4 Enjoying the natural environment

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the values that people place on the natural environment and how and where they engage with it. It considers how the natural environment is managed for public access and explores a range of current evidence about the nature and scale of benefits to people resulting from their engagement with the natural environment.

People have many reasons for enjoying the natural environment and engage with it in various ways:

- They enjoy it physically – through activities such as walking, climbing, bird watching or gardening or through conservation volunteering – close to home and further afield.
- They enjoy it visually – from home and when on the move.
- They enjoy it vicariously – through literature, art, photography, television and, more recently, the internet.

All can benefit from a chance to escape from the pressures of everyday life and a change in pace that this engagement provides.

4.2 People enjoying the natural environment

This section assesses how many people enjoy England's countryside, what they do there and how they feel about it. It focuses upon the use of specific sites and facilities, as well as the key issues and future challenges in terms of enjoyment of the natural environment.

4.2.1 How people enjoy the natural environment

One measure of the value that is placed upon the natural environment is the number and type of visits to it. *The England Leisure Visits Survey 2005* (Natural England 2006b) estimates that there were 763.4 million rural leisure visits in England in 2005. This includes trips to the countryside, to the coast, to woods and forests and to water. Comparison with the *Great Britain Day Visits Survey 2002/2003* (Countryside Agency 2004) suggests that there has been a fall in the overall number of rural leisure visits, although this may be accounted for by changes in the survey methodology.

Average spend per person on rural leisure trips at 2005 prices was £13.99 (compared to £25.09 for all leisure visits). Fuel, admission tickets, alcoholic drinks and food accounted for 70% of expenditure. Total expenditure on rural leisure trips during 2005 is estimated to be £10.6 billion.

Once people had reached their destination, their main activity was walking (36%). Other popular activities include eating or drinking out (16%), pursuing a hobby or special interest (11%) and taking part in sports or active pursuits (7%). The *Sport England Active People Survey 2005/06* (Sport England 2008) confirms that walking is the most popular recreational activity for people in England. It estimated that over 8 million adults aged 16 and over had gone on a recreational walk for at least 30 minutes in the four weeks up to the survey.

While many people travel significant distances to enjoy particular landscapes, many more will enjoy regular contact with green space close to home. There is, however, limited data on the extent or nature of engagement with green space at this local scale.

Volunteering provides another measure of how people enjoy and value with the natural environment. Opportunities available include land and species management, education, walk leadership, visitor management, practical conservation tasks, market and customer research and public relations. The *2005 Citizenship Survey* (Cabinet Office 2007a) shows that overall levels of formal volunteering increased from 39% in 2001 to 44% in 2007. A study by the Institute for Volunteering Research suggests that levels of volunteering in the natural outdoors are also increasing, with some of the larger voluntary conservation bodies experiencing up to a 30% increase in the number of people volunteering (Ockenden 2007). The importance of volunteering is recognised by the UK Biodiversity Indicator project group, which is currently collating data on which to base a biodiversity volunteering indicator.

Skipwith Common volunteers

Skipwith Common SSSI and SAC is one of the last remaining lowland heaths in the north of England, famous for its heathland wildlife and ancient burial mounds. The *Restoring the Heaths of the Vale of York Project*, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, was initiated by English Nature in 2003 to restore Skipwith Common to favourable condition for its wildlife and to increase local communities' appreciation of and involvement with this important site. A series of open meetings at the start of the project led to the formation of the Friends of Skipwith Common Group which, by 2008, had 150 members.

Members undertake practical work, tackling everything from scrub clearance to erecting information boards and wardening, which has reduced the problems of anti-social and damaging behaviour such as illegal off-road motorbiking and fly-tipping to almost zero. They also assist the Escrick Park Estate in managing the conservation-grazing flock of Hebridean sheep. The group has started a large scale archaeological survey into this complex intact historical landscape. The group also leads guided walks and contributes to management planning to enhance Skipwith Common for wildlife and for visitors.

Table 4.1 Levels of volunteering for Natural England and English Nature

Type of volunteer	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	% change 2003-2007
Bat volunteers						
Volunteer hours	27,600	30,100	34,550	36,750	41,500	+ 50
Number of volunteers	552	602	691	735	830	+ 50
NNR/SSSI volunteers						
Volunteer hours	72,300	85 ,000	82,500	94 ,400	10 2,000	+ 41
Number of volunteers	861	1,012	982	1,124	1,214	+ 41
Admin/office volunteers						
Volunteer hours	3,100	2,900	3,900	4, 400	4,800	+ 55
Number of volunteers	31	29	39	44	48	+ 55

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

Volunteering for Natural England (and its predecessor body English Nature) has similarly increased, with a 45% rise between 2003 and 2007 (Table 4.1).

While there is some evidence to suggest that engagement with the natural environment, as measured by levels of volunteering, has increased in recent years, far more people connect with the natural environment through their own gardens. In urban areas gardens occupy up to 25% of the land surface (See Section 3.10).

A Natural England commissioned poll in 2007 found that nearly half of those questioned remembered having their first contact with nature in a garden (the comparable figure for nature reserves was 6%). In addition, more than a million people take part in surveys of garden wildlife annually. Seventy seven per cent of the 34 million gardeners in the UK describe themselves as enthusiastic about or having some interest in wildlife.

Even when people are not actively engaged with the natural environment, they may take pleasure from it through television and radio programmes. For example, BBC's *Springwatch* gained over 3.5 million viewers on some nights in June 2007 (BARB 2008).

High levels of concern about the wider environment and quality of life are revealed in the recently published Defra research on *Public Attitudes and Behaviours Towards the Environment* (Defra 2007d). Seventy nine per cent of respondents agreed that they worry about the changes to the countryside in the UK and the loss of native plants and animals. The importance of accessible green space was also highlighted, with two thirds stating that it was 'very important' to have green spaces (including for instance public gardens, parks or commons) nearby.

Qualitative research by Defra found that many complex environmental concepts such as 'ecosystem services', 'biodiversity' and 'green infrastructure' created a negative perception of the complexity of the environment (Defra 2007e). However, respondents placed a high value on the natural environment where it related to their day-to-day activities (for example local green space) and where it clearly contributed to their quality of life.

4.2.2 Where people enjoy the natural environment

The types of locations that are used for enjoyment and engagement include land with different designations, such as National Trails, open access land, National Parks, AONBs, and NNRs.

4.2.2.1 National Trails

There were around 13.5 million visits to England's National Trails in 2006. In a survey 93% of users were walkers, 5% cyclists and <2% horse riders. Walkers use National Trails for short and longer distance journeys: 6% walk for less than one hour, 44% for around half a day and 50% for a full day or longer.

Satisfaction levels were very high, with 98% of users describing their experience of the Trail as very good. In terms of the motivation of users, the most important factor was the love of nature and landscape (38% of users). (Natural England/Countryside Council for Wales 2008).

4.2.2.2 Open access land

In 2005, there were 21.6 million visits to open access land in England (Natural England 2006b). Ninety three per cent of these trips were to the countryside and 7% to the coast.

Open access land is used particularly for walking, hill walking and rambling, which account for 57% of visits to open access land (compared to 36% of all rural leisure visits). Open access land generates longer journeys, with the average distance travelled to open access land being a round trip of 29.4 miles, considerably longer than the average round journey for rural leisure trips of 21.5 miles. People also spend slightly more time at open access land destinations (average 2.38 hours) than on all rural leisure visits (2.10 hours) (Natural England 2006b).

The first year of the national open access monitoring programme indicated that 44% of visitors thought that further information would have been useful prior to their visit (Natural England 2006c). Their preferences were for printed maps (22%), local path signage (22%) or interpretation boards/maps on site (17%).

4.2.2.3 Access to coast and water

The most recent evidence of recreational use of the coastal environment (Natural England 2007a) estimates that there were 75 million day visits in 2005 to the undeveloped coastline. Walking is the most popular form of land-based coastal recreational activity. Seventy two per cent of respondents said that they had undertaken an activity at the coast in the last 12 months. The coast is most popular with white, middle aged, social class A & B people with children, who live relatively close to it. Only 34% of black people and 44% of Asian people visited the coast, and 51% of people overall didn't visit frequently but would like to visit more often.

Despite this popularity, there is no general right for people to use the coast, although most people believe that their *de facto* access to beaches is lawful and express disquiet if beach access is withdrawn or threatened.

There were 150.6 million visits to stretches of inland water in England, which accounts for 4% of all leisure visits (Natural England 2006b). There were 71.7 million leisure visits to the coast, accounting for 2% of all leisure visits.

4.2.2.4 National Parks and AONBs

There were estimated to be 74.8 million visits per annum to National Parks, with the Lake District and Peak District being the most visited Parks (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Visitor days to National Parks

National Park	Million visitor days per annum
Northumberland	1.5
Lake District	22
Yorkshire Dales	9
North York Moors	9.5
Peak District	22
Broads	5.4
New Forest	Not available
Exmoor	1.4
Dartmoor	4
Total	**74.8**

(Source: National Parks Portal, 2008)

Over three quarters of travel to National Parks is made by car (Natural England 2006b). This reflects the relatively long distances that visitors travel to National Parks with an average round trip of 35.4 miles. Visitors spent an average of 2.57 hours at their destination. A relatively large proportion of visitors visit the same National Park repeatedly: around a quarter of visitors had visited the same National Park on 11 or more occasions over the last 12 months.

