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Paper 5:
Planning for outdoor recreation

A report for Natural England's
outdoor recreation strategy

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Executive summary

In May 2005 the Outdoor Recreation Strategy Project Board made up of representatives from the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Rural Development Service jointly commissioned Henley Centre to assess the future of demand for outdoor recreation over the next 20 years. This paper, concerning the key influences on planning, spatial and other frameworks, is one of the five key papers Henley Centre were commissioned to produce. Others in this series are concerned with the demand for outdoor recreation, supply of places for outdoor recreation, health links to outdoor recreation and the impact of outdoor recreation, (see Paper 1: Background and introduction to research).

As part of the process, Henley Centre identified the key drivers of change in spatial and other planning frameworks, as well as the barriers, the uncertainties and the critical issues that arise for the future of outdoor recreation.

The workshop stage of the project process (see appendix C: Trends assessment workshop presentation) prioritised the following eleven drivers out of a list of 38 (see appendix B: Potential drivers of change in outdoor recreation to 2020) as the principal influences on future spatial and other planning frameworks:

- Future of planning structures
  - Uncertainty about how and at what level future governance of planning policy and decisions will be made, linked to uncertainty about the level of devolution and the future of regional and local Government
- Changing urban landscape
  - The changing urban landscape and focus on the 'liveability' agenda, and improvement of public spaces, outlined in the Urban White Paper[1]
- Fragmentation of leisure
  - The increasingly diverse and fragmented nature of leisure and the difficulties associated with predicting future demand
- Sustainable communities
  - The drive for more sustainable housing and development of communities, as outlined in the Sustainable Communities Plan[2]
- Integrating the needs of conservation and recreation
  - The need to strategically manage the demands of leisure and conservation together, and the differing forms of outdoor recreation, to ensure benefits for all participants in outdoor recreation and the environment
- Growing tensions over transport
  - Tensions over transport policy, infrastructure development and increasing access to outdoor recreation
- Convenience culture

  - Consumers demand for every to be convenient to access and use – 'on their doorstep'
- Changing Government priorities
  - The shifting nature of Government priorities and planning, the relative positioning of outdoor recreation among these priorities and their overall impact on priorities within planning and spatial frameworks
- Lifestyles of children and young people
  - The nature of young people's attitudes to recreation and the outdoors and relative influence of technology, urbanisation and peer pressure on these attitudes
- Diversification
  - The increasing diversification of land use and the traditional farm business, driven by global economic forces, CAP reform and shifts in support for agriculture
- Drive for greater physical activity, mental health and well being
  - Pressures on public spending from obesity and mental health, and push for more physical activity, alongside a greater societal focus on improving mental health and overall well being.

To ascertain the key uncertainties resulting from the drivers, they were analysed using a futures mapping process (see 'Paper 1: Background and Introduction to research' and 'appendix A: Mapping the impact' for more detail). This process highlighted those drivers which were both influential in relation to future spatial and planning frameworks but also uncertain due to the nature of their relationship with other drivers.

Drivers that emerged from this process as both important and uncertain and therefore raising some uncertainties in relation to the future of spatial and planning frameworks, and their impact on the future of outdoor recreation were as follows:

- Fragmentation of Leisure
- Changing urban landscape
- Sustainable Communities
- Tensions over Transport
- Drive for greater physical activity, mental health and well being
- Integration of Conservation and Recreation

As a consequence of the mapping process and further analysis of these drivers and the relative degree of influence, the following critical issues emerge for the future of outdoor recreation:

- Are outdoor recreation arguments fully understood in relation to national, regional and local planning structures?
- Can outdoor recreation be made more convenient through integration into future planning frameworks?

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- How far will leisure and outdoor recreation arguments be heard in current and future transport debates?
- How can the needs of often conflicting and increasingly fragmented forms of outdoor recreation be more effectively integrated?
- How can demand for high value / honey pot sites be better managed within future spatial and planning frameworks?

Many of the challenges raised by these questions appear to be uniquely time limited. In many cases, e.g. in relation to the changing urban landscape, there is a small, and potentially opportune time window to influence future planning frameworks and decisions. If this time window is lost many of the potential influences on future planning frameworks could pose potential threats to the future of outdoor recreation.

The future strategy may therefore wish to look at the issues arising from this paper as a priority, particularly the requirement for a clear business case for including the needs of outdoor recreation, the need to think about the outdoors in a broader context of urban as well as a more traditional rural context, and the need for a clear unity and focus when discussing these issues with relevant Government Departments and other decision makers at the regional and local level.

