1995 to forge links between the environmental education providers working within the area. In 1996 a joint leaflet 'Explore and Discover the Sussex Heritage Coast' was produced and distributed to schools and residential centres in East and West Sussex.

## 2.3 Living in the AONB

*'Interpretation is an educational activity and those of us concerned with environmental education are concerned that future generations (and existing ones) understand more about the processes which form our environment and our towns and cities.'*

Barrow G., 1994

The Sussex Downs is a living landscape with some 47,000 residents within the AONB, one and half million people living on or close to the boundary, and ten million people living within one hour of the area.

Good two-way communication between interpreters and the local population will be mutually beneficial, helping to raise awareness, and possibly support for, the organisation's aims, whilst increasing local knowledge of opportunities in the countryside. This will enable the Board, its partners, and local people to protect, conserve and enhance the AONB.

**Explore  
&  
discover**  
the Sussex Heritage Coast

*A Guide to  
Environmental Education  
Opportunities*



## Environmental education

There are many agencies involved in the delivery of environmental education within the AONB. The pooling of resources and expertise in this area should help to avoid duplication and maximise the effectiveness of delivery. This could be achieved with the combined resources of agencies such as the Weald and Downland Museum, Sussex Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Sussex Archaeological Society, The Board and East and West Sussex Education Authorities.

The compilation and production of a Teachers' Resource Pack would benefit providers of environmental education within the AONB. Activities, grouped under broad subject headings, could be promoted. Linked to the National Curriculum, these would be backed up with pre and post-visit exercises. Site specific information, including maps and self guiding trails, would be produced. These resources would highlight those activities available at the site and where best to undertake them. The combination of site specific information and general activities produces a customised product for each site and guarantees a standard for service provision.

Teachers might welcome a training course on how to get the most out of the Resource Packs. Once developed, the information could be accessed through a variety of media from booklets, CD ROM or via the internet.

### Action

- The Board, in co-operation with its partners, will work towards the production of a Teachers Resource Pack.
- Local communities will be involved in the interpretive planning process.
- The Board will seek to raise the profile of the AONB with local communities through a proactive media relations programme, lectures to groups, publications and a presence at relevant events.

## 2.4 Enjoying the landscape

*'Waymarking benefits not only users of rights of way but also farmers and landowners. It increases users' enjoyment of the countryside and prevents unintentional trespass.'*

Countryside Commission, 1992



D. Sweeney

The Board aims to promote quiet informal enjoyment of the AONB. One third of all leisure trips in the UK are to the countryside and there were over thirty million visits to the Downs in 1993. Interpretation and environmental education can be used to help people gain an understanding of visitor management issues. Public support for countryside management is vital.

Site and area managers need to develop an awareness of the needs of those enjoying the Downs. Tools such as Welcome Audits (Appendix 4) and Visitor Surveys are useful in this respect. In order to be aware of and responsive to changing needs, it is important to monitor use of the AONB on a regular basis.

A major recreational resource within the AONB is the rights of way network (around 2,000 kms), which allows people access to the AONB by foot and, along some routes, by horse, cycle and motor vehicle. The network should be easy to use - people must feel confident and safe, knowing where they are going, how far their destination is, how long their journey will take and that their chosen route is passable. Ease of access across the network depends, to a certain extent, on the quality of information available about it. Information provision should include clear waymarking using the national colouring system (i.e. footpath - yellow, bridleway - blue and byway - red) and access to useable maps. This can be supplemented with guided activities and events.

## Visitor Management Zoning

To maximise the impact of interpretive provision, the concept of visitor management zoning could be usefully integrated into interpretive planning. In the United States and New Zealand zoning has been developed into the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). This is a classification system for regional recreation planning. Zones are defined by experience (experience being a combination of recreational activity and environmental setting), from urban through to wilderness. Different activities are then developed within each of the zone typologies. This is a useful way of setting priorities according to context.

Within the context of the Sussex Downs AONB, the ROS zoning system can be adapted to include honeypot, fringe and rural sites. See below:

### **Zone 1 Honeypot**

**Description:** Key sites/areas within the AONB with large numbers of tourist/recreation visits.

**Priorities:** Visitor management and orientation, minimising impact of visits to sensitive areas.

**Media:** Signage, interpretive panels, environmental education, off peak guided activities and events.

### **Zone 2 Fringe**

**Description:** Urban Fringe and countryside with easy access to Zone 1.

**Priorities:** Encouraging access into the wider countryside.

**Media:** Self guided trails, environmental education, guided activities and events.

### **Zone 3 Rural**

**Description:** All non urban fringe/honeypot areas.

**Priorities:** Maintaining a clearly waymarked rights of way network and minimising the impact on the landscape of any further interpretive provision.

**Media:** Rights of way and site signing.

It is important to realise that in the context of the Sussex Downs AONB this zoning methodology is useful only as an interpretive planning tool and is not suggested for other purposes. The zones should be loosely described and used informally within the bounds of interpretive provision rather than rigidly mapped out.

The South Downs Way National Trail and Sussex Heritage Coast lie across all the zones and have their own management and interpretive objectives. These designated areas and their objectives should be taken into account when planning interpretation in the vicinity. A research project has been initiated to define recreational opportunities along the South Downs Way National Trail.

## Action

- The Public Rights of Way Network will be promoted through clear waymarking and provision of supplementary information.
- Information and interpretation will be produced to promote enjoyment of the area.
- Visitor Surveys will be undertaken and the results disseminated to guide management decisions. The Forum will be used to co-ordinate surveys and data between agencies
- The Board will use a variety of training activities to promote the Countryside Commission's Visitor Welcome Initiative.
- The South Downs Way ROS methodology will be extended to cover the whole AONB.

## Example - Gateway Signing

Good signing and visitor orientation can make a visit to the countryside enjoyable and can help site/area management. Signing must take into account visitor use/flows and be easy to follow. Working with Michael Renton of the Guild of Sussex Craftsmen, the Board has produced Signing Design Guidelines. These encapsulate traditional signs and countryside furniture designs.

Made from local oak, with routed lettering, the signs are easy to maintain. Their rounded shape reflects the Downs landscape. The Board has undertaken a programme of site signing and will promote the use of these design guidelines for countryside sites within the AONB.

Entrance sign (opposite) shows the site name and designation and promotes the AONB. Further signing within the site shows facilities, site owner and manager.



## 2.5 Partnership in practice

As discussed above, the main objectives of this interpretive strategy are to promote structured interpretive planning and co-ordinated regional interpretation within the Sussex Downs AONB, leading to the protection and enhancement of the landscape. To achieve this the Board will consult with all those undertaking interpretation within the AONB (e.g. museums, trusts and countryside services etc.) reaching a consensus on the way forward.

Regional interpretation can only work if a partnership approach is taken. The main advantages of regional interpretation are: area-wide interpretive themes can be taken up; duplication can be avoided; collaboration rather than competition can be advocated; and the expertise and resources within the AONB can be pooled for special projects. The outcome will be resource and other efficiencies. A perceived disadvantage of the partnership approach is the potential for over-standardisation. However, reference to design guidelines and sensitivity to the site of interpretation will prevent this.

Working in partnership with landowners can also reduce conflict over access and open up possibilities for increased information provision, for example when promoting a particular route such as a cycling route along a bridleway.

Partnerships should also be sought with local services such as pubs, sub-post offices and public transport operations. The advantages of such partnerships are:

- Access to a captive market of people using these services.
- The use of structures already within the AONB (e.g. bus shelters) for interpretive provision.
- Having a 'one stop shop' for rural information, adding value to the service and enhancing users' access to information.
- Helping the rural economy by promoting the use of local services.

### Example - Rights of Way Signing

The Board is currently undertaking a number of pilot projects to enhance waymarking in areas of high recreational use (e.g. around Midhurst and the South Downs Way at Houghton). From the roadside and at major path junctions public rights of way are marked with oak fingerposts. At other locations intermediate posts are used and where possible directional signage is incorporated into existing countryside furniture.

All waymarking uses the Countryside Commission's nationally recognised colouring system:

Yellow for a public footpath;  
Blue for a public bridleway; and  
Red for a byway.

Additional information, such as the destination of the route and the distance to the destination is included on some of the posts. Special routes, e.g. South Downs Way or a circular walk, will have printed arrows set into the fingers.



### Action

- The Board will work with its partners to promote good interpretive practice.

# 3 Where to go from here ?

## 3.1 How to do it - local interpretive planning

*'We view the interpretive plan and interpretation in general as a 'journey' not a destination. A well developed interpretive plan is the map for our Journey.* John Ververka, 1992

Structured interpretive planning is a vital component of interpretation. Without it, it is difficult to integrate interpretation with management policies. If clear objectives are not set, evaluation is impossible. Moreover, if interpretation and information activities are not co-ordinated, they can cancel each other out.