People are motivated to visit our National Parks because they are easy to get to, are good for outdoor activities such as walking and cycling, provide a safe environment, welcome visitors and offer peace and quiet (Natural England 2006b).

Visitor numbers are not recorded nationally for AONBs, but some do keep records; for example Arneside and Silverdale AONB received an estimated 250,000 visits in 2007.

4.2.2.5 National Nature Reserves

There were 16.7 million visits to National Nature Reserves (NNRs) in 2005/06, an increase from 13.5 million in 2000/2001. There were over 10 million visits to the top ten most popular NNRs.

London and the West Midlands were the most heavily visited regions (Table 4.3), primarily because of the large number of visitors to two large open parkland NNRs (Richmond and Sutton) close to large centres of population.

Table 4.3 NNR visitor numbers by Region

Region	Number of visits 2005/06	Percentage of total
NE	885,000	5
NW	218,000	1
YH	329,000	2
EM	1,674,000	10
WM	2,906,000	18
EE	2,203,000	13
L	3,175,000	19
SE	2,712,000	16
SW	2,638,000	16
England	**16,740,000**	**100**

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

Section 35 NNRs are managed by partners approved by Natural England. These reserves are typically selected not only for their outstanding conservation value but also for high levels of visitation. In 2005/06 Section 35 NNRs had three times as many visits as those managed by Natural England. The most visited Section 35 NNRs were Richmond Park (3,000,000 visitors), Sutton Park (2,500,000), Studland & Godlingston Heath (1,000,000) and Dungeness (1,000,000). The most visited Natural England-managed NNRs in 2005/06 were Holkham (800,000 visitors), Lindisfarne (500,000) and Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes (300,000).

4.2.2.6 Other reserves and access opportunities

The Forestry Commission estimates that there were 222 million visits to woodland in 2002/03: opinion poll data records 65% of people in England as having visited a wood in the last few years. The Forestry Commission has also developed a survey methodology to measure the quality of experience at specific sites. On-site surveys have shown that visitors had high quality experiences overall, driven largely by value for money and opportunities to get fit, as well as other site-specific strengths (Forestry Commission 2007c).

4.2.3 Future issues and challenges

4.2.3.1 Under-represented groups

There is a consistent body of evidence that certain groups in England – in particular young adults, low income groups, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, older people and women – are less likely to participate in activities related to the natural environment. For example, the *England Leisure Visits Survey 2005* (Natural England 2006b) found that visitors to the countryside were older, white, affluent, car owning and in better health than the general population of England.

In response to the Government's commitment to undertake a diversity review (Defra 2000), the Countryside Agency undertook research between 2002 and 2005 into how to encourage more people with disabilities, more people from ethnic minorities, more people from inner cities, and more young people to visit and engage with the natural environment (Natural England 2006a). This concluded that these groups wanted to enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation but had concerns about lack of information in accessing the outdoors, about not being made welcome and about transport. The Government's Diversity Action Plan *Outdoors for All* (Defra 2008c) was launched by the Minister in March 2008.

4.2.3.2 Future trends

A study of the emerging trends that are likely to have significant implications for the way that people engage with and recreate in the natural environment in the future (Henley Centre 2005) showed that:

- People are spending more time on indoor-based and sedentary activities at home, and visits to the countryside are in decline.
- Society has become more risk averse and good reliable information is often sought before new experiences are tried. Parents are less likely to allow children to explore the natural environment close to home, alone.
- Health and wellbeing are costing society in terms of health budgets and quality of life.
- There is a trend for people to be more concerned about their health and to be interested in preventative means to keep them healthier.
- A 'convenience culture' means that people are drawn to activities that seem to use their time well; the more convenient the activity, the more likely they are to do it.
- The planning system is the key to creating more opportunities for outdoor recreation near to where people live, and agri-environment schemes have potential to increase and diversify access opportunities in other areas.
- Information on the internet was used for leisure-based decisions.
- An ageing society means that there are more active and experience-seeking people over 65.
- The social justice agenda is leading to more expectation for equal opportunities to engage with and enjoy the natural environment.

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4.3 Places for people to enjoy the natural environment

This section looks at the range of places, both statutory and non-statutory, that provide opportunities for people to enjoy the natural environment in England. It also considers the spatial differences across the country and across different landscapes.

4.3.1 Public Rights of Way

Public rights of way (PRoW) provide definitive access and take many forms: footpath, bridleway, byway open to all traffic (BOAT), and restricted byway. They offer the opportunity to meet the present and likely future needs of people for essential and recreational journeys; and to encourage recreational walking and cycling to meet our needs to reduce carbon emissions, traffic congestion and improve our health, fitness and quality of life. Maintaining them is a statutory duty for local authorities.

Currently England has about 188,500 km of public rights of way, of which public footpaths constitute 78% (Table 4.4).

The public rights of way network is put in context by the range of maps on Figure 4.1, which give an indication of how access opportunities vary across England. There is no optimal density for rights of way and, across certain landscapes and habitats, a relatively low density may be entirely appropriate. There is a complex relationship between the density of public rights of way (Figure 4.1a PRoW density per km square), designated and defined areas (Figure 4.1b), open access land (Figure 4.1c) and major urban centres and transport routes (Figure 4.1d).

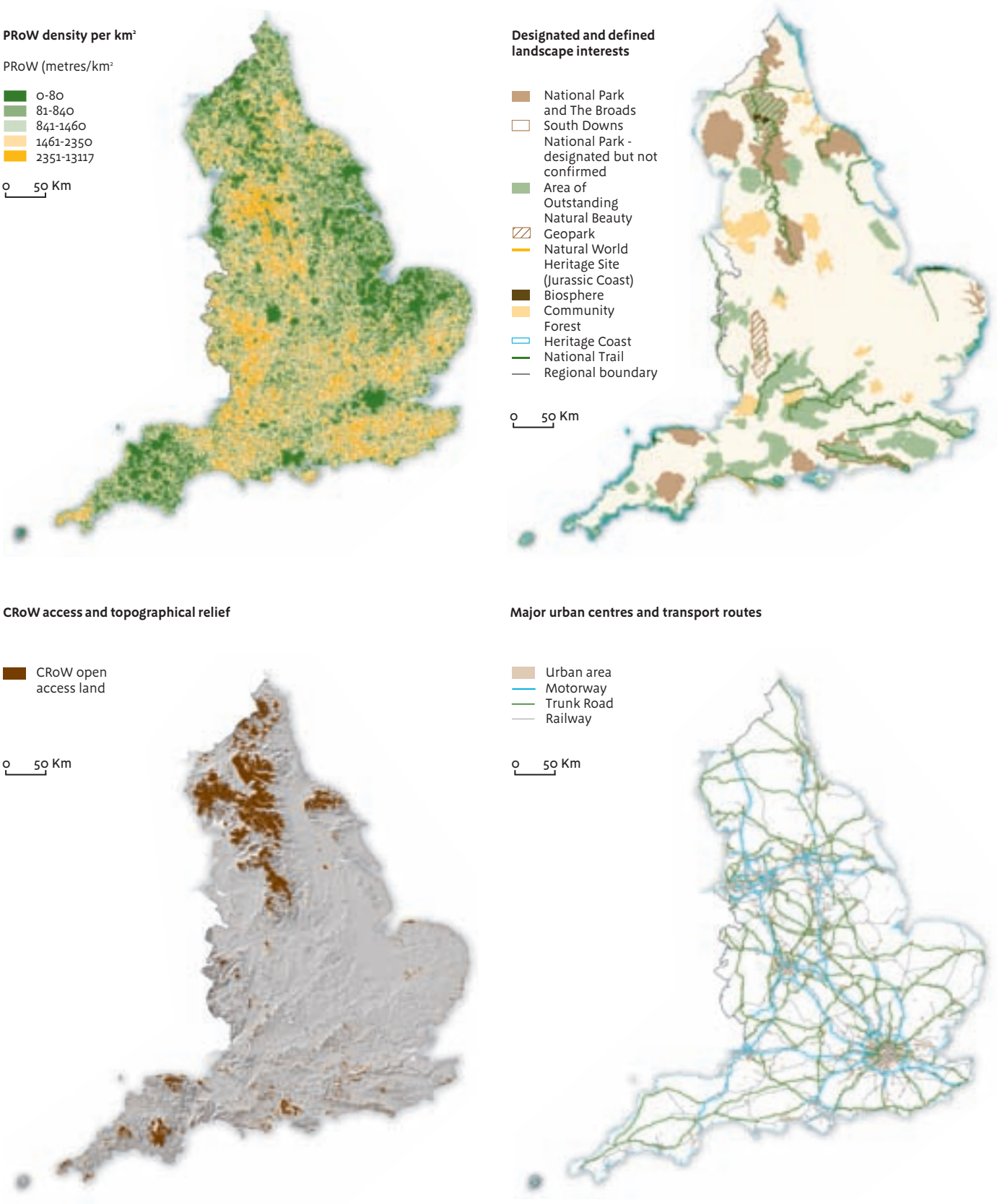
Table 4.4 Lengths of PRoWs in England

Type	Length (km)	% of total PRoW s
Footpaths	146,470	78
Bridleways	32,340	17
Restricted byway	5,950	3
Byways open to all traffic (BOAT)	3,740	2
Total length of rights of way	**188,500**	**100**

Owing to creations, diversions, extinguishments and path claims, these figures are never completely static. Discrepancies between these figures and those on Natural England's website are due to rounding.