1. Background

Natural England will be a new organisation constructed from the merger of English Nature, the Rural Development Service, and the Landscape Access and Recreation division of the Countryside Agency. In May 2005, the Natural England partnership commissioned five papers from the Henley Centre to inform the development of a strategy for outdoor recreation. The combined papers focussed on the question:

"What are the main factors which will inform the development of outdoor recreation in England over the next 20 years and what are the implications of these for Natural England's outdoor recreation strategy between now and 2015?"

Each of the six papers focuses on a separate dimensions affecting the future of outdoor recreation:

- Background and introduction to research
- Demand for outdoor recreation
- Health and outdoor recreation
- Supply of places for outdoor recreation
- Planning for outdoor recreation
- Impact of outdoor recreation

This paper is the fifth of these and focused on the question:

"How are national, regional and local planning and spatial frameworks likely to develop over the next 20 years and what risks and opportunities does this create in relation to Natural England's long term strategy for outdoor recreation?"

The other five papers and the appendices, which accompanies the series, are referenced throughout this report.

1.1 A definition of outdoor recreation

Outdoor recreation includes many different activities. As a result, a concise definition is difficult to establish. For the purposes of the papers, however, outdoor recreation can be broadly defined to include;

- Just being outdoors
- Creative activities
- Health or relaxation
- Utility journeys

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- Informal games and play
- High adrenalin, non-competitive activities
- Commercially run activities
- Study of the natural environment
- Educational activities and programmes
- Conservation volunteering
- Sustainable journeys to outdoor recreation

For a more detailed description of outdoor recreation please refer to 'Paper 1: Background and introduction to research'.

Planning is a significant issue in relation to many aspects of outdoor recreation, particularly the relative supply and demand for outdoor recreation, and the health outcomes and other impacts that result (all of which are covered in more depth in the other papers in this series).

The Natural England partnership need to understand how existing planning frameworks at a national, regional and local level will develop over the next 20 years. In addition they want to understand the implications of these possible changes for the long term strategy for outdoor recreation in terms of the risks and opportunities that the different influences on planning frameworks might present in the future.

There is a wide range of factors that will influence the shape of planning and spatial frameworks over the next 20 years or so. Some are politically driven and relate to the very nature of the frameworks and how they will fit into the future governance structures, linking across to the future of local authorities and extent of future devolution. Others are more related to societal factors which will have a significant influence on the way key planning decisions are made and the things that they should take into account, such as changing leisure patterns, future housing demand and the continuation of the convenience culture.

The paper first explores these potential influences on the future of national, regional and local planning and spatial frameworks. In doing so the paper considers the impact these influences may have in terms of outdoor recreation.

It then goes on to discuss the various uncertainties that result from combinations of these key influences on the future and how these uncertainties could impact on the future strategy for outdoor recreation. In doing so we examine a number of key issues and questions the strategy will need to address if it is to take account of these future influences and be relevant and flexible enough to adapt to the future possibilities.

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2. Drivers of change

2.1 Introduction

The following section of the report explores a number of 'drivers of change' (factors influencing future planning frameworks) in detail.

A list of 38 drivers was developed through a combination of desk research, review of Henley Centre's knowledge base, review of the Natural England partner organisations and a series of in depth executive interviews. The list was supplemented by two workshops with key stakeholders and experts (see Appendix B: Potential drivers of change in outdoor recreation to 2020).

The drivers discussed below have been selected from this longer list, as those which are thought to be the most important factors influencing future planning and spatial frameworks. The initial prioritisation was carried out through a series of in depth executive interviews and two workshops involving key stakeholders and experts. The drivers selected in these workshops were then supplemented with additional drivers thought by the Henley Centre project team to have potential important consequences or implications for future planning and spatial frameworks.

The final list of drivers is as follows:

- Future of planning structures
- Changing urban landscape
- Fragmentation of leisure
- Sustainable communities
- Integration of conservation and recreation
- Growing tensions over transport
- Convenience culture
- Changing Government priorities
- Lifestyles of children and young people
- Diversification
- Drive for greater physical activity, mental health and well being

The following discussion takes each of these drivers in turn below. Supporting commentary, particularly from the executive interviews, workshops, customer focus groups and other evidence, is provided on each of the drivers in order to outline why each is felt to be a significant influence on future planning and spatial frameworks. Possible implications of each are also explored. Unlike some of the other papers in this series we have not provided firm conclusions on whether these influences on planning frameworks currently provide opportunities or threats. This is essentially because the nature of many of the