The Local Interpretive Planning Model advocated in this strategy is based on the Peart/Woods (1976) planning model, modified by Ververka (1995) and adapted for use within the context of the Sussex Downs. The plans can either cover a site (e.g. Burton Mill Pond) or a block of land (e.g. Seven Sisters Country Park and Seaford Head Local Nature Reserve). A clear structured methodology is attached as Appendix 1.

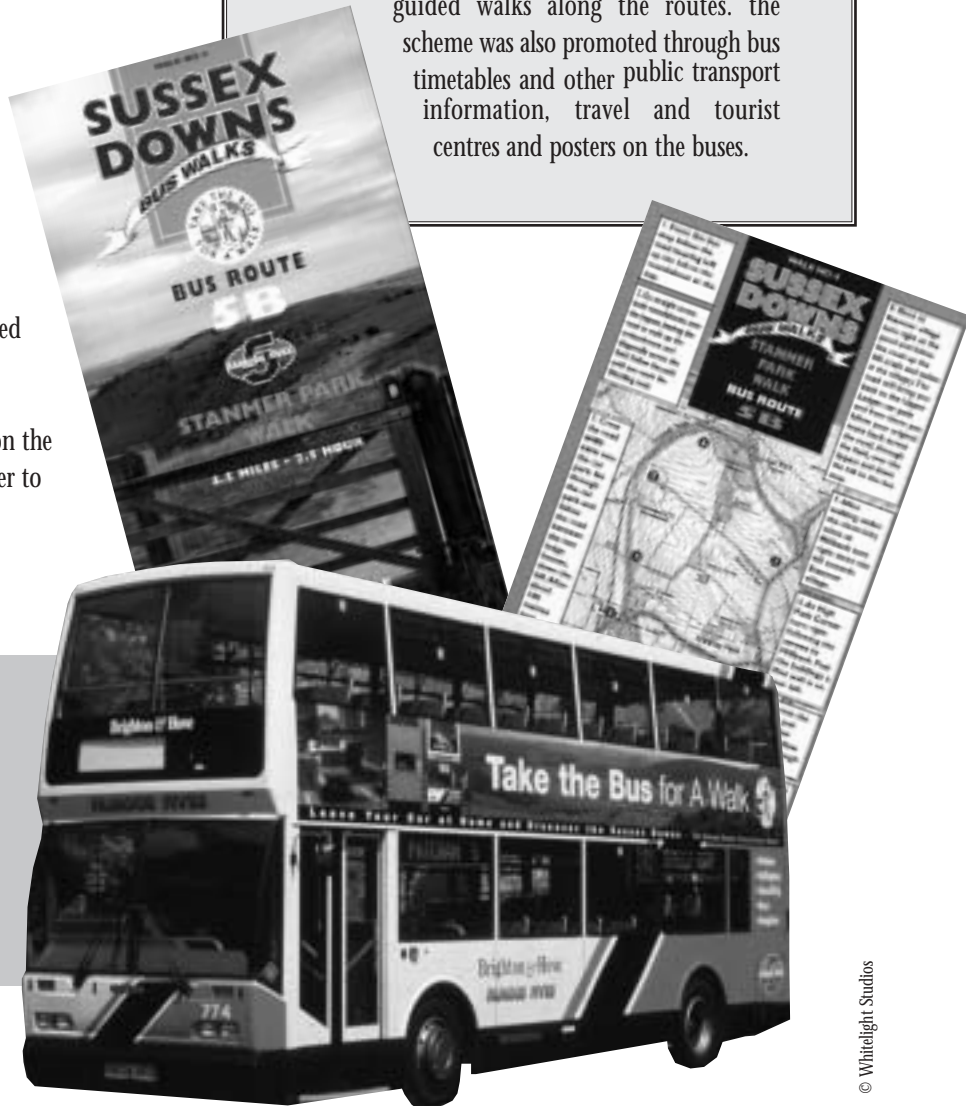
Since recreation has potential to impacting on the landscape, local interpretive plans should refer to and/or be developed within the context of conservation management plans.

### Action

- The Board will lead a number of training events within the AONB to promote good practice in interpretive planning.
- Use of the Local Interpretive Planning Model will be promoted.

### Example - "Take the Bus for a walk"

The 'Take the Bus for a walk' campaign was developed with Brighton and Hove Buses and aimed to increase access to the Downs from the Urban Fringe using public transport. This not only gave access to the countryside to people without cars, but also encouraged visitors to use public transport instead of the car. A series of six self-guided trails were developed with the accompanying route cards. All routes start, and linear routes finish, at bus stops along the urban fringe. The route cards were made available from the buses. Board rangers led a series of guided walks along the routes. The scheme was also promoted through bus timetables and other public transport information, travel and tourist centres and posters on the buses.



© WhiteLight Studios



## 3.2 Working together - regional planning

### Working Together

This is a one day interpretive planning workshop for countryside and museum managers within the Sussex Downs AONB. It is a collaborative venture between the the Board, CEI and the South East Museum Service at the Weald and Downland Museum, Singleton.

The aim of the day is to link countryside and museum services for collaborative ventures, and to encourage the adoption of the principle of regional interpretive planning.

The production and implementation of interpretive plans across the AONB will be a major achievement. Regional interpretive planning goes one stage further.

The regional interpretive strategy ensures that the provision of information and interpretation are planned strategically across the AONB. This will enable:

- AONB themes to be developed.
- Different agencies or sites to interpret different parts of a regional theme.
- Pooling of resources and experience across sites.
- Duplication to be avoided.
- Joint marketing between sites and agencies.
- Strategic planning, over several years, of an interpretive programme.
- Setting of interpretive objectives, and subsequent evaluation of effectiveness of delivery.

If a number of agencies use the Local Interpretive Planning Model (Appendix 2) across the AONB, this will allow comparisons to be made between plans. This has the added benefit of giving a mechanism for collaborative ventures.

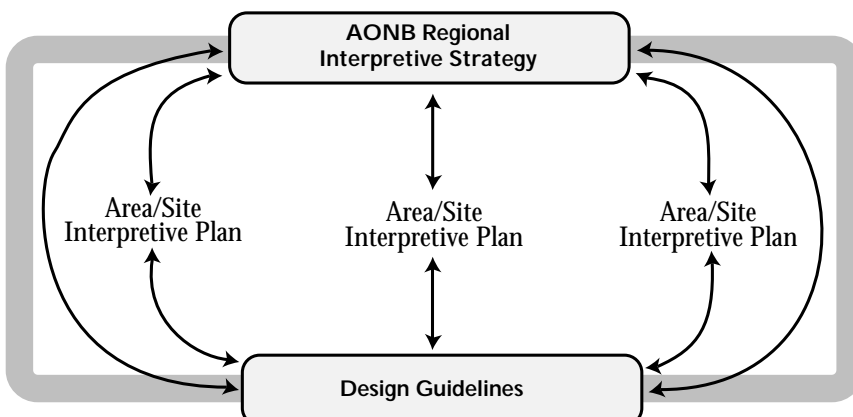
It can also be used as a tool for resource allocation across the area on a sensible priority rather than an *ad hoc* basis. Funding bodies such as the Countryside Commission could use the plans to assist their selection of projects suitable for grant-aid.



G. Coddlen

### Action

- The Board advocates the use of regional interpretive planning across the AONB.
- The Board will promote the idea of the AONB as a special landscape worth protecting as a major theme running throughout interpretation within the area.
- The Board will promote the formation of an AONB Interpretive Forum to implement and develop this strategy.



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Interpretation: An explanation given; The way in which a thing ought to be explained; the proper explanation. The act of translating

**appendices**

# Local plan methodology

*'Interpretive Planning is the complete process of answering the questions what, where, when and how, in relation to interpretive provisions. It begins with a series of surveys and ends with a prospectus of interpretive provisions.'*

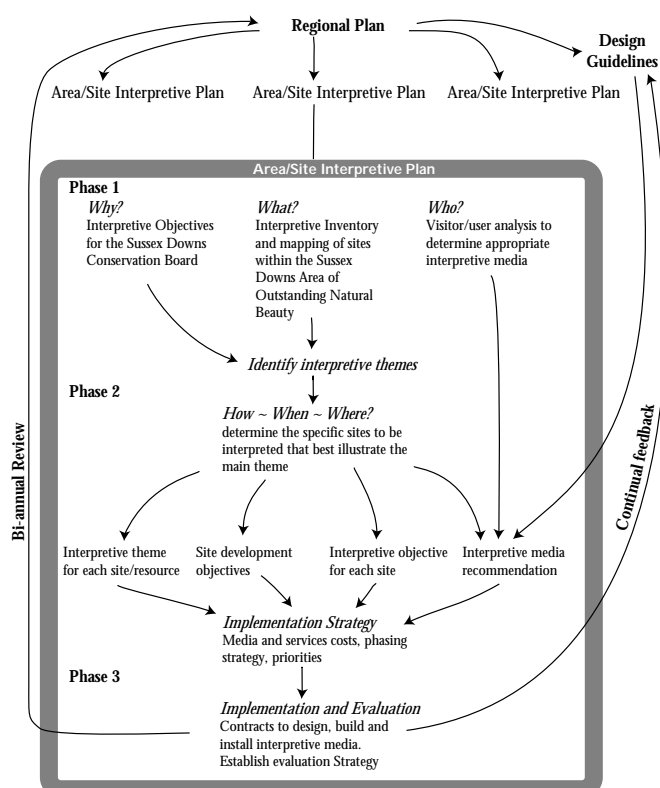
Don Aldridge, 1975

The methodology for producing an interpretive plan will provide a structure for future plans carried out by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board and other organisations involved in interpreting the Sussex Downs AONB.