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

Figure 4.1 Spatial variation in Public rights of way (PRoW) and other features



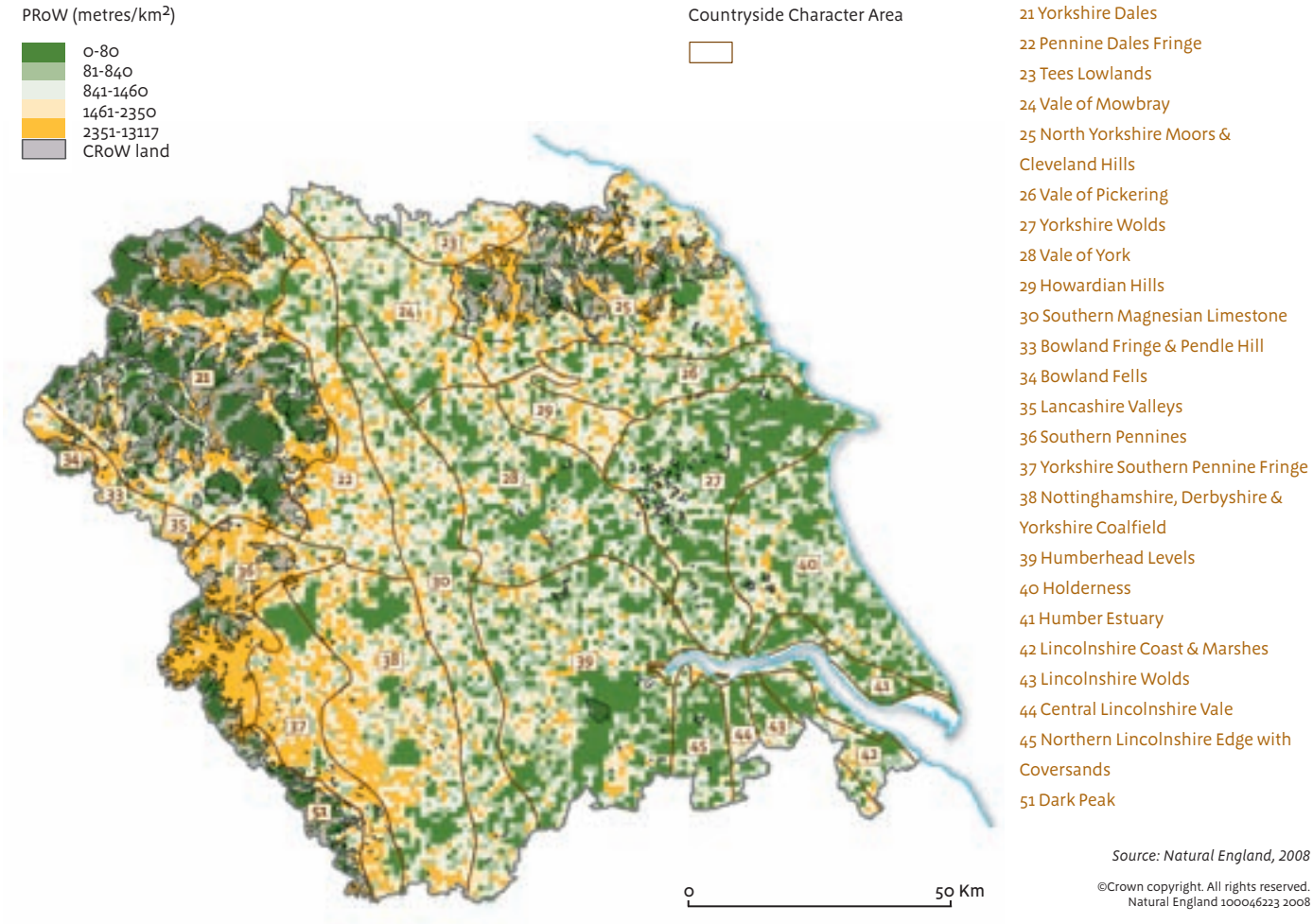
At a regional scale, it is possible to relate this variation to the different landscapes that people can enjoy. For example, the map for the Yorkshire and Humber Region (Figure 4.2) reveals a significant difference between the upland areas (Pennines, North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales) and the lowland areas in the south and east of the region. This difference is at least in part a reflection of the different patterns of land use historically. However, further work is required at a finer scale to analyse this variation in access provision.

Public rights of way must be in good condition to fulfill their potential for public use and enjoyment. The Rights of Way Condition Survey 2000 (Countryside Agency 2000) highlighted the following problems on public rights of way in England:

- Walkers, cyclists and horse riders could all expect to encounter a serious problem approximately every 2 – 2.5 km.
- Carriage drivers and motorists were only able to travel about 1.2 km between serious problems.

Sections 60 to 62 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) place a duty on local highway authorities to prepare Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs). These are intended to be the prime means by which local highway authorities identify the changes required to manage and improve their local rights of way network in order to provide better provision for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and people with mobility problems. They are a key to better public enjoyment of our unique and beautiful landscapes. Of the 134 highway authorities and outer London Boroughs required to produce a RoWIP, 40% have now published a final plan and 44% have a draft ready for approval.

Figure 4.2 Public rights of way within the Yorkshire and the Humber Region related to Character Areas



Source: Natural England, 2008

4.3.2 Access to water

Inland waters such as rivers, canals and enclosed waters such as lakes, ponds and reservoirs provide people with opportunities for recreation. Popular activities include angling, canoeing, sailing, windsurfing, rowing and swimming. In England, there are 14,862 km of major rivers, 42,740 km of minor rivers and 2,307 km of canals – these include 4,308 km of navigable waterways in England (Table 4.5). There are also 1,720 enclosed waters (of 1 ha or more) in England. The report *Water-based Sport and Recreation: the Facts* highlighted the importance of navigable waterways as a recreational resource: watersports (excluding angling) are more popular as an outdoor pursuit than climbing, cricket, skiing or rugby (University of Brighton 2001).

Table 4.5 Navigable waterways by Region

Region*	Population -10,000s (1997 figs.)	Total lengths of rivers and canals with public navigation rights (km)	Length per 10,000 people
North	308.6	11	0
NW	639.3	611	1
Y&H	503.7	520	1
EM	415.6	625	1.5
WM	532.1	821	1.5
East Anglia	216.2	592	2.7
SE	1825.3	761	0.4
SW	487.6	369	0.8
England	**4928.3**	**4308**	**0.1**

*1997 standard statistical regions (Source: University of Brighton, 2001)

4.3.3 Open access

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW), the Countryside Agency had a statutory duty to map "access land". This statutory responsibility has now passed to Natural England. Some of this land already had access provision, for example some registered commons or National Trust access land. Natural England maintains various statutory and non-statutory maps of areas of open access land including:

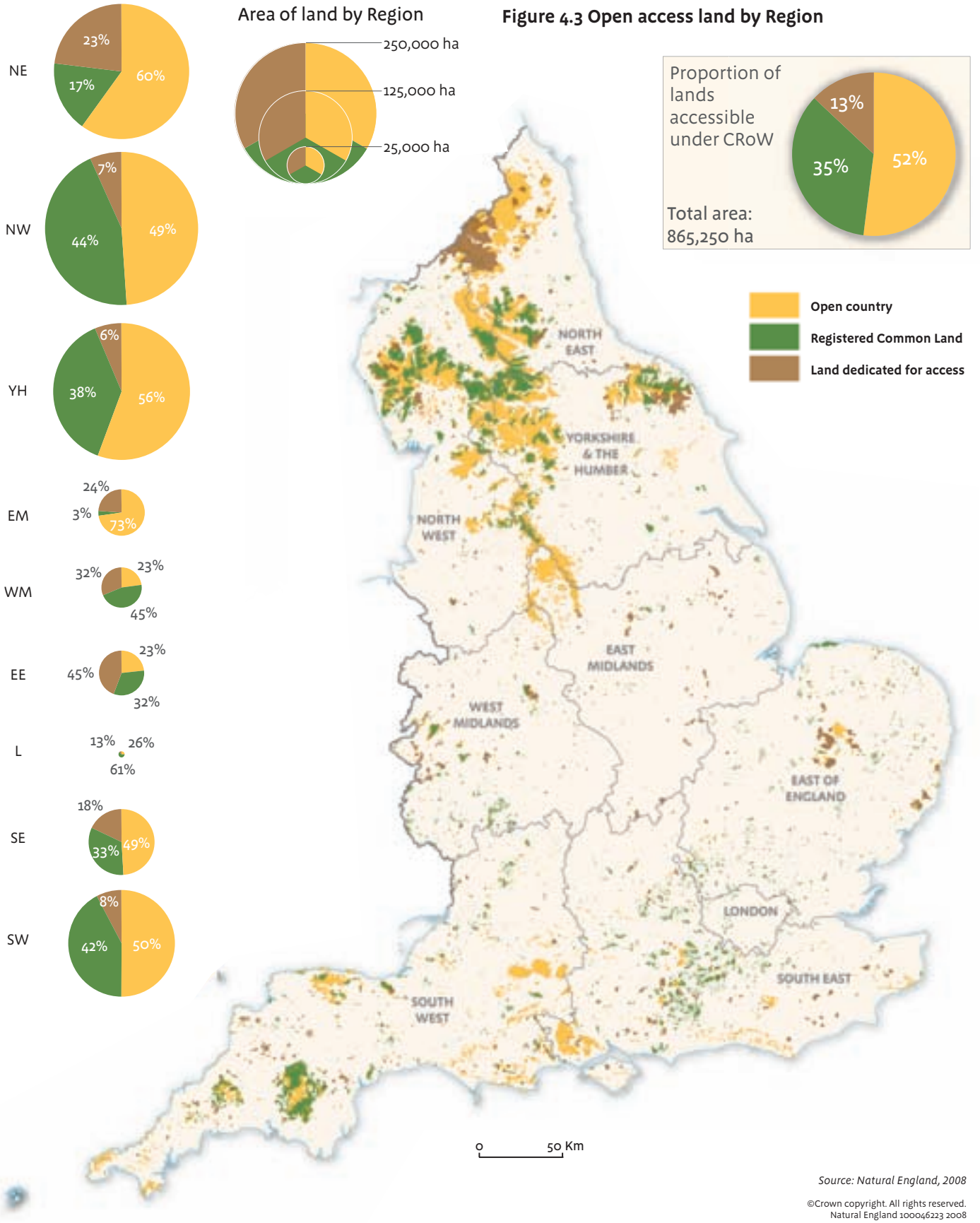
- land mapped as registered common land and open country (mountain, moor, heath and down) over which the CRoW Act created a new right of access.
- land dedicated by its owner for access under CRoW section 16 for permanent access.
- land subject to pre-existing open access rights, sometimes including rights to ride horses as well as walk – for example over urban commons.