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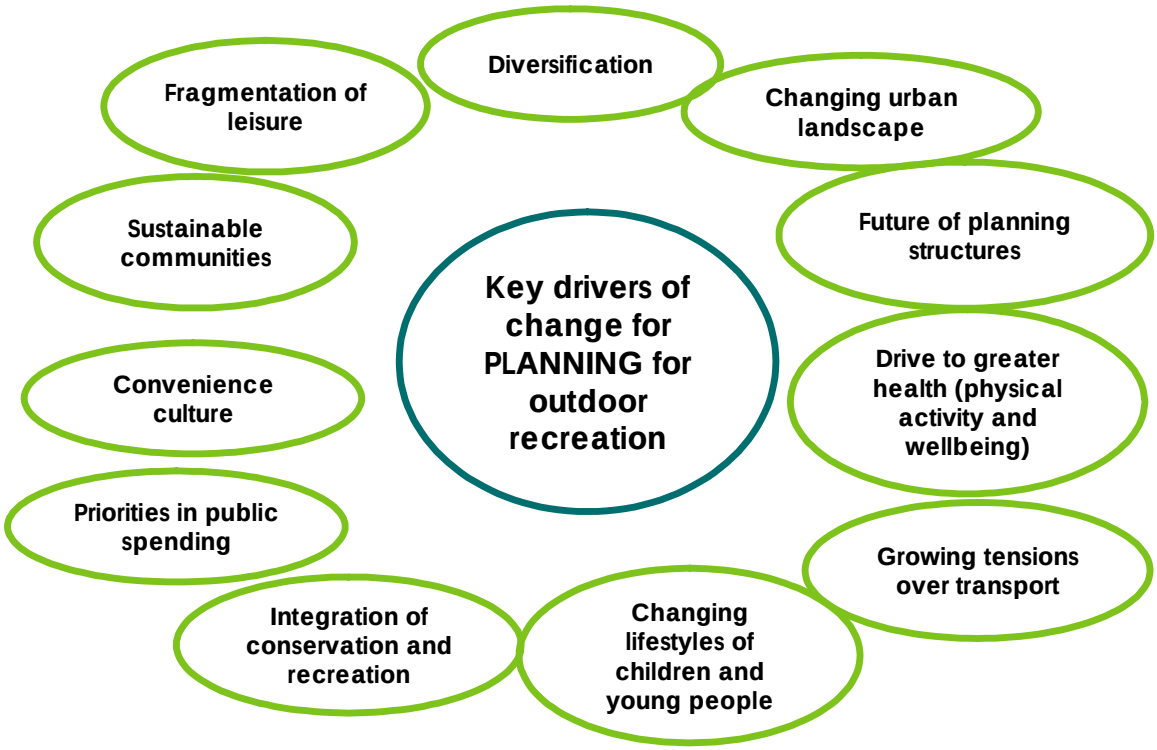
opportunities is dependent on the nature, and timeliness, of the response in relation to the outdoor recreation strategy. In many cases, if the nature of the response is not robust enough, or quick enough, many of these apparent opportunities could very quickly become serious threats to the future of outdoor recreation.

2.2 Drivers at a glance



2.3 Future of planning structures

The driver concerning potential reforms to the way in which decisions are made in relation to planning is felt to be a significant influence on the future of planning and spatial frameworks. Over the long term, this could be affected considerably by decisions on Local Government reform and also the scope of devolution of decision making - on planning and other issues – to the regional agencies and local authorities, both of which were felt to be uncertain over the medium term.

In some areas of the country there appears to be a live and active debate surfacing about the relative size and number of local authorities. Some of those we spoke to in executive interviews or the workshops, saw a reduction in the number of local authorities, and a subsequent introduction of larger, potentially

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unitary authorities to be a distinct possibility over the next 10-20 years, given the desire for greater efficiency in Local Government and National Government.

Related to this is a second issue concerning the future powers and resources that will be held by local government, about which there seems to be a great degree of uncertainty. While some feel that the desire to see more powers devolved to regional and local level will inevitably lead to a growth in the powers of local authorities on issues such as planning, others feel that local authority powers may be diminished over the next 20 years as National Government initiatives, targets and a continuing efficiency drive reduce the 'real' power and influence of local authorities on issues such as planning. Despite rhetoric about the wish to devolve more power to the local level many of those spoken to during the research process seemed sceptical about whether any real power and decision making would be devolved.

The recent announcement from the Government about extending the timescale and, perhaps more importantly, the remit of the Lyons Inquiry into the future of Local Government and related financing, has made the future shape of Local Authorities even more uncertain. While some claimed that local authorities, and the move towards Local Area Agreements signalled a move to more devolved responsibility and power, others said that in certain parts of the country there could be moves towards larger Unitary authorities, especially in those areas of the country where there are large numbers of smaller local authorities.