## Why produce an interpretive plan?

In the past interpretation has tended to occur on an *ad hoc* basis. To date panels and leaflets have been the preferred medium. However, there are many other ways in which information can be disseminated (e.g. via radio, guided walks, school visits, events etc.). See Appendix ii.

Interpretive planning offers a structured and tiered framework in which to work (e.g. an overall interpretive strategy, regional plan, local plans, site plans, and interpretive project plans).



Local area interpretive plans aim to involve communities in decisions about what is to be interpreted. Participation can help foster a sense of ownership and appreciation of a site/area.

This strategy provides a guide to the planning process and examples of good interpretive practice. The aim is that other organisations and individuals across the AONB will be encouraged to adopt the approach.

The production of a plan can help to raise the profile of interpretation as a tool for communicating a specific message. It can also provide support for project funding applications.

## Methodology for a local plan

### Outline programme

#### 1 Preparation

The key players need to be identified and invited to attend a meeting at least two months in advance. The following information needs to be sent out with the invitation: a basic introduction to the project, a map of the area/site with visitor facilities marked on a sheet and a request for ideas from those who cannot attend the workshop session. Participants should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the area. On the day participants should bring with them: any relevant visitor survey data, site/management objectives and ideas for themes and projects.

#### 2 Whole day workshop meeting with facilitator

##### a.m. Introduction

Introduction to the interpretive planning process. How it fits in with the interpretive strategy. General introduction to the principles and processes of interpretation so that all participants have the same basic understanding. The following criteria need to be covered.

##### Why a plan?

Group work to identify group key aims and objectives, issues and constraints - a prepared list of possible aims and objectives helps to stimulate discussion.

Who are we interpreting for? - Who are our audience?

Identification of the current and potential audience using visitor survey information where possible.

##### Interpretive Audit

Site inventory - inventory sheets need to be filled in to indicate what the possible sites and topics to be interpreted are.

What resources are available in terms of finance and staffing? Current visitor provision - a review of existing facilities for visitors to the site/area.  
p.m. Review of existing interpreting provision.  
Site visit to review existing interpretation - good and poor practice. Map showing existing interpretation.

### **3. Follow up meeting with facilitator**

(this should take place within a month of the first meeting)  
a.m. Briefly review information gathered at the previous meeting. Themes and stories need to be developed. What stories are there to be told? Interpretive objectives need to be set. What do you want people to remember from their visit? A list of possible projects is drawn up.  
p.m. (or evening) Half day set aside for meetings with those interested, but unable to attend workshops.

### **4. Draft plan written, projects costed and prioritised.**

### **5. Presentation of the draft plan and consultation.**

### **6. Final plan agreed.**

### **7. Working party set up to implement projects.**

### **8. Lead agencies to take projects forward identified.**

### **9. Evaluation of plan and individual interpretive projects.**

## Programme details

### **Identification of key players**

The key players involved in the management of a site or area need to be identified and notified about the production of a plan. In the case of a site this may involve site staff and the interpretive team. Larger area plans will involve working with partner organisations such as the National Trust or Sussex Wildlife Trust and community groups.

Community involvement throughout the whole planning process should be promoted. Initial contact with the local community is vital for gaining valuable local information. All participants should be briefed about the project and invited to attend a workshop, bringing with them any information which may be helpful to the development of the plan (e.g. visitor numbers, management issues, ideas for themes and projects).

### **Workshop**

An initial workshop session should brief participants and set the plan in the context of the Interpretive Strategy for the Sussex Downs AONB. A general introduction to the principles of interpretation would be useful at this stage. The role of the Sussex Downs Conservation Board as a facilitator for interpretive planning within the AONB needs to be explained.

The format of the workshop should consist of a combination of group discussions and activities. It is useful to record all ideas produced on a flip chart. A large scale map showing existing visitor and interpretive provision would be a valuable visual aid.

### **Why is an interpretive plan needed?**

The first question to be asked is 'Why is a plan needed for the specific site or area being discussed?' Any aims set for site/area interpretation need to fit into the overall objectives of the Interpretive Strategy. Site management objectives must be clearly stated to ensure that they do not conflict with any interpretive objectives. For example, it would be inappropriate to provide extra interpretive facilities if a site could not withstand the pressures of increased visitor use. Specific interpretive objectives can be set at a later stage once information about visitors and resources had been collated.

### **Who are we interpreting for?**

*'Visitors to any interpretive facility are not part of a monolithic group but a number of smaller, more homogeneous groups with specific characteristics, desires and behaviour.'*

Burde and Howatt, 1993

It is essential to find out information about site/area visitors. Why do people visit the site? How often do they visit the site? What do they want when they get there? This information will help to determine the most appropriate media for site interpretation. Without knowing what visitors want from a site there is a danger that personal views of perceived visitor needs will dominate. In addition to finding out who current visitors are, it is important to identify potential visitors. Which groups do not visit the site or area?

Visitor surveys provide the best means of finding out who the audiences are. In the past many sites have relied on spot checks or estimates based on staff knowledge of day to day use.

Such methods often prove to be inaccurate when checked against visitor surveys or monitoring exercises.

Relevant data relating to visitors to a site or area should be brought along to the workshop.

### **An interpretive audit**

An audit is a useful way of identifying resources available in terms of what is there to be interpreted, staffing, finance, current visitor provision and current interpretive provision. Mapping our current visitor provision and interpretive provision will enable workshop participants to familiarise themselves with the resources.

### **What is there to be interpreted?**

Information regarding site location, description, accessibility and interpretive significance is recorded on inventory sheets (see opposite and at the end of this Appendix). By involving people from different organisations specialist and local knowledge can be utilised.

### **Staffing and finance**

Resources available in terms of staff and finance need to be identified. The number of core staff available to work on projects is often limited. However, local community groups, schools and colleges could be approached. The timescale for the projects also needs to be clarified.

*The Board has developed a computer database to record and analyse information collected for the interpretive inventory. This not only acts as a site-specific interpretive tool, but also allows cross-referencing of data between a number of sites. A sample screen is shown overleaf and further examples of inventory sheets can be found at the end of this Appendix.*

### **Current visitor provision**

It is vital to know what facilities exist for current visitors (e.g. bus stops, train stations, cafes, public houses and local shops). As these facilities are already used by the public, they are potentially useful sites for provision of interpretation. Basic visitor orientation (e.g. sign posting to or within a site) is required before more specialist interpretation can be considered. It would be inappropriate to invest in interpretation if people do not know how to get to or around a site.

Welcome Audits (see Appendix 4) are a useful tool for finding out what visitors think of a site. They allow a review of ease of use and availability of facilities,

This can help managers improve the quality of the visitor experience. The actual views of visitors are often quite different from staff perceptions of these views.

### **Current interpretive provision**

The afternoon workshop sessions look at current interpretive provision in the field. Site visits provide a refreshing change of setting for discussion. Existing provision will provide examples of both good and bad practice. The advantages and disadvantages of using different media can be explained by looking at working examples of projects. As well as pursuing new projects, it is important to review and revamp where necessary existing provision (e.g. an old nature trail could be improved to fit more readily with current interpretive objectives).

This concludes the first workshop session. A follow up workshop should be held within a month of the initial workshop. It begins with a review of information gathered from the previous workshop. The next stage involves determining themes and interpretive objectives for the plan and listing possible projects. Story development sheets follow on from the site inventory and can be used to record objectives and themes (see examples at end of Appendix).

### **Themes and stories**

By basing all interpretation on a common theme a message is much more likely to become embedded in the mind of a visitor; people are more likely to remember a theme than a string of isolated facts. For the interpreter the setting of a theme guides what information is given. People do not need to know all the facts, but should be provoked to find out more. Themes should be interestingly worded and to the point. The theme is the message that you wish your audience to go away with once they have visited the site. Themes can be used to link interpretive projects over an area.

A topic is simply the subject matter of any presentation, whereas a theme is the specific message interpreters wish to communicate about the topic, e.g.

Topic - *litter*

Theme - *litter in the countryside is a danger to wildlife*

### Writing themes

1. Select a general topic (linked to AONB theme)
2. State specifically what it is that you want people to know about the topic
3. Express the theme - I want my audience to understand that . . .