The Countryside Agency identified 865,250 ha of land that meets the definition under CRoW of 'open country' or registered common land and is usually accessible for public access, subject to any local restrictions (see below). (An additional 70,431 ha meets the criteria but is currently excluded from public access due to its present usage.) Six per cent of England now has CRoW open access land, including 42% of National Parks and 20% of AONBs.

Through section 16 of the CRoW Act, the Forestry Commission has dedicated 141,851 ha of its freehold estate for public access. A further 1,989 ha has been dedicated by 25 local authorities and private individuals or organisations.

There is regional variation in the extent of open access land, with the largest areas in the four regions containing upland and common land. Indeed these contain 86% of open access land (Figure 4.3, Table 4.6).

Figure 4.3 Open access land by Region



Source: Natural England, 2008

Table 4.6 Open access land by Region

Region	Total area of Region (ha)	Total access land (ha)	% of total area
NE	867,642	159,968	18.4
NW	1,492,362	264,113	17.7
YH	1,556,403	215,309	13.8
EM	1,581,076	33,182	2.1
WM	1,300,380	18,852	1.4
EE	1,957,410	14,463	0.7
L	159,472	831	0.5
SE	1,940,740	49,599	2.6
SW	2,436,589	108,933	4.5
England	**13,292,074**	**865,250**	**6.5**

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

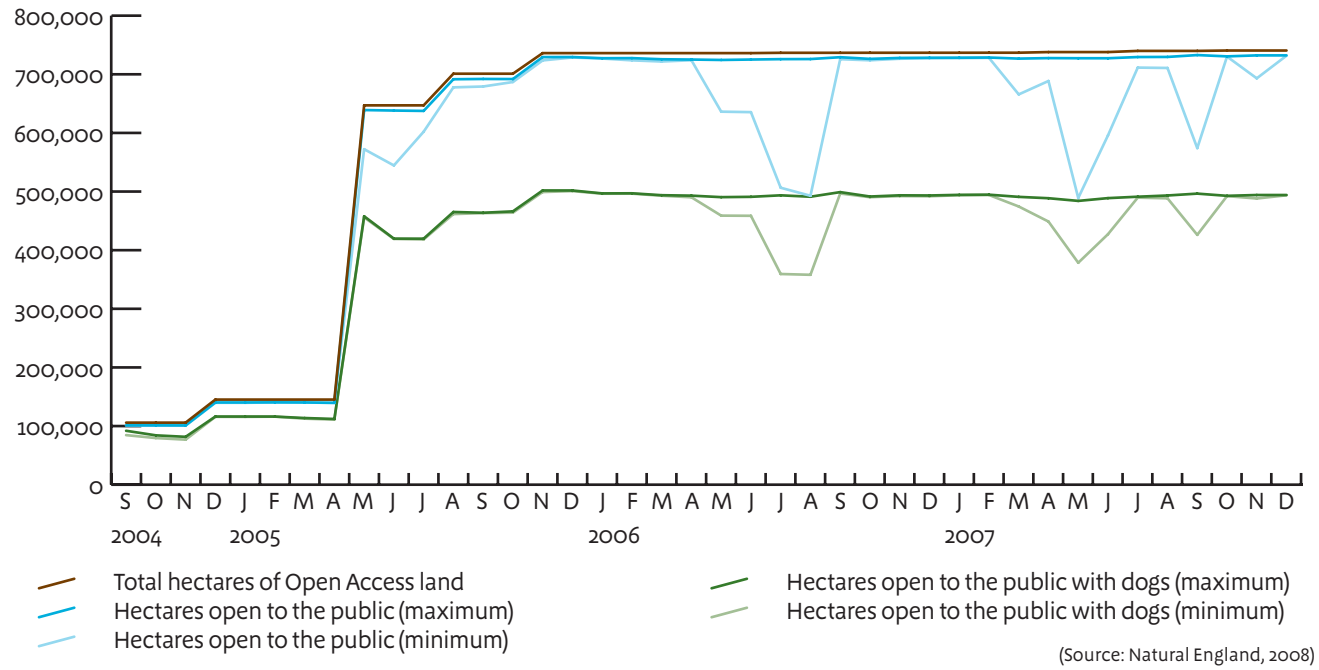
CRoW access rights are subject to a range of restrictions, both permanent and temporary. Natural England manages this restrictions system, together with the National Park Authorities (for land within National Parks) and Forestry Commission (for any dedicated woodland). Monitoring has shown that:

- Less than 1% of access land is formally restricted for nature conservation reasons. These restrictions are usually seasonal, and may only affect certain types of recreational use.
- Positive access management, such as signage or siting of entry points, has reduced the need for formal restrictions in many cases.
- Integrating both access and nature conservation objectives on a landscape scale can be successfully achieved and implemented in a positive way.

The CRoW access rights were introduced region by region between September 2004 and October 2005. Of this, 230,000 ha are subject to temporary restrictions for people with dogs, mostly on managed grouse moors.

There is some seasonal variation in the amount of CRoW access land available to the public (Figure 4.4). In both 2006 and 2007, there was a decrease in accessible land during spring and early summer. This was due to restrictions at times of exceptional fire severity combined with grouse moor owners exercising their right to restrict access during the nesting season. The graph also shows two periods of exceptional fire severity in September and November 2007.

Figure 4.4 CRoW access land available for access and recreation



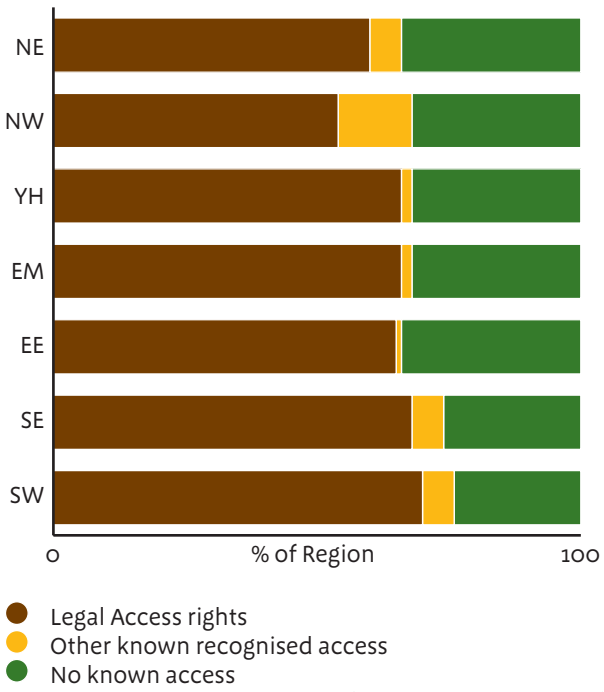
(Source: Natural England, 2008)

4.3.4 Coastal access

There is some form of legal or other recognised access on 70% of England's coast. However, only about half of this access is good quality (Natural England 2007). The other half is poor either because there have never been formal access rights along it, or because existing rights do not join up. In addition, some access has been lost to erosion or is physically unusable. For example, at Runswick Bay the Cleveland Way National Trail used to run along the top of the cliff. In the last decade the cliff has eroded and slumped onto the beach. The National Trail still follows the original mapped line, but is now on the beach, and at high tide is not always useable by walkers.