As result of this and other developments, many in the workshops and interviews were unwilling to speculate how the long term relationship would develop in practice between regional spatial strategies and local planning frameworks.

However, despite split views on this issue it was felt that the introduction of regional spatial strategies, and the more strategic approach that this encourages to spatial planning, were positive developments that should be encouraged and developed further. Concerns were raised about the lack of incentives to take account of outdoor recreation needs in such strategies at present. However, for most this is felt to be a legacy of the previous frameworks for auditing local authority performance management, and something that could be addressed in future arrangements.

Changes to planning structures in the future were seen as a critical influence on future planning frameworks, and a potential agent for change in terms of creating more opportunities for outdoor recreation. However, the influence of the Natural England partnership over this was seen as uncertain, particularly in urban areas. There remains a need to influence top level decision makers and also the general public (to demand outdoor space), in order that the importance of planning in outdoor recreation opportunities is recognised at all levels – from the EU at the very top, down to local access forums and place checks at the more micro level.

2.4 Changing urban landscape

The changing urban landscape, and related "liveability" agenda was seen as something that would increasingly influence future spatial planning at all levels. It was felt by stakeholders to be of particular importance to planning at the regional and local level, with the new focus on liveability and desire to provide more recreational space in urban areas representing a major chance to increase outdoor recreation opportunities for significant numbers of the population.

However, many thought that in order to seize this opportunity, a national push would be required. In many cases the scale of investment and change required at the local level would be relatively small, but could provide significant returns in terms of increasing the opportunities for people to participate in outdoor recreation closer to home.

Stakeholders perceived that a significant time window was approaching, which, if missed, could represent a significant threat to the future of outdoor recreation. Despite delivery of the changes lying at the regional and local level in terms of detailed planning, it was recognised that influence would be required at the level of national government, to signal that the provision of outdoor space be included in all local development frameworks and plans. Others recognised that delivery would ultimately rest on influencing planners and landscape planners.

Some stakeholders spoke about this being a major priority for the new outdoor recreation strategy, given the nature of many of the other drivers of change in relation to demand, supply, well being and planning. One of the workshop groups spoke about the creation of "an integrated, continuous landscape for living", including outdoor space in urban as well as rural areas. Others spoke about dangers of too much urbanisation of the countryside, and the need to provide outdoor recreation opportunities 'on people's doorsteps'.

Overall, this driver is seen as presenting a major opportunity that could not be lost if the future strategy is to be a success in terms of increasing the volume of and interest in outdoor recreation. It represents a significant area of new focus and a significant opportunity for the Natural England partnership.

2.5 Sustainable communities

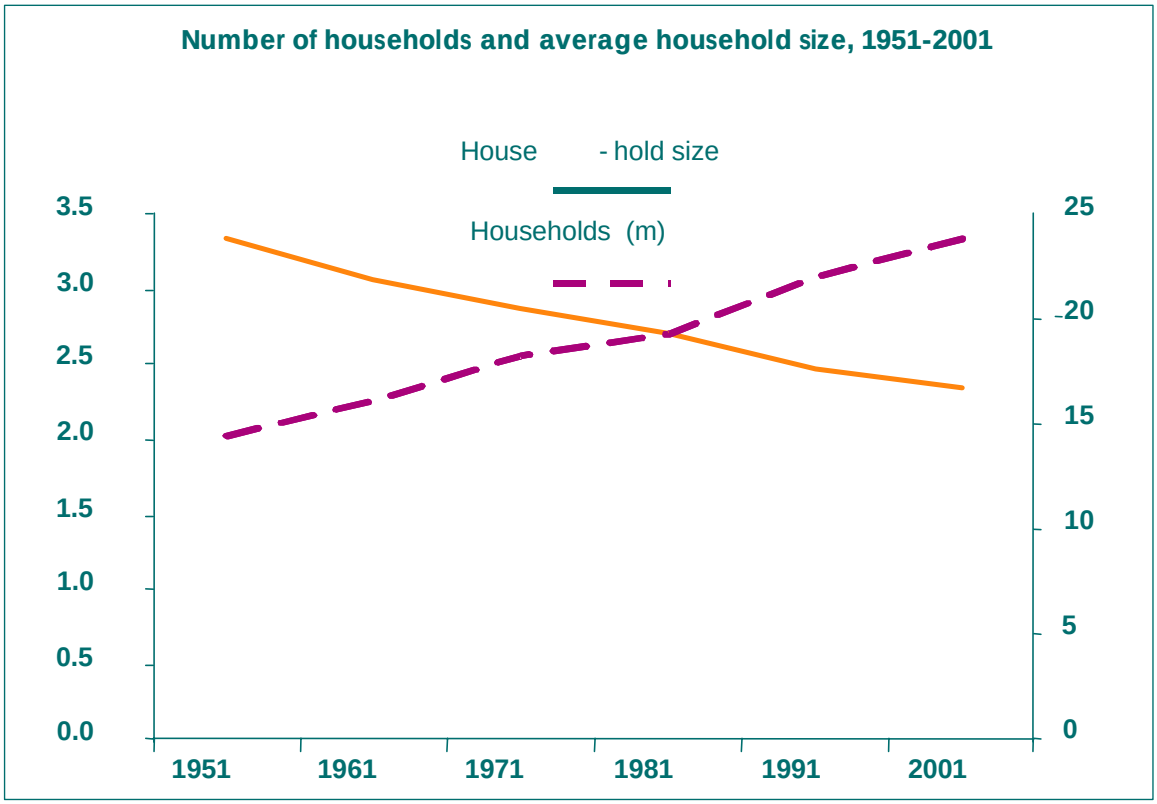
Linked to discussions above concerning the changing urban landscape and pressure, the Government's focus on developing sustainable communities is felt to be a significant influence on future planning frameworks.