### Interpretive objectives

What do you want interpretation to achieve in a particular site or area? Setting clear objectives from the outset enables interpretation to be more focused. Regular referral back to objectives enables interpreters to follow a theme. If information does not fit with the interpretive objectives of the plan it should not be included. Furthermore, setting objectives makes it easier to evaluate a project at a later stage.

Interpretation is an 'objective based' communication process. There are three kinds of objectives that interpretation can focus on: learning, behavioural and emotional objectives.

<b>Learning</b>	what you want your visitors to learn or remember
<b>Behavioural</b>	what you want your visitors to do
<b>Emotional</b>	what you want your visitors to 'feel'

Some projects incorporate all three types of interpretive objectives. However, this is not essential. It is quite feasible for a project to have just one objective, for instance an objective that relates directly to management objectives (e.g. people will take their litter home with them after visiting a site). All objectives need to be simple, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-tabled.

### What do we want?

A wish list of possible projects can be drawn up. Brainstorming can produce a whole range of ideas and at this stage all should be recorded. Once the overall message that needs to be communicated has been determined and the audience identified, appropriate media for the project should be chosen. What works on one site will not necessarily do so on another. The financial and staffing resources available will also play a role in determining the type of project implemented.

An afternoon can be set aside to allow people who were unable to attend the workshop sessions to voice their opinions.

### Draft plan

A draft plan will summarise the findings of the workshop and meetings, list the possible projects and provide costings.

### Consultation

The draft plan should then be presented to participants to allow comments before the final plan is produced. Participants need to agree on how the plan is to be taken forward.

### Implementation

A working group should be set up to co-ordinate prioritisation and selection, implementation and evaluation of projects. Lead agencies can then be identified to take responsibility for each project. Consideration needs to be paid to the design of media and the siting of any additional structures put to the countryside.

### Evaluation

Having set objectives and implemented a project it is important to find out whether those objectives are being accomplished. There are a variety of methods which can be used to evaluate projects. These include questionnaires, suggested boxes, direct feedback from audiences after an event and general audience observation (e.g. how long people spend looking at a display). Often the type of media used will govern what type of evaluation is undertaken.

### Planning of individual interpretive projects

Each interpretive project needs to be planned, adhering to the same framework used for the local interpretive plan. Objectives and themes should also be set for individual interpretive projects. Themes must fit with those of the local plan and the AONB Interpretive Strategy. Interpretive planning can be taken one stage further by setting objectives for specific parts of a project. For instance, as well as setting a theme for a self guided trail, each stop along the trail should have its own objective. This allows the theme to be reiterated. It also provides a means of assessing whether different stopping points are meeting their objectives.

## Interpretive Site Inventory

Site Index N<sup>o</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_ Site Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Page: \_\_\_\_\_ of: \_\_\_\_\_

Site Location:

Site Description:

Accessibility:

Interpretive Significance:

Attach photograph/ illustration here

## Story Development - Form A

Site Index N<sup>o</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_ Site Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Page: \_\_\_\_\_ of: \_\_\_\_\_

Interpretive Theme:

Site Objectives:

Interpretive Programme Objectives:

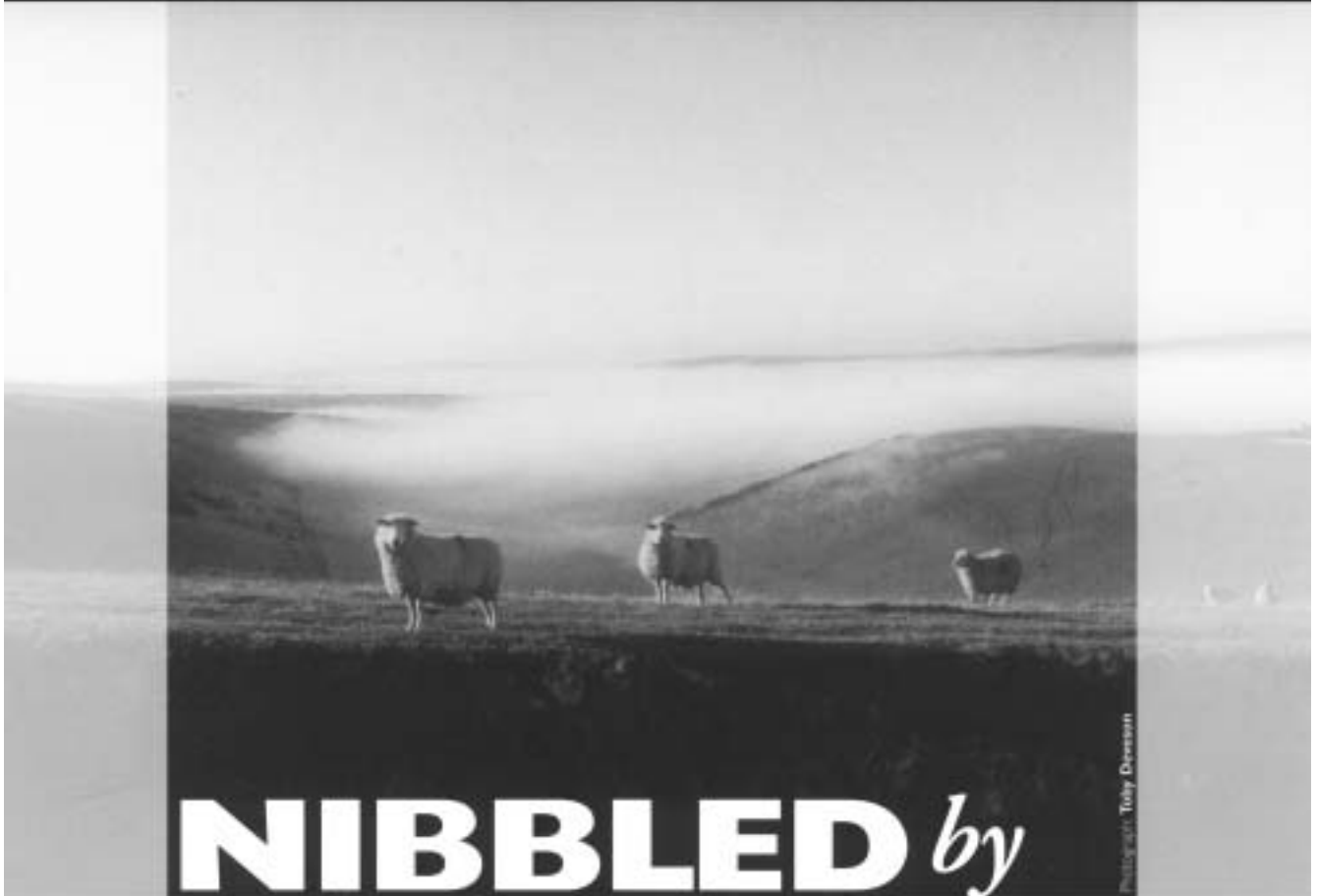
Interpretive Concepts:

## Story Development - Form B

Site Index N<sup>o</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_ Site Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Page: \_\_\_\_\_ of: \_\_\_\_\_

Interpretive Mode(s):

# THE SOUTH DOWNS



Photograph: Tolly Deveson

## NIBBLED *by* GENERATIONS

Traditional sheep and cattle grazing has created the downland turf, home to rare orchids, butterflies and other wildlife. Without grazing, this chalk grassland becomes overgrown with scrub, or ploughed up for arable crops. There is now less than five percent of chalk grassland across the South Downs.

*"By buying locally produced beef and lamb you are supporting the farmers who run cattle and sheep on the Downs. Without sales of such meat products the grazed landscape of the Sussex Downs will be at risk in the future."*

**S.E. Region National Farmers Union**



## Example -Iping Common Heathland Trail

### Trail theme

*Heathland is a rare, fragile and important habitat.*

Two of the stopping points along the trail and their objectives are illustrated below. Each objective reinforces the trail theme.



### Stopping point theme:

*Heathland needs different management for different species.*

Heather is mown at different heights to suit individual heathland species. The Silver-studded Blue Butterfly favours relatively young heather of between one and seven years old. The exposed soil next to the heather provides a home for ants which 'look after' the butterfly in its caterpillar stage.

### Stopping point theme:

*Without heathland some species would disappear altogether.*

Without management the heathland will gradually be invaded by Scots Pine, Silver Birch and Bracken. This will result in the loss of species such as the Dartford Warbler who live only on heathlands.