The average length that someone can walk along the coast in confidence without having to turn around or divert inland is about 4 km, or an hour's walk. There is regional variation in the length of accessible coast, with the Eastern region having the lowest provision and the South West the highest (due in part to the 1,277 km South West Coast Path). However, the proportion of the total coastline that is accessible is similar between regions (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Coastal access by Region



(Source: Natural England, 2008)

4.3.5 Permissive access under agri-environment schemes

Agri-environment scheme agreements, as well as paying for farming in an environmentally sensitive manner, have used public money to purchase public benefits including access. Through this, 4,286 km of linear and 7,158 ha of area permissive access had been funded. This has occurred primarily in the four southern and eastern regions (Figure 4.6). Linear agreements add 2% to the total length of public rights of way, and offer a temporary solution to gaps in the existing network. Most agreements last ten years but many are then renewed for a further ten-year period. The access is therefore temporary but can be long term.

Under the Stewardship Educational Access option 650 agreement holders are paid to host school and group visits, comprising a farm tour and talk about farming, food production and countryside conservation. School groups can visit to learn any curriculum subject, using the farm as an outdoor classroom.

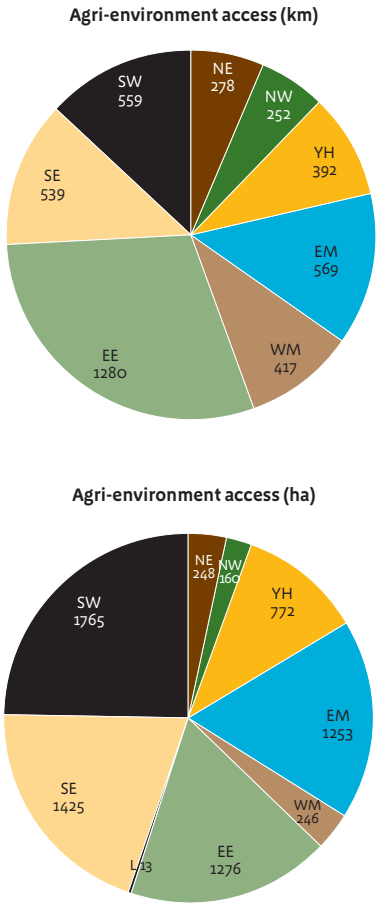
4.3.6 Accessible green space in England

Parks and green space strategies produced under the Government's Planning Policy Guidance (PPG17) identify accessible spaces in urban areas. These include (but are not limited to) natural and semi-natural urban green spaces, cemeteries and churchyards, village greens and land owned by Government bodies (eg MoD).

Green spaces are available in a range of forms, from playing fields to nature reserves, and come in all shapes and sizes. Some are managed mainly for nature conservation (see Section 4.4.5), but here we consider those managed specifically with recreation in mind.

Access to Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt), a strategy to improve access to green space, is described in Chapter 6.

Figure 4.6 Linear and area permissive access under agri-environment schemes



(Source: Natural England, 2008)

Woods for People

Woods for People is an ongoing partnership funded by the Woodland Trust with support from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, the Forestry Commission and the Environment and Heritage Service (Northern Ireland) to create and maintain a UK-wide 'provisional' dataset of accessible woodland. As a result of the information gathered on accessible woodland, the Woodland Trust has undertaken a major analysis of woodland access provision and deficit across the UK. This analysis, *Space for People* (Woodland Trust 2004) proposes a Woodland Access Standard and establishes targets across the UK for opening up existing woods for public access and creating new woods. There are estimated to be 488,240 ha of publicly accessible woodland in England, which is 46% of the woodland area. Accessibility of woodland varies across the country. Around 10% of the population has a 2 ha accessible wood within 500 m of where they live, and 55% of the population a 20 ha wood within 4 km of where they live (Forestry Commission 2006a).

4.3.6.1 Country Parks

The Countryside Commission was given powers to establish Country Parks by the 1968 Countryside Act. The purpose of Country Parks was to provide or improve opportunities for the enjoyment of the countryside by the public. Currently we know of 319 Country Parks, ranging from under 20 ha to around 800 ha in size. The East of England and South East Regions have the highest numbers (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Regional distribution of Country Parks

Region	No of Country Parks
North East	24
North West	43
Yorkshire and The Humber	23
East Midlands	39
West Midlands	30
East of England	57
London	15
South East	58
South West	30

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

4.3.6.2 Doorstep Greens and Millennium Greens

Millennium Greens and Doorstep Greens enable communities to create or enhance local green spaces, predominantly in urban settings (see Section 4.5.2.4). The greens vary in size from less than 1 ha to over 15 ha. Their regional distribution is shown on Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Regional distribution of Millenium Greens and Doorstep Greens

Region	Total Millenium Greens	Total Doorstep Greens
North East	21	28
North West	35	26
Yorkshire and The Humber	31	22
East Midlands	19	26
West Midlands	37	20
East of England	27	24
London	8	10
South East	27	13
South West	40	25

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

4.3.6.3 Town and Village Greens

Town and Village Greens are areas where local inhabitants hold rights to participate in lawful sports and pastimes. They can be recognised where recreational activities have been undertaken for at least 20 years without permission, and without resorting to force or secrecy (irrespective of whether users understood that they held such rights). The 1965 Commons Registration Act enabled the formal registration of Town and Village Greens through local registration authorities. There is no updated national overview of Town and Village Greens. Existing data suggest that there are over 4,300 sites and the average size is just over one hectare (ADAS 2006).

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4.4 Managing the natural environment for enjoyment

Many designated sites and landscapes include provision for access and recreation and, while they do not necessarily confer any additional access rights, they generally imply that access will be better promoted or will be of a higher quality.

4.4.1 National Trails

National Trails are designated long distance routes for walking (and, in some cases, cycling and horse riding) through some of England's most striking landscapes, and offer a range of high quality walking experiences in this country. They have all been created by linking existing local footpaths, bridleways and minor roads and developing new rights of way to fill gaps. Although predominantly established on existing public rights of way, National Trails give people linear access to some of our most attractive landscapes and have higher quality standards of management.

There are 13 National Trails in England (including Offa's Dyke which is partly in Wales) totalling 3,787 km. The first, the Pennine Way was opened in 1965, the most recent, the Cotswold Way, in 2007.

The length of National Trails varies between regions: over 50% is in the South West and South East Regions whereas the West Midlands Region has just 2% (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9 Regional distribution of National Trails

Region	Total length of National Trails in Region (km)
North East	397
North West	382
Yorkshire and The Humber	548
East Midlands	125
West Midlands	69
East of England	156
London	109
South East	724
South West	1,277
England	**3,787**

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

The Trails are managed by highway authorities, with funding largely from Natural England. The standards for the condition of National Trails in England, set in conjunction with highway authority partners in 2000 (Countryside Agency 2001), are monitored annually. This monitoring shows that, overall, National Trails are in very good condition, with the majority of standards being 90+% compliant (Natural England 2006d). The current monitoring regime can only be a "snapshot" as uncontrollable events can affect quality in specific areas at specific times. For example, in the July 2007 summer floods a section of the Cotswold Way National Trail at Coberly was washed away. The damage, which included deep water erosion, was not repaired until February 2008.

Irresponsible off-road vehicle use continues to cause problems and, although changes in legislation and sensitive management have managed to improve standards on some National Trails (eg The Ridgeway), the situation has worsened on others (eg Peddars Way and Thames Path).

The economic benefits of National Trails

As with other public rights of way in England, people do not pay to use National Trails, yet they can generate economic benefits.

The western section of the Ridgeway National Trail runs along ridges of the North Wessex Downs, with views over the Thames Valley to the Cotswolds. Users of this section were willing to pay an average of £1.24 per visit towards maintenance of the Trail in 1996. Aggregated for the 150,000 person days that people spent on the Trail that year, the annual value of the Trail to users was in the region of £186,000. This exceeds the cost of maintaining the path, estimated at £106,750 in 2001, funded by the Countryside Agency (now part of Natural England), local highway authorities and landowners. These findings indicate that expenditure on maintenance of the Trail is in the interests of society.

Source: Bennett *et al.* 2003

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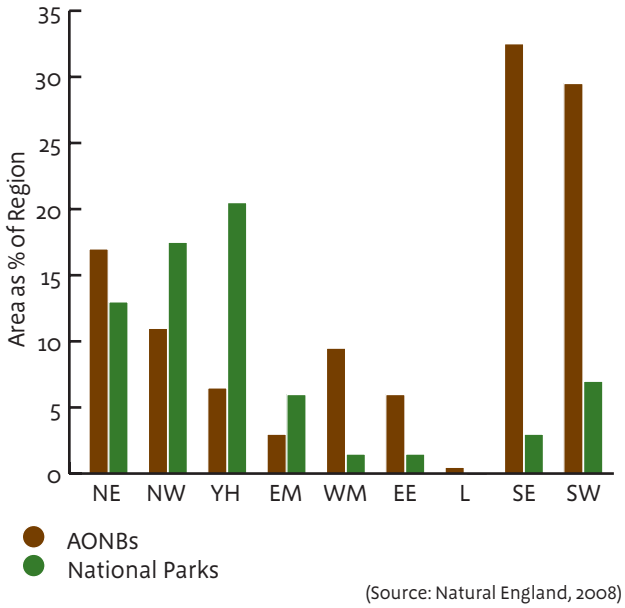
4.4.2 National Parks, AONBs and Heritage Coasts

The designation and definition of National Parks, AONBs and Heritage Coasts is dealt with in Section 2.3.1. Here we describe the access opportunities enjoyed in these areas.

4.4.2.1 Regional distribution

The high quality landscapes of the National Parks are mainly in the north and west, with the AONBs mainly in the south and south west (Figure 4.1). The three northern regions have the greatest proportion of land designated as National Park, the largest being Yorkshire and the Humber Region with 20% (Figure 4.7). Sixty six per cent of the total area of AONB is in the South East and South West Regions. In contrast, only 8% occurs within the East Midlands and East of England Regions. Thirty one per cent of the area of the South East and South West Regions is designated as AONB, in contrast to less than 5% of the East Midlands and East of England Regions. As the majority of the population lives in the south and east, there are varying opportunities for people to enjoy designated high-quality landscapes.

Figure 4.7 Regional distribution of National Parks and AONBs



(Source: Natural England, 2008)

The 32 stretches of Heritage Coast, managed for their natural beauty and accessibility, are spread around the coast of England but with a particular concentration in the South West Region (Figure 2.6).

4.4.2.2 Access

As National Park and AONB designations do not confer any additional access, public rights of way are an important means of public access to protected landscapes. There is considerable variation between National Parks: the Lake District has 3,595 km of public rights of way whereas Dartmoor has only 682 km and the Broads only 312 km (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10 Public rights of way in National Parks

National Park	Km				
	FP	BW	RUPP	BOAT	Total
Northumberland	529	368	0	0	897
Lake District	2,896	673	0	26	3,595
Yorkshire Dales	1,483	634	8	21	2,146
North York Moors	1,506	752	0	15	2,273
Peak District	2,124	258	29	0	2,411
Broads	278	32	0	2	312
New Forest	-	-	-	-	-
Exmoor	438	464	63	0	965
Dartmoor	331	316	35	0	682
Total	**9,585**	**3,497**	**135**	**64**	**13,281**

FP =footpath

BW = bridleway

RUPP = road used as public path

BOAT = byway open to all traffic

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

CRoW open access land covers 42% of National Parks, with the Yorkshire Dales having the largest proportion designated (Table 4.11), and 20% of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The amount of open access land in each AONB ranges from 126,133 ha in the North Pennines to 3 ha in the Howardian Hills. Thirty nine per cent of AONBs have less than 2% open access land. There are 14 AONBs larger than 50,000 ha, but, of these, only four have more than 15,000 ha open access land, three of which are in the northern uplands.

Table 4.11 National Parks and open access land

National Park	Total area of National Park (ha)	Total open access land (ha)	% of total area
Northumberland	105,106	45,884	44
Lake District	229,178	114,546	50
Yorkshire Dales	176,773	109,636	62
North York Moors	144,074	46,893	33
Peak District	143,768	3,765	37
Broads	30,189	148	1
New Forest	57,096	16,892	30
Exmoor	69,291	17,598	25
Dartmoor	95,558	37,824	40
Total	**1,051,033**	**443,186**	**42**

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

4.4.3 Community Forests

The community forest programme was established in 1990 to test the use of multipurpose forestry as a mechanism to regenerate 5,230 square kilometres of countryside and green space around England's towns and cities. The programme sought to integrate forestry with recreational interests and address problems of poor land management and despoiled land, thereby enhancing the health, wellbeing and quality of life of local communities. There are 12 Community Forests (Figure 2.6).

A 2005 evaluation report showed that the community forest programme has performed well in terms of opening up rights of way, exceeding the target for 1995-2003 of 2372 km by 57% (Land Use Consultants & SQW 2005).

4.4.4 Nature Reserves

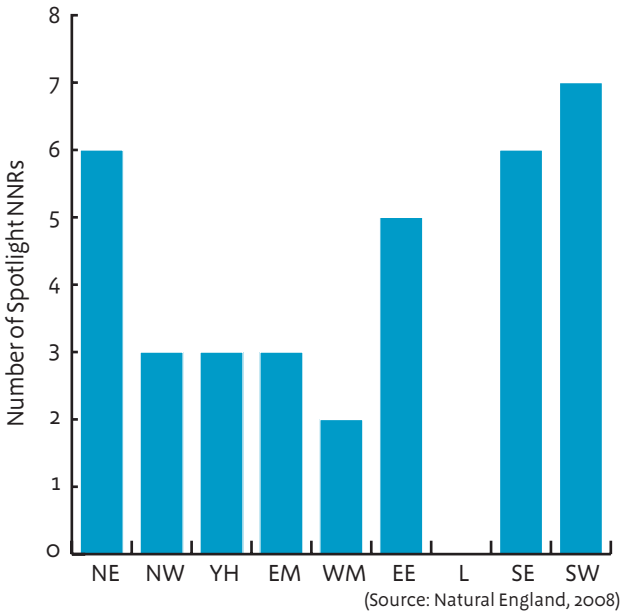
Although their primary reason for designation is nature conservation, many nature reserves offer and encourage access and the opportunity to enjoy and engage with nature.

4.4.4.1 National Nature Reserves

Our 222 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are the jewels in England's wildlife and geological crown, and offer excellent opportunities for people to access the countryside. They are managed to ensure their special wildlife and natural features are secured for future generations and allow people from all parts of society to learn about, appreciate and enjoy nature. They are either owned or controlled by Natural England or held by approved bodies such as the Wildlife Trusts (Section 35 NNRs).

The great majority of NNRs have public access with some subject to seasonal closures. (A very few are closed more permanently because tenure of the land does not allow public access, the site is unsafe, or the wildlife interest is so fragile.) Natural England has classified 135 NNRs for their access and visitor provisions into four categories. There are 35 Spotlight NNRs (Figure 4.8), chosen because they represent the best visitor experience to these special places. These reserves have high visitor standards, covering everything from signing, interpretation and leaflets, to the development and maintenance of tracks, trails, car parks, boardwalks, huts and hides. Many NNRs offer volunteering opportunities, local walks, talks and events.

Figure 4.8 Regional distribution of Spotlight NNRs



(Source: Natural England, 2008)

Table 4.12 Open access land on NNRs

Access Category	Area (ha)	% of total NNR area
Mapped as open country	20,372	21
Registered common land	10,485	11
Total (excluding overlap)	30,813	32

(Source: Natural England, 2008)

Thirty two per cent of NNR land is mapped as open access (Table 4.12).

4.4.4.2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest

510,000 ha of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) have public access (47% of the total area of SSSIs). There is increased emphasis on encouraging public access to these special sites via agri-environment and other grant schemes.

4.4.5 Local Nature Reserves

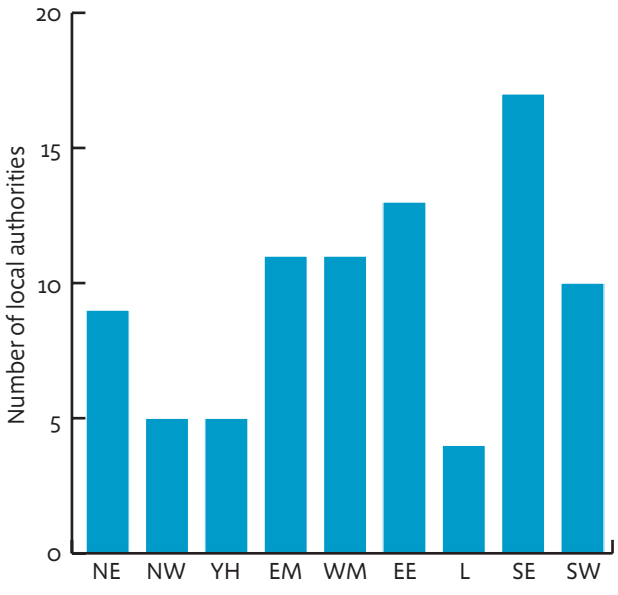
Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are designated by local authorities for the purpose of giving access to natural green space often in an urban setting. They are places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally. Most are managed by local authorities or sometimes local Wildlife Trusts. They offer people special opportunities to study or learn about nature or simply to enjoy it; Natural England recommends that LNRs are capable of being managed with "opportunities for study, research or enjoyment of nature as the priority concern".

There are 1,321 LNRs in England covering around 40,000 ha, which is 0.3% of England. They range from coastal headlands, ancient woodlands and flower-rich meadows to former inner city railways, abandoned landfill sites and industrial areas now re-colonised by wildlife.

LNRs are most frequent in urban situations (urban 29%, urban fringe 50%, rural 21%; sample 1,117). LNRs are therefore easily accessible to those in our towns and cities. Although the urban sites may not offer the vista of open moorland or coast, they give immediate access to the natural environment.

There is wide variation in the number of LNRs per local authority, with the highest being in County Durham (20). About 85 local authorities (ie about 20%) do not have any LNRs (Table 4.9).

Figure 4.9 Local authorities with no LNR, by Region



(Source: Natural England, 2008)

From resistance to involvement

Plans to turn an area of Suffolk's Breckland into a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) met with resistance, until people understood the reasons why. Talks, workshops, volunteering, practical conservation days – as well as continued consultation – have all helped local people feel the reserve belongs to them.