## Example - Hove interpretive plan

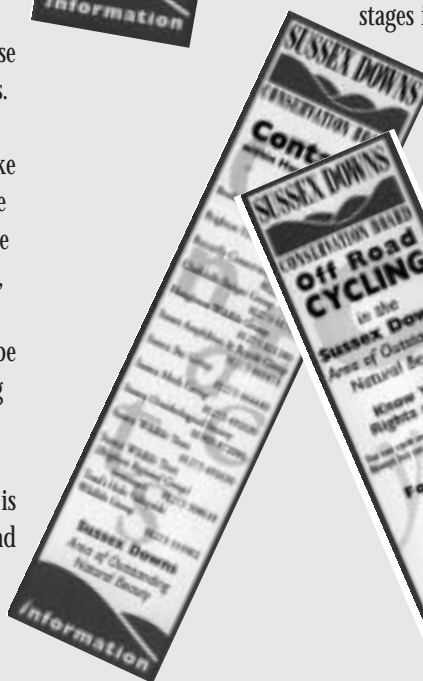
In March 1995 the CEI was contracted by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board and Hove Borough Council to produce an interpretive plan for Hove Downland. All local organisations and community groups involved in interpretation in Hove were invited to attend a day long workshop which asked the key questions: What do we want interpretation to achieve? What is there to be interpreted? Who are we interpreting for? What interpretation is currently provided? The workshop provided a forum in which the key issues, ideas and initiatives in the area were discussed. From this information objectives and themes for interpretation were produced which formed the basis of a draft interpretive plan. This was presented to the participants and comments made before the final report was produced. A working party will take the plan forward, prioritising projects, securing funding and implementing action. Once in place each project will be evaluated to ensure that objectives are being met.

### Lessons learnt from the Hove plan

- Thoroughly research the participant list to ensure that there is a good representation of voluntary and public organisations, local community groups and individuals.
- Provide the brief at least two months before the workshop is due to take place. Make sure that the introductory letter is jargon free, otherwise it may be off-putting to potential participants.
- Allow sufficient time for the workshop to take place. The Hove Plan workshop consisted of one day long session and a half day presentation. The general feedback was that this was too long, especially for those who were new to interpretation. Two shorter sessions would be more effective and also give people thinking time in between workshops.
- The plan is part of a continuous process. It is important to keep the momentum going, and to prioritise, plan and implement projects soon after the workshops.



J. Gray



- The structure of the plan must be flexible enough to accommodate all types of sites, areas and participants.
- Include site visits in one of the workshops. In an area plan a participant may be familiar with a particular site but not aware of how that site fits into the surrounding area.
- Ensure that community involvement persists throughout the planning process. After participation in the initial stages it would be wrong to impose a project without the input of the community.

# Interpretive Media and Services

This Appendix is based on the Dartmoor Area Tourism Development Action Programme. For further details contact Dartmoor National Park Authority, Parke, Haytor Road, Bovey Tracey, Devon TQ13 9JQ.

Interpretation by a guide/ expert/ performing person by means of talking demonstrating, illustrating, explaining and answering questions.

- Guided Walks (outdoors)**                      Include earth walks and animated trails
- Guided Walks (indoors) Ranger / Warden Services**                      Can offer first-hand explanations, information and advice either at a fixed base (e.g. a visitor centre) or over a wide area.
- Courier Services**                      Include mini-bus/coach tour operatives.
- Visitor Centre staff services**
- Living history and**                      Including costumed guides performances.
- Task forces**                      E.g. conservation volunteers.
- On and off site demonstrations**
- Roadshows**                      Taking the site theme/ organisation elsewhere.

- Activity events**                      Local WATCH groups, play schemes, trying your hand (e.g. crafts, murals)
- Open days**                      Specified days on which visitors are welcome to a place not normally open to the public.
- Creative interpretive**                      Using artists, musicians, poets and events actors.
- Role play**                      Exercises for participation, especially for school children.
- Workshops/artists in residence**
- Courses, lectures and public meetings**

A. Tait ESCC





### Interactive Physical Provision

**Self-guided trails  
(outdoors)**

**Self-guided tours  
(indoors)**

**Observation hides** Carefully sited structures, well screened from view, which allow small groups of visitors to observe and photograph, at close range, wildlife in its natural habitat.

**Overlooks** Outdoor viewpoints or viewing platforms with some interpretive provision to explain an extensive view.

**Outlook windows** Windows where some interpretation is provided to explain the view as seen by the visitor looking out from within a building.

**Viewfinders**

Devices used to facilitate the identification of distant objects or features forming part of a view e.g. photograph or annotated sketch of the view.

**Orientation tables**

Panels, usually mounted near to the horizontal position, to help the identification of features in the view.

**Camera obscura,  
binoculars,**

Optical devices for visitor use

**Telescopes, magnifying  
Glasses and microscopes**

To allow good close-up views.

**On-site identification**

Descriptive labels (with or without illustrations), key charts etc.

**On and off-site identification and reference material**

**On and off-site displays** E.g. natural objects such as geological specimens, tree bark, and human artifacts.

**Sound guides** Including listening posts and portable cassettes. These may be carried out by the visitor on foot, both indoors or outdoors, used with a vehicle or fixed permanently to the site.

**Electrical and mechanical** Often incorporated into displays, quizzes, particularly effective in nature discovery rooms.

**Push button devices** Devices and exhibits where sound, light or movement is produced by the visitor pressing a button or operating a switch.

**Remote information** A system whereby a visitor can service obtain a recorded message by operating a telephone or similar device.

**Computerised systems** E.g. Data vision, MAP, PRESTEL, ORACLE information retrieval etc.

**Publications** Information cards, leaflets, booklets, books, maps etc.  
*(most of the above media and services can have various levels of interaction)*

Displays

**On and off-site displays of living organisms** E.g. animals in enclosures, nesting boxes with glass backs, aquariums, herbariums etc.

**On and off-site displays of working machinery**

**Indoor exhibition panels**

**Outdoor panels**

**Wayside exhibits** Self-contained displays/exhibits along or near a route used by visitors.

**Mobile exhibitions**

**Working and non-working** Of sites, machinery and other objects; tourist and non-tourist types

**Mounted transparencies** Film transparencies fixed to apertures in an opaque surface and illuminated from the rear.

**Indoor exhibits/artifacts Small and life-size** 3-D exhibits taking the form of a dioramas model, often to a scale which diminishes towards the background to enhance the effect of perspective; usually designed for viewing from one direction.

**Historical documents** Originals or facsimiles.

**Maps**

## Others

**Son et lumiere** A multi-media application of presentation lighting and sound effects, movement, and commentary to interpret the significance of a site or to recreate an historic event.

**Audio-visual** Including film strips, lantern presentation slides, cine films, videotape, slide dissolve sequences and projection onto maps and models.

**Sound effects** Representation of sound to add realism to an exhibit or display.

**Illuminated panels** Darkened surfaces, illuminated in sequence, containing written texts or captions or illustrative material, e.g. electric maps

**Optical, mirror and light effects** Used to add realism or effect to a display. E.g. ghost applications, dissolving images, mirrors in dioramas to convey a sense of space (Infra-red light can be used to observe a live outdoor situation in darkness).

## Public relations and working with the media

**Promotions material** E.g. posters, postcards, logos stickers, notices, banners, events programmes.

**Merchandise** E.g. mugs, pens, tee-shirts, magazines.

**Press releases**

**News-sheets, newspapers and journals**

**TV and radio**

**Travelling exhibitions**

**Talks/lectures and general**

**Word of mouth**





# Visitor Welcome Initiative

This appendix is taken from the Countryside Commissions' Visitor Welcome Initiative pack (CCP 476). The pack is offered free to countryside recreation site managers, local authorities, tourism authorities and managers of any other visitor attractions which fall within the initiative's scope.

The pack is otherwise available at a price of £4.00 from Countryside Commission Postal Sales,  
PO Box 124,  
Walgrave,  
Northampton NN6 9TL

Users are at liberty to adapt the Visitor Welcome Initiative's checklists etc. to suit their own needs. The Countryside Commission owns the copyright of the initiative and any references made to it in external publications should acknowledge the Commission as being the source.

## Preface

Over the past twenty years, substantial resources have been invested in the development of countryside recreation sites. These picnic sites, country parks, nature reserves and woodlands all offer a place where people can escape for a while from the stresses of urban life and enjoy a breath of fresh air in rural surroundings.

If recreation sites are to continue to have a wide appeal, they must offer a welcoming environment, where people's expectations of being able to relax in safe, accessible and pleasant surroundings can be fulfilled. The Visitor Welcome Initiative offers a simple framework for assessing the quality of welcome offered by many kinds of site and for making improvements where these are needed.

Our policy statement *Enjoying the Countryside: Policies for People* (CCP 371) pledged help for managers of major recreation sites with a method of reviewing the quality of welcome offered to visitors. Small informal sites are important to many people, so now we have covered these too. We are grateful to the Centre for Environmental Interpretation and the Heritage Coast Forum for their help with piloting this new initiative. Thanks are due too to Severn Trent Water and the various country park managers who commented on early drafts.

Michael Dower, Director General, Countryside Commission 1995

## The countryside starts here

For many families and individuals a trip to a countryside visitor site can represent a first taste of the great outdoors. A roadside picnic site is enough to satisfy many people; others may prefer a gentle stroll on waymarked paths; while some people are looking for sites with toilets, a visitor centre and children's play area.

Visitors should be made to feel comfortable in all of these diverse places. For many, the countryside begins and ends in these managed countryside sites. The best site managers in the world can do nothing to influence the weather or over-enthusiastic wasps; but they can ensure that visitors feel welcome.

## The initiative - what it is for?

The Visitor Welcome Initiative is designed to help site managers make sure that their visitors find a welcoming environment, feel at ease in their surroundings and, at the end of their stay, want to return or investigate other countryside opportunities.

Although most site managers will automatically take steps to provide a welcoming environment, a more systematic approach can be useful. Some recommendations and suggestions have therefore been devised; together they comprise a good management guide and are presented in the form of a checklist. Site managers can use it to see exactly how their site measures up to various standards, and to measure progress over time.

## The checklist

The checklist is not a site design guide (though it can sometimes look that way); and it does not seek to impose a centrally dictated vision of how a countryside visitor site should look. The appeal of local distinctiveness is far too important to be set aside.

But it is a comprehensive list of practical points that also serve as pointers to good management. The checklist focuses attention on the specific recommendations and suggestions that are the basis of the Visitor Welcome Initiative.

## The four site classifications

The Visitor Welcome Initiative recognises four distinct types of countryside sites. Standards for each type of site set out the essential elements that make up a 'welcoming environment'. The more sophisticated the site, the more advanced the standards which are applicable.

### **Type 'A' - Roadside picnic sites and viewpoints**

This is the most basic site addressed by the initiative. Type 'A's are a step beyond simple lay-bys and will normally offer a pleasant view or a picnic spot for road users. Recommended standards include safe off-road parking, some basic seating and an environment accessible to everyone be they disabled, elderly or in a pram.

### **Type 'B' - Informal 'walk around' sites**

In type 'B' sites there is much more space for people to wander around, perhaps in a wood or nature reserve. As with type 'A' sites, safe off-road parking is needed. Additional standards include clear open paths and some form of welcome/orientation sign at the site entrance. The sign should invite visitor feedback by including a contact address for suggestions (or complaints).

### **Type 'C' - Supervised sites**

Type 'C' sites are expected to have a ranger/warden on site all the year round. The presence of supervisory staff means that a wider range of facilities and services can be provided. Type 'C' standards include a programme of educational/fun events, clean toilets, local promotion of the site and a designated car park.

### **Type 'D' - Prime sites**

These supervised sites should offer the highest level of facilities. Built features should include a visitor centre with promotional literature and helpful staff. Any on-site public rights of way that link to the surrounding countryside need to be signposted. Buildings open to the public should offer access for all. Other standards include a children's play area and picnic area.

## Classifying the site

Before using the checklist you need to determine which site type is being checked. At the start of the checklist is an explanation of recommended standards for countryside sites, which will be helpful where the site type is not immediately obvious.

Many sites will fall somewhere between two types. This is most likely to happen with type 'B's and 'C's. In order to be accorded 'C' status all the type 'C' standards must be met. A type 'B' site does not become a type 'C' simply because a ranger is employed. On the other hand, a sadly deficient 'D' site could be treated as a 'C' site and achieve an excellent rating.

## What is the checklist?

The Visitor Welcome Checklist forms the basis for a self-completion welcome audit. It is a comprehensive list of questions requiring a simple yes or no response. There are two kinds of questions.

- Some deal with key matters relating to the standards recommended for that particular site type. A negative response means the recommended standard has not been met.
- Other questions, the majority in fact, deal with matters that can be considered important but not essential. They may be regarded as suggestions.

The 'key' checks, i.e. those dealing with recommendations, are indicated in bold and underlined. This will become clear when you look at the checklist; it would be helpful to do this now, before reading further.

## The checks in detail

There are seventeen numbered sections, with several questions in each. But not all of the questions will apply to all four site types. To see if a section applies to the site you are checking, see what it says after the heading title; to see if a specific question applies to your site, look in the column headed "Applies to types".

A commonsense approach when applying the checks goes without saying. Where a type 'C' site has a visitor centre, for example, do carry out the visitor centre checks even though they are not normally appropriate to type 'C' sites.

Within each section the questions are split (where appropriate) into 'System' and 'Visual' checks. Dealing with system checks will require knowledge of the site's management and operating procedures. Visual checks can all be answered through direct observation of the site and its facilities.

## Carrying out the checks

It is strongly recommended that at least two people carry out the checks - someone who is fully familiar with the site and its management practices and one 'outsider' who is not directly involved with the particular site. Including a member of the public on the checking team can help reinforce links with the local community. Depending on the size of the site and number of facilities, the checklist may take anything from an hour to most of a day to complete.

After categorising the site, the checking team should begin by deleting any questions that are clearly inapplicable to the site under scrutiny. However, no 'key' checks for that site type should be deleted.

## The seventeen sections some guidance notes

### 1. Identification of visitor needs

A site manager who knows what visitors want is better able to target the provision of facilities. There is little point in spending substantial sums on a visitor centre if local people only want a place to walk the dog. Knowing the main characteristics of the site's usual visitors is an important aid to management. Encouraging suggestions (or complaints) from site users is considered essential. Putting a contact address on the site's welcome/orientation signboard is probably the simplest way to achieve this. Suggestion boxes sometimes prove useful on supervised sites but face to face contact with the public is preferable.

### 2. Access for all

A site's physical characteristics may make provision for disabled people difficult but there are usually ways to get around most obstacles. Many disabled people are far more enterprising than some site managers imagine and, given the right kind of assistance, even a wheelchair user can manage fairly steep or uneven terrain. The first priority is to ensure there are no artificial barriers to access, such as stiles and 'wheelchair proof' gates.

It is essential that access provision for disabled visitors is fully integrated with wider access. Staff at supervised sites should be able to assist disabled visitors without appearing patronising. The principle of "access for all" offers benefits for elderly people, parents with prams and children with tricycles, so references to this important aspect of the 'Welcome' occur in some of the other checklist sections.

Facilities for visually impaired people might include large print literature, tactile maps, sensory trails and taped guides that can be used at home or on-site.

Specifications for paths, gates, picnic furniture, etc can be found in 'Informal countryside recreation for disabled people' (CCP 439), available for £2.00 from the Countryside Commission.

### **3. Off-site promotion**

Some managers of the more heavily used sites may question the need for off-site promotion, so this lengthy section of the checklist is composed mainly of suggestions rather than recommendations. All sites should be signposted from the public highway. Type 'C' sites should be promoted in the local area and for 'D' sites there should be professional, up-to-date promotional literature. A site that hides its existence from potential visitors cannot be regarded as welcoming.

### **4. Opening hours**

Type 'A' sites should never close except in emergencies. All other sites should normally open daily. Instances may arise where sites have to be closed temporarily because there is a risk of danger to the public. This is acceptable for essential management work, natural hazards, fire risk or emergencies.

### **5. Site entrances and exits**

First impressions set the tone for the visit so a distinctive and welcoming entrance is important at sites type 'B', 'C' and 'D'. A positively worded welcome and/or orientation sign is recommended. Ideally this should provide details of opening times, entrance charges and what facilities/events are available. A contact address should be provided on the sign. At type 'B' sites there should be a solid structure that bicycles can be locked to.

### **6. Car parks and informal parking areas**

Type 'A' and 'B' sites should have safe off-road parking though not necessarily in a designated car park as would be expected of type 'C' and 'D' sites. To ensure a rural character at these latter sites, informal bays without concrete edges but with plenty of greenery are suggested. However, bays should not be so secluded that they attract thieves. Some form of interpretation in the car park is desirable to help visitors orient themselves. Designated car parks must have some wide spaces reserved for disabled visitors and somewhere safe to leave bicycles.

### **7. On-site signing**

Careful thought should be given to what on-site signs are necessary, as too many can look unattractive. Signs and notices should be positively worded wherever possible. Even prohibitory notices can be 'softened' through a skilful choice of words. Signs should be designed to fit in with their rural surroundings and take account of local styles; uniformity throughout the site is also important. As tastes vary on design and style, compromises may be necessary.

### **8. Paths and trails**

All of the questions in this section can be checked visually, and the first two are 'key' for sites 'A', 'B' and 'C'. All paths should be kept open and usable (this is, of course, a legal requirement for public rights of way). Signs and waymarks should be clearly visible where they are needed. Rest benches help not only disabled and elderly people but parents carrying infants too.

### **9. Site care**

The checklist refers to facilities being "well maintained". This is intended to cover a multitude of routine functions, ranging from litter disposal to the upkeep of gates, benches, etc. What is important here is that the site looks as if it is being cared for. Frequent monitoring should be carried out to identify on-going maintenance jobs as they arise.

### **10. Toilet facilities**

For a great many visitors, the toilet block will be the only building on the site where they spend any time. It therefore needs to be clean with all facilities working properly. Daily cleaning is essential. An inspection every two hours is advisable - and once every hour during busy days.