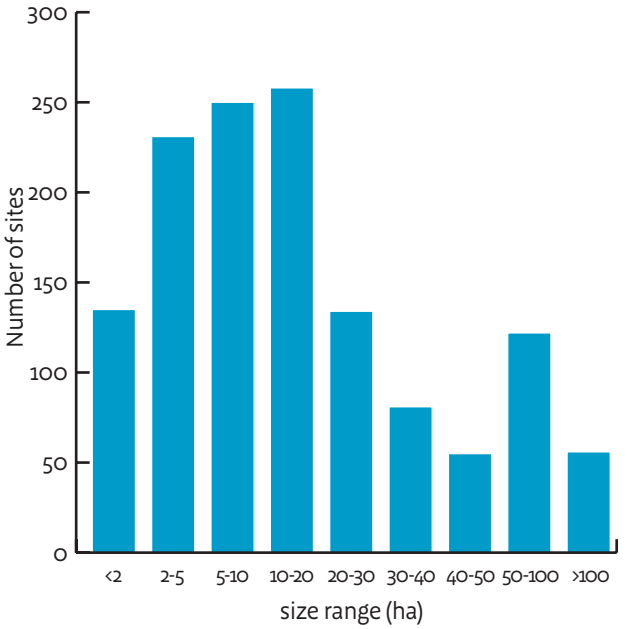
Maidscross Hill LNR is leased by Forest Heath District Council, and their Community Liaison Officer has described to local people how the reserve would work. For example, he explained how controlling scrub and bracken on the heath was needed to protect rare plants such as Spanish catchfly *Silene otites* and Breckland thyme *Thymus serpyllum*.

Local people were worried that their access might be restricted and were concerned about how the site would be managed. These concerns were dealt with and now locals are actually helping manage the reserve and community involvement has really taken off.

© Natural England

LNRs range markedly in size (Figure 4.10); the largest is Farndale, North Yorkshire (1,012 ha) and the smallest is Nore Hill Pinnacle, Surrey (0.01 ha). Most are over 2 ha but two thirds are less than 20 ha in size.

Figure 4.10 Size range of LNRs



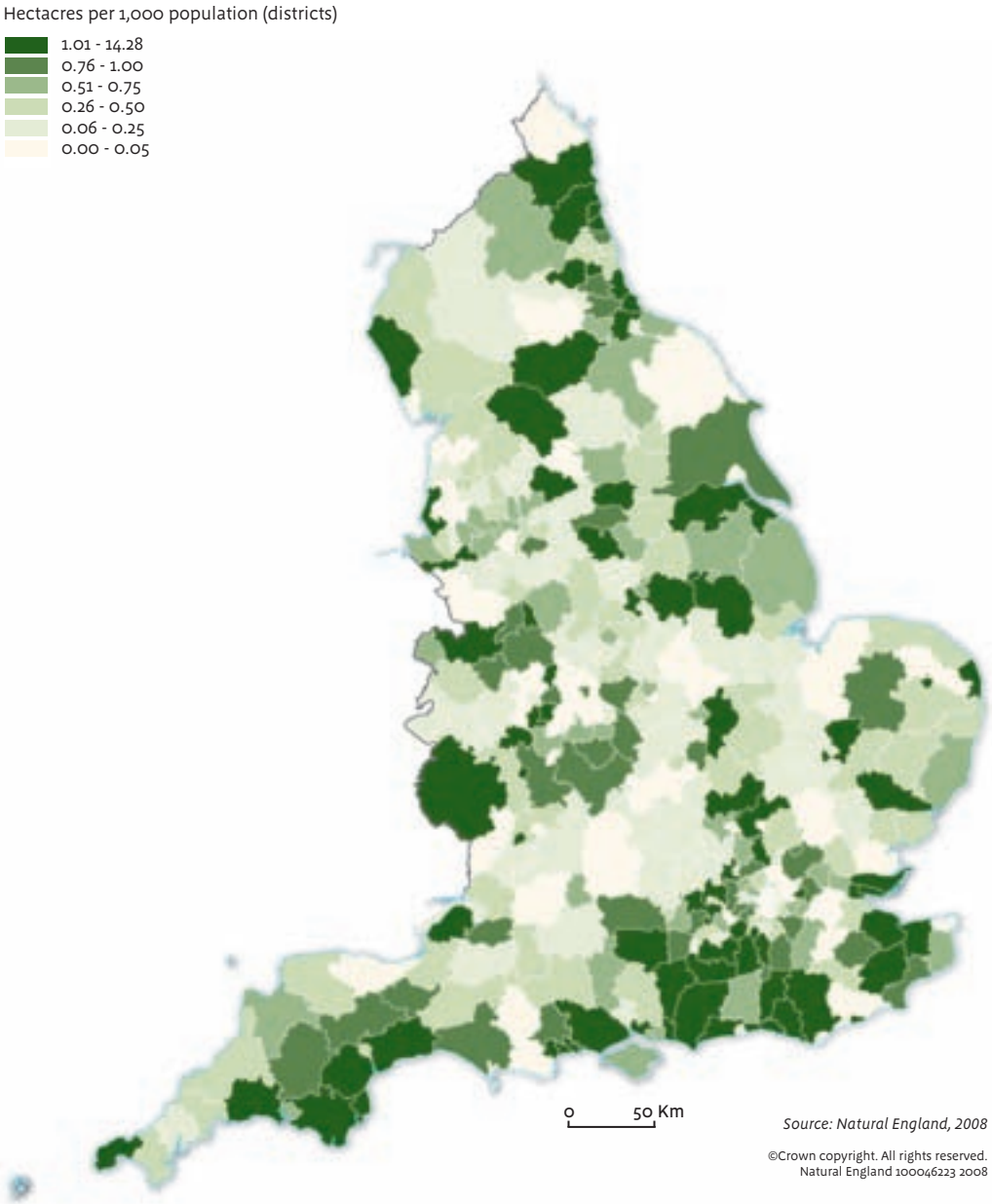
(Source: Natural England, 2008)

There is a belt of low LNR density running across the country roughly from the Severn estuary to the Wash (Figure 4.11).

Other opportunities

There is a wide range of other opportunities for engaging with the natural environment on reserves (including Section 35 NNRs) managed by voluntary sector partners including, but not restricted to Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, Woodland Trust, National Trust and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. These opportunities also include Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks (see Sections 2.3.3 and 2.4.2), which allow for and promote public enjoyment of high quality landscape and habitat.

Figure 4.11 LNR distribution against population density



Source: Natural England, 2008

4.5 Inspiring people

The perceived social public benefits from the natural environment are many and varied, ranging from health and wellbeing to social cohesion and economic growth.

Research into the relationships between people and the natural environment is a developing area amongst stakeholders and the academic community. Although the links appear to be inherently obvious, firm evidence of the benefits currently remains limited. Natural England is only one amongst many with an interest in exploring and developing a body of evidence around the relationships between people and the environment and our evolving work in this area is therefore highly reliant on successful partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders and the academic community.

To see a world in a grain of sand,

And a heaven in a wild flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,

An eternity in an hour.

William Blake

4.5.1 The natural environment as a source of inspiration

England's landscapes and wildlife have been a source of artistic, spiritual and cultural inspiration to painters, musicians, sculptors, poets and writers for many centuries. From the seascapes of Turner to the idyllic pastoral landscapes of Constable or the poetry of John Clare and the prose of Thomas Hardy, we have a rich cultural resource.

According to Nature in Art, the world's first museum dedicated exclusively to art inspired by nature: 'Artists have the uncanny ability to see the natural world through fresh eyes. They can draw our attention to both the minutest detail and the bigger picture. Art can prick the conscience, sow the seed of awareness and nurture appreciation of our natural world.' (English Nature 2004a). The strong links between art and our National Nature Reserves are revealed in Rollins (2003).

Evidence suggests that, despite all the technological advances around us, the human brain still responds to nature. The Biophilia Hypothesis (Kellert & Wilson 1993), first proposed by EO Wilson attempted to explain this response as:

> *"the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms. Innate means hereditary and hence part of human nature"*

This underlying fundamental relationship between nature and man goes some way to explain why creating more and easier access to the natural environment, whether physical or virtual, can result in a range of benefits to our quality of life.

Wild words for wild places

A series of poetry workshops was organised at the four large National Nature Reserves in Northumbria. At Lindisfarne and Castle Eden Dene, the workshops were open to anyone – local people and visitors. At Teesmouth, there was a special event for one group of people from Stockton. In Moor House-Upper Teesdale the poets were children and teachers from the tiny school overlooking the reserve.

The final work, a 56-page book called *Wild words for wild places*, features wonderful words from children, conservation volunteers, established writers' groups and people who just wanted to give writing a go. It proved to be an inspiration, a way of bringing people even closer to the countryside around them.

4.5.2 Benefits from access to natural green space

A recent review (Newton 2007) found that engagement with the natural environment brought the following benefits:

- populations in areas with higher levels of greenery have higher levels of physical activity and lower levels of obesity;
- "green" exercise enhanced mood, improved self-esteem and lowered blood pressure more effectively than exercise alone;
- reduced stress and improved recovery from stress;
- improved mental alertness, attention and cognitive performance;
- reduced levels of depression;
- reduced levels of aggression and violent behaviour;
- enhanced social interaction.

Newton concluded that more research is required to find out if and how society benefits from more people enjoying the natural environment.

The following sections examine current evidence on the benefits from access to natural green space, relating to young people, under-represented groups, health and wellbeing, and community cohesion.