### **11. Visitor centres**

A visitor centre is expected only at type 'D' sites but where one exists at a type 'C' site the checks should also be carried out. Centre staff should be helpful and knowledgeable. There should be no access difficulties for wheelchairs or pushchairs. This section contains a number of suggestions for making improvements. Open counter areas help convey the impression that staff are approachable; clear counter-tops will allow maps to be spread for visitors seeking advice on routes through the park (and beyond). Display exhibits that can be handled will appeal to younger visitors and those with visual disabilities.

### **12. Shops, refreshments and other on-site facilities**

The questions here apply mainly to type 'D' facilities but, as with visitor centres, if a question applies to another type of site it should be answered. A picnic site and children's play area are requirements for 'D' sites. Many visitors will assume that shop and catering staff are countryside experts; they should be ready to answer some basic queries on occasion. Staff should be familiar with the site's layout and facilities, and who to direct visitors to for further information.

### **13. Links with the local community and countryside**

For many people, managed sites are often their first point of contact with the countryside. It is important to convey the message that the countryside doesn't end at the site boundary. Rights of way that lead to the wider countryside may occur on all site types. It is suggested - and on 'D' sites recommended - that visitors are made aware of these access routes.

Forging links with the local community is highly recommended, particularly for urban fringe sites. Local people with an interest in the site will discourage vandalism and may volunteer to help with basic management work. To foster local interest and enthusiasm, all supervised sites should run a programme of events designed to appeal to a variety of ages, abilities and interests.

### **14. Site staff**

A good standard of welcome cannot be provided if staff are unhelpful, aloof or poorly informed. Staff need to be approachable, personable, knowledgeable and reasonably smart. It helps if the public can identify members of staff, so some form of uniform is desirable. This does not need to be elaborate; a distinctive badge or armband is sufficient.

### **15. Visitor safety**

If the unthinkable happens, site staff must be ready to deal with it. Safety precautions should be obvious and visitors should be able to locate help without difficulty. Properly maintained safety equipment appropriate to the environment must be present at all site types. First aid facilities must be available at all supervised sites. For many people, particularly unaccompanied females, the countryside can be a frightening place. Staff must be ready, willing and fully able to assist anyone who is being intimidated by the actions of other people - or animals. Threatening or hooligan-type behaviour calls for an appropriate response every time - it must never be ignored.

### **16. Other checks directly relevant to the site**

This section contains space for additional checks that apply specifically to the site under examination but that have not been covered elsewhere. These 'custom' checks could cover any aspect of the visitor welcome.

### **17. Overall impression**

The checking team can record its overall impression of the kind of welcome the site offers. This might be expressed as its 'ambience'. The checker(s) should comment freely and frankly.

## **Interpreting results**

After completing the checklist the team needs to see if all the relevant 'key' checks (those which make recommendations) have received positive responses. Any negative responses to these recommended items means that the site lacks some attributes that the 'Welcome Initiative' sees as part of a welcoming environment.

Items requiring swift attention should be noted on the page headed 'Record of visitor welcome check'. If all the 'key' checks have received 'yes' responses, the site meets the recommended standards of the 'Welcome Initiative'. A small celebration is probably in order!

If all the recommended standards have been met, the site manager may wish to act on some of the Visitor Welcome Initiative's many suggested examples of good practice.

Managers should not be despondent about large numbers of negative responses on checks for suggested items. It is quite possible that the site's facilities ideally suit its visitor catchment and its regular visitors like things just the way they are. The analysis of visitor needs can help determine whether this is the case.

Because different sites need different approaches, a points or scoring system for the checklist has deliberately been avoided. But managers may wish to create their own. For 'C' and 'D' sites especially, it is impossible to design a checklist that covers all the specific management objectives for each park. Site managers may find it desirable to add some additional checks that address issues raised in their management plan. The penultimate checklist section (16) provides for this.

### Finally...

The Visitor Welcome Initiative is purely voluntary in nature. It comes with no associated grant package and no hidden agenda. The site type classifications have no additional significance outside the scope of the initiative but countryside managers are free to extend and adapt them if desired.

The Countryside Commission looks forward to receiving feedback from countryside managers who have taken the Visitor Welcome Initiative on board.

# EXPLANATION OF RECOMMENDED STANDARDS FOR COUNTRYSIDE SITES

## Type 'A'

### Roadside picnic sites and viewpoints

- Open at all times
- Signed from the public highway
- Accessible to all
- Safe, informal off-road parking
- Basic seating in keeping with the rural surroundings
- Free of safety hazards
- 'Wheelchair friendly' picnic furniture (picnic sites only)

## Type 'C'

### Supervised

- All type 'B' features plus....
- All year ranger/warden service for maintenance, assisting visitors and enforcing by-laws
- Helpful and knowledgeable staff
- A programme of educational/fun events
- Well maintained toilet facilities (including for disabled people)
- Site promoted in the local area
- A designated car park
- First aid available on site

## Type 'B'

### Informal 'walk around' sites

- Safe, informal off-road parking
- Open daily unless essential management work poses a safety risk to visitors
- A positively worded orientation/welcome sign at the entrance displaying a contact address for visitor feedback
- Free from artificial barriers to access for all
- Unobstructed paths, especially public rights of way
- A structure to lock bicycles to

## Type 'D'

### Prime sites

- All type 'C' features plus....
- Visitor centre
- Children's play area
- Picnic area
- Buildings accessible to all
- Promotional literature
- Signposts indicating public right of way links (where present) to the local countryside

## Record of Visitor Welcome Check

Site name

Site type – *circle one*

Date of check

Checked by

All standards for site type met –

Summary of items requiring urgent attention:-

Date next check due

Signed

## How to use the Checklist

- 1 Identify the type of site you are checking by using the site standards listed on the next page.
- 2 Go through the checklist and delete any checks that are clearly inappropriate to your particular site.
- 3 Deal with all the system checks first, answering yes or no to all those that apply. If you cannot answer them seek guidance from someone who can.
- 4 Inspect the site and carry out all the applicable visual checks.
- 5 Complete the 'welcome check' record on this page.
- 6 Act on any failed checks that are recommended standards for your site type.

### I. IDENTIFICATION OF VISITOR NEEDS (All site types)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b>		
1	All	Do you genuinely know the main characteristics/interests of your usual visitors?		
2	All	In terms of facilities offered does your site have wide appeal for your usual visitor catchment?		
3	All	Have you undertaken any form of visitor survey?		
4	All	Have you undertaken any initiatives to attract visitors from apparently under-represented groups? (ethnic minorities, particular age groups, etc)		
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
5	<u>All</u>	Do you encourage visitor feedback (contact address publicised)?		

### 2. ACCESS FOR ALL (All site types)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b>		
6	All	Are facilities for people with disabilities publicised locally?		
7	All	Is on-site information available on facilities for less able people?		
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
8	<u>All</u>	Is provision for less able people integrated with wider provision for everyone?		
9	All	Are there facilities that benefit people with sensory disabilities?		
10	<u>B,C,D</u>	Is picnic furniture designed to accommodate wheelchair users?		
11	<u>B,C,D</u>	Are site gates designed to admit wheelchairs?		
12	B,C,D	Have boardwalks been provided to aid wheelchair (and pram) users where path surfaces are unsuitable?		
13	C,D	Are there wheelchairs available on loan?		
14	D	Is a battery-powered disabled person's vehicle available for loan?		

### 3. OFF-SITE PROMOTION (All site types)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b>		
15	B,C,D	Has an informative and attractive brochure and/or poster been produced giving details of the site's location, opening time and attractions?		
16	B,C,D	Is it currently in print?		
17	B,C,D	Is it updated annually (at least)?		
18	B,C,D	Is a translated version available for local ethnic minority visitors? Are supplies of the brochure/poster currently available/on display at:		
19	B,C,D	Tourist Information Centres?		
20	B,C,D	Local libraries?		
21	B,C,D	Local railway/bus stations?		
22	B,C,D	Local health, sports and leisure centres?		
23	B,C,D	Other local rural attractions?		
24	B,C,D	Offices of local community groups?		
25	B,C,D	Is a monitoring/distribution system in place to ensure that brochure outlets are regularly restocked?		
26	B,C,D	Are other visitor sites in the area displaying your brochures/posters and is this a reciprocal arrangement?		
27	B,C,D	Have you taken steps to ensure that your site features in any local tourist guidebooks or other 'What to do' type publications?		
28	B,C,D	Are there any maps or displays showing the site's location on public view in the nearest centres of population?		
29	C,D	Do you provide regular information to the local press and radio?		
30	D	Do you produce and distribute an interesting newsletter regularly?		
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
31	<u>All</u>	Is the site clearly signposted from the public highway?		
32	All	Are there signposts to the site from local public rights of way?		

**4. OPENING HOURS (All site types)**

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b>		
33	<u>A</u>	Is the site open all the time?		
34	<u>B,C,D</u>	Is the site normally open daily?		