4.5.2.1 Young people

Natural green space provides both informal and formal opportunities for young people. Play is a vital part of a child's healthy and fulfilled development, and there is evidence that children often prefer to play in natural or wild places, and that direct experience of playing in the natural world helps children develop their cognitive skills of balance, co-ordination and spatial awareness and encourages children to work constructively together (Maxey 1999) . A lack of opportunity to play can result in poorer ability in motor tasks, less physical activity, poorer ability to cope with stressful situations, reduced ability to assess risk and poorer social skills (Lester & Maudsley 2006).

Recent research commissioned by Natural England (Ward-Thomson *et al*. 2006), has investigated the role that 'wild adventure space' can play in meeting the developmental needs of young people, in the context of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders for teenagers and concerns about poor mental health, obesity and lack of physical activity in the population. The study set out evidence of the potential benefits for individuals and the wider community arising from young people's engagement with wild adventure space, barriers to obtaining these benefits, gaps in understanding, issues for further study, and opportunities for provision of relevant and necessary resources. It found that engagement with outdoor activities has the potential to confer a multitude of benefits on young people's development and therefore on society as a whole. It recommended the action needed to take this work forward and identified a range of potential partners.

A review of the benefits of more formal, educational access to natural green space (Rickinson *et al*. 2004) focused on three types of outdoor activities: fieldwork and visits, outdoor adventure activities and activities in the school grounds or community projects. The key benefits from outdoor adventure activities were increased independence, confidence, self esteem, self efficacy, personal effectiveness and coping strategies. Projects in the school grounds or in the community generated pride in the local area, increased motivation towards learning and a sense of belonging and responsibility.

Baby Birds learn to fly in Sandwell

Sandwell's human fledglings learn about wildlife at the popular 'Baby Birds' parents and toddlers group. The group meets every week in the education room of the RSPB visitor centre at Sandwell Valley Nature Reserve. The meetings are led by a field teacher with the help of the Wildspace! Community Liaison Officer.

The centre provides wildlife-themed activities, wooden toys and cuddly animals in the shape of birds, mammals and insects. The children play outdoors whenever the weather allows while their parents and carers enjoy the fresh air and green surroundings.

© E Woolley

4.5.2.2 Under-represented groups

Research undertaken to support the diversity review (see 4.2.3) has highlighted some of the benefits of engagement with the natural environment to groups that have traditionally not used natural green space. As part of the review, four action research projects tested novel ways for engagement that can be independently sustained. For the participants, the benefits of increased access to outdoor recreation have broadly been improved health, social contact and the confidence to venture out independently into new environments; although some have discovered that a lack of confidence in using public transport affects their participation (Natural England 2006a).

By All Means, one of the action projects, focused on providing access to Kent's countryside for disabled people. Key benefits for participants in the project included increased confidence, as well as improved self esteem and sociability.

Other evidence has highlighted the potential role that access to natural green space can play in the context of education. Anecdotal information from the Forestry Commission's Forest Schools programme, and from rehabilitative pilot programmes with offenders and drug addicts, has suggested that the people who are failed by mainstream education provision are those that benefit most from outdoor environmental activities, both in terms of learning skills and personal development. Natural England is working with the Forestry Commission, the Ministry of Justice and other partners to develop a more robust evidence base about this relationship.

4.5.2.3 Health and wellbeing

There is a growing evidence base around the health and well being benefits of access to the natural environment.

Health inequalities are a significant problem, with people in the poorest areas having the shortest life expectancy and highest infant mortality. Those at risk of the worst health often live in poor environments, which contribute to chronic stress, low self esteem, obesity and physical inactivity. This discrepancy has not improved despite significant investment in the poorest areas. One of the challenges in terms of providing evidence to support this link is the relatively long time lag between interventions designed to improve health and the resulting change in health outcomes.

A large study of over 250,000 people in Holland has shown that the perception of health was related to the percentage of green space within a 3 km radius . Those with more green space felt the most healthy, with the strongest results amongst the poorest people (Maas *et al*. 2005). In Chicago, those living in poverty yet with greenery around are better able to cope with stress and major life events than those with barren surroundings, suggesting that the natural environment can help people cope with stress (Kuo 2001). There is an increasing understanding that physical activity undertaken in a natural environment, so-called 'green exercise', creates an immediate increase in self esteem and a more positive state (Kuo 2001).

Increasingly patients are being advised by health professionals to take physical activity, including walking schemes in the natural environment as well as gym-based activity. The *Walking Your Way to Health Initiative* (WHI) is a joint initiative between Natural England and the British Heart Foundation. WHI is for everyone with an interest in walking for health, but

The benefits of good quality urban green spaces: Queen Square Bristol

Good quality urban green spaces can provide significant economic, environmental, social and health benefits. Green and recreation spaces can attract businesses to an area and in some cases has been a key component of the economic success of new developments.

Prior to restoration in the 1990's, Queen Square in Bristol was bisected by a busy dual carriageway. Much of the square was used for parking and the remaining green space was largely inaccessible. By 1990 around one third of the office space around the square was vacant.

The aim of the restoration was to restore the historical character and create a tranquil public space. The dual carriageway was closed, parking was restricted and a pleasant green space was created.

Use of the square by pedestrians has increased markedly and a strong community of small professional businesses has developed. The business occupancy rate is high for properties overlooking the square.

Properties on the square command 16% higher prices than similar buildings situated just two streets away with no square to overlook. Higher property values are not a benefit per se but are a partial reflection (proxy) of the value of some of the above benefits that residents receive as a result of being in close proximity to good quality green space. Using differences in property prices as a measure of value is likely to provide an underestimate. For example it is likely that such measures will not capture all the above benefits and will not include an assessment of the benefits for non-resident visitors.

Source: CABE SPACE 2005

particularly those who take little exercise or who live in areas of poor health. The initiative offers information, support and encouragement to complete beginners, existing walkers and health and leisure professionals. WHI has helped to create over 525 local health walk schemes with volunteer walk leaders helping people to start and continue with physical exercise to benefit their physical and mental wellbeing (Natural England 2008a). There are sister schemes in Scotland and Wales. Care farming is an initiative in which commercial farms, woodlands and market gardens work with health and social care agencies to provide basic farming activities to improve participants' physical and mental health and wellbeing. A recent report (Hine *et al.* 2008) found that 64% of the care-farming participants surveyed experienced an improvement in their self esteem. Other reported benefits include improved physical health, independence, formation of a work habit and development of social skills. In a case study on a persistent offenders scheme on a care farm in Shropshire, West Mercia constabulary estimate that the savings to the community on just two offenders were £47,741.

4.5.2.4 Community cohesion

A sense of place, combining both our environment and our community, gives us an identity and a feeling of belonging, and a number of initiatives are designed to contribute to this sense of place.

The aim of the *Doorstep Greens Evaluation*, launched in April 2001 (Parks Agency 2005), was to provide grants of between £10,000 to £150,000 to local communities to help them to create and manage their own special local open space. Almost £13 million was provided by the Big Lottery Fund as part of the *Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities* programme with a further £15 million donated from other funders. By the end of 2006, the initiative had achieved 194 individual Doorstep Greens. The projects have nearly all been led by the community, which retain a dominant role in the planning, development and implementation.

4.5.3 Changing public behaviours

The broad objectives of enhancing and protecting the natural environment can only be secured through widespread public support and action. There is a widely held assumption that engagement with the natural environment can motivate people to espouse pro-environmental behaviours. However, there appears to be little or no evidence of the extent to which this engagement then leads to 'green' and ethical consumption choices or on the impact that those choices make on the individual's actual 'eco-footprint'.

This is confirmed in recent work on understanding and influencing environmental behaviour (Defra 2008b). This study reported that the greatest influences on people's behaviour are their perceptions of what is approved and accepted by the groups they identify with, particularly the 'micro-communities' with whom they interact – neighbours, friends in the pub or colleagues at work.

The study also highlighted the patterns of disconnection that exist between espoused values and actual behaviours. For example, unwillingness to reduce driving and air travel emerges as a particular barrier to reducing unsustainable consumption.

There is a requirement to secure more evidence and a better understanding of the issues at play here, and on this basis to develop more effective approaches to changing public behaviours.

Kirkby Thore Doorstep Green

The Sanderson's Croft Estate in the village of Kirkby Thore, near Penrith, has about 70 houses, most of which are occupied by housing association tenants. Although the estate houses many families, before the Doorstep Green project began there was nowhere for the children to play. A traditional playground had been vandalised some time ago and the play equipment removed.

Kirkby Thore's 0.28 ha Doorstep Green has been created following the demolition of three houses and two rows of garages in the centre of the estate by the owners Eden Housing Association. With concerns over the estate's poor reputation, empty houses and no waiting list, Eden Housing together with local residents felt that the Doorstep Green presented a good opportunity to improve the estate.

The project has contributed to restoring pride in the area and creating a framework for long-term sustainability, and all the properties are now let. This shows how high quality green space can influence choice of housing and improve the reputation of a residential area.

Chapter 4 Enjoying the natural environment

Evidence gaps

Areas where we believe we need more evidence on the condition of England's natural environment, how it is used and the most effective mechanisms to address the challenges we face.

1 **People's use of the natural environment including the extent and nature of their engagement with green space locally.**

2 **Nature and scale of the benefits to individuals, groups and society from engagement with the local environment.**

3 **People's motivation for, and preferred methods of, engaging with the natural environment.**

4 **Relationship between engagement with the natural environment and people's motivation to adopt pro-environmental behaviours.**

5 **The socio-economic benefits arising from people accessing the natural environment.**