**5. SITE ENTRANCES AND EXITS (Not applicable to site type A)**

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
35	<u>B,C,D</u>	Is there a welcoming sign at the entrance giving details of opening times and providing a contact address for feedback?		
36	<u>B</u>	Is there a solid structure that bicycles can be locked to?		
37	B,C,D	Is the site named at the entrances?		
38	B,C,D	Are details of facilities and forthcoming events on display at the entrances?		
39	B,C,D	Are entrances free of negatively worded signs?		
40	B,C,D	Is it obvious at the entrances which direction to take to get to the car park and other facilities?		
41	B,C,D	Are entrances well maintained, litter free and in keeping with their surroundings?		
42	B,C,D	Is there a 'thank you for coming' sign at the exit(s)?		

### 6. CAR PARKS AND INFORMAL PARKING AREAS (All site types)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>				
43	<u>A,B</u>	Is it possible for visitors to park safely off the public highway?		
44	<u>C,D</u>	Is a formal car park provided?		
45	<u>C,D</u>	Are suitably sited parking places for less able visitors provided and are they wide enough (at least 3.2m) to permit wheelchair loading/unloading?		
46	<u>C,D</u>	Is there anywhere to leave bicycles securely?		
47	C,D	Is the car park designed to reduce opportunities for theft?		
48	C,D	Is the car park design consistent with the style of the site?		
49	C,D	Is there a map board in the car park?		
50	C,D	Is there a leaflet dispenser in the car park and if so is it stocked?		

### 7. ON-SITE SIGNING (All site types)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>				
51	All	Is the site free from unnecessary signing?		
52	All	Are site signs positively worded wherever possible?		
53	All	Does signing follow a common, ideally vernacular, style consistent with the style of the site?		
54	All	Are site signs easy to follow?		
55	B,C,D	Are there signs directing people back to the car park and exits?		
56	C,D	Is there a noticeboard on site usable by all giving details of forthcoming events and activities?		

### 8. PATHS AND TRAILS (Not applicable to site type A)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
57	<u>B,C,D</u>	Are paths unobstructed and, where necessary, signed and waymarked? ( <b>Particularly important for public rights of way</b> )		
58	<u>B,C,D</u>	Do long paths (particularly those with steep gradients) have benches along their length where elderly or infirm people can rest?		
59	B,C,D	Are path surfaces consistent with their surroundings?		
60	B,C,D	Are paths wide enough (minimum 1.2m) to permit wheelchairs to turn and people to pass each other safely?		
61	B,C,D	If paths are usable by cyclists and horse riders is this clearly indicated?		
62	B,C,D	Are the views from the paths free of removable eyesores?		
63	B,C,D	Is there a self-guided trail available with supporting interpretive literature or panels?		
64	C,D	Is there a path suitable for use by wheelchairs (as well as other users) on the site?		

### 9. SITE CARE (All site types)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b>		
65	<u>All</u>	Is the site checked regularly and frequently to identify maintenance needs?		
66	<u>All</u>	Are litter bins (if provided) emptied frequently and regularly?		
67	<u>All</u>	Is evidence of vandalism removed quickly?		
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
68	<u>All</u>	Are site facilities well maintained so that they work properly and give the appearance of being cared for?		
69	All	Is the site generally free from litter?		

**10. TOILET FACILITIES** (Applicable to site types C and D)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
<b>70</b>	<u>C,D</u>	<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b> Are the toilets cleaned daily at least?		
<b>71</b>	<u>C,D</u>	Are regular and frequent (hourly or two-hourly) checks carried out on cleanliness, supply of soap, toilet paper, etc and serviceability?		
<b>72</b>	<u>C,D</u>	<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b> Are the toilets clean and in good working order?		
<b>73</b>	C,D	Is there a 'Parent and baby' room?		
<b>74</b>	C,D	Are there prominent notices in the toilet blocks telling users who to go to in the event of complaint?		

**II. VISITOR CENTRES** (Required at D sites; desirable option at C sites)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b>		
75	<u>D</u>	Are visitor centre staff ready, willing and able to answer questions from visitors on all aspects of the site?		
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
76	<u>D</u>	Is the visitor centre fully accessible to wheelchair users?		
77	<u>D</u>	Is there sufficient space between displays and other fixtures to allow easy passage of wheelchairs and pushchairs?		
78	D	Does the interior of the visitor centre permit easy circulation of visitors?		
79	D	Do counter areas appear open and welcoming?		
80	D	Are browse copies of site guides etc available to visitors?		
81	D	Are there a few seats available?		
82	D	Are displays: reasonably current?		
83	D	showing the correct season (where season specific)?		
84	D	adequately lit?		
85	D	in a logical sequence?		
86	D	appealing to younger visitors?		
87	D	attractive and in good condition?		
88	D	Are there non-visual type displays or exhibits?		
89	D	Are there models and other three-dimensional displays?		

**12. SHOPS, REFRESHMENTS AND OTHER ON-SITE FACILITIES** (Applicable to site types A & D, though appropriate checks should be made for B & C sites with any of these facilities)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	Action/Comments
<b>90</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b> Are shop and refreshment staff able to answer basic enquiries about the site generally?	
<b>91</b>	D	Are shop and refreshment staff trained in customer care?	
<b>92</b>	D	Does shop merchandise follow the rural theme?	
<b>93</b>	D	Are publications available that develop interpretive themes introduced elsewhere on the site?	
<b>94</b>	D	Are <u>local</u> items (eg crafts or produce) on sale?	
<b>95</b>	D	Are refreshments reasonably priced and of good quality?	
<b>96</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b> Is there some basic seating that is in keeping with the rural surroundings?	
<b>97</b>	<b>D</b>	Is there a children's play area with play equipment?	
<b>98</b>	<b>D</b>	Is there a picnic area?	
<b>99</b>	D	Is there somewhere to eat if it is raining?	
<b>100</b>	D	Is there a separate dog exercising area?	
<b>101</b>	D	Is there something outside the shop or cafe to attach dog leads to and is clean water available?	

### 13. LINKS WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND COUNTRYSIDE (All site types)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b>		
<b>102</b>	<b>C,D</b>	Do you run a programme of walks and events designed to cater for all ages, levels of ability and a variety of interests?		
<b>103</b>	C,D	Do you provide information on the countryside around the site?		
<b>104</b>	C,D	Do you run any events designed to encourage ethnic minority participation?		
<b>105</b>	C,D	Do you develop and maintain links with local visitor groups (schools, churches, scouts/guides, clubs etc)?		
<b>106</b>	C,D	Do you develop and maintain links with local disabled and ethnic groups?		
<b>107</b>	C,D	Do you offer talks on the site, your work and the local countryside to local groups?		
<b>108</b>	C,D	Do you run any off-site guided walks?		
<b>109</b>	C,D	Is there a 'Friends of' type group for the site?		
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
<b>110</b>	<b>A,B,C,D</b>	Are there signposts indicating the way to the wider countryside using on-site rights of way connections?		

**14. SITE STAFF** (Applies to site types C and D)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<p><b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b></p>		
111	<u>C,D</u>	Are supervisory staff:		
112	<u>C,D</u>	Recognisable to members of the public?		
113	<u>C,D</u>	Helpful?		
114	<u>C,D</u>	Able to answer visitors' questions about the site and its wildlife?		
115	<u>C,D</u>	Presentable?		
116	C,D	Polite?		
117	C,D	Trained in customer care?		
		Trained in disability awareness?		

## 15. VISITOR SAFETY (All site types)

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments
		<b>SYSTEM CHECKS</b>		
118	<u>All</u>	Has a site hazard assessment procedure been undertaken?		
119	<u>C,D</u>	Are staff trained to deal with first aid and other emergency situations?		
120	<u>C,D</u>	Do your staff take action to deal with intimidatory or anti- social behaviour?		
121	<u>C,D</u>	Do your staff maintain a visible presence on site to deter unruly behaviour and reassure visitors who may feel ill at ease in their surroundings?		
122	<u>C,D</u>	Does the site have an integrated fire response plan?		
123	C,D	Does the site have a casualty evacuation plan with a procedural linkage to the relevant emergency services?		
124	C,D	Is there an accident record book on site?		
		<b>VISUAL CHECKS</b>		
125	<u>All</u>	Is safety equipment appropriate to the site environment (eg lifebuoys for deep water) readily available and in good condition?		
126	<u>All</u>	Are potentially dangerous areas signed and/or fenced?		
127	<u>C,D</u>	Are there notices on site directing visitors to first aid facilities?		

**16. OTHER CHECKS DIRECTLY RELEVANT TO THE SITE (All site types)**

Use this section to add your own checks on any special facilities or aspects of your site that have not already been addressed

Check no.	Applies to types	Check	yes/no	Action/Comments

**17. OVERALL IMPRESSIONS (All site types)**

USE THIS SECTION TO RECORD YOUR OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THE WELCOME OFFERED BY THE SITE AND ITS GENERAL AMBIENCE. CONSIDER ALL THE CATEGORIES IN THE SECTIONS ABOVE AND OFFER SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IF YOU WISH

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