Current Government policy, captured in both the *Urban White Paper*[3] and the *Sustainable Communities Plan*[4], sets out an ambitious agenda for new communities and related housing development across the UK. The decline of traditional housing stock in many areas of the country, the need to breathe

new life into deprived areas along with projections of population increase in the UK, decreasing average household sizes and rising numbers of smaller, often single person households are key underpinning drivers for this new programme, aimed at

"tackling housing supply issues in the South East, low demand in other parts of the country, and the quality of our public spaces."[5]

UK population & household set-up



Source: ONS, Census 2001, Kate Barker, Review of housing Supply, Dec 2003

These ambitious plans are seen by some as a major threat in terms of damaging natural habitats and valuable areas for outdoor recreation. However, many of those we spoke to felt that the current sustainable communities programme was a favourable development as it put sustainability at the heart of the community development issue. In doing so, the programme appears to place a greater emphasis on building communities, including the supporting infrastructure e.g. high quality services and public spaces, which could represent a sizeable opportunity to raise issues concerning citizen entitlement to the provision of space for outdoor recreation.

A critical uncertainty and potential threat in this area is the extent to which planners, private sector developers and other providers were truly being asked to figure sustainability (including social and environmental considerations) into their future plans. This is an area that could be worth pursuing in more detail.

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2.6 Integration of conservation and recreation

The extent to which conservation of sensitive environments can be managed in a way that is consistent with the future needs and supply of space for other activities such as outdoor recreation could have a significant influence on future planning. For example - will sensitive environments be more highly valued and better protected in future or will the provision of greater access to popular sites be a priority, with the subsequent effects of greater access being managed in other ways?

The need to manage these different demands on the same land is felt by some to present a major potential threat in terms of future spatial planning. This is largely due to the diverse nature of future recreational activity and the potential for extra demand for recreation in highly sensitive areas, and the environmental damage that can be done by even the more traditional forms of outdoor recreation (such as dog walking) to such highly sensitive habitats. The extent to which a maximum carrying capacity in such areas can be effectively determined, and then effectively managed and implemented, is a major issue here.

The need to manage the demand for increased outdoor recreation, and for different and competing types of outdoor recreation, with the conservation of highly sensitive environments creates a number of challenges in the current political environment. Assuming that carrying capacities can be determined in these areas, the effective implementation and management of numbers visiting these sites within these limits is a big challenge. Issues such as the resource intensive nature of the protection of sensitive habitats and the sheer logistical challenges the required monitoring represents are key issues. There is also concern about the lack of suitable powers to effectively intervene, challenge and prosecute illegal and damaging activities, even in the most protected areas and habitats. Current powers and the emphasis on burden were said by many to make effective "policing" of such areas impossible.

A related, but separate, set of issues concerns the need to plan more strategically to cope with the additional demand for access to high value sites. Different views were expressed on issues such as the need to provide easier access to such facilities. Some believe this is crucial to increase demand for outdoor recreation further, while others feel that easier access to high value sites should be limited, thereby restricting volumes of visitors to high value sites, limiting the related environmental damage and potentially encouraging interest and more sustainable visitor numbers across a wider range of nearby sites. One suggestion, worth considering in relation to this is the creation of new "honeypot sites" (i.e. major outdoor attractions) in certain areas. Such sites could perhaps manage larger numbers of visitors, particularly as such sites also provide economically viable opportunities to provide the necessary high quality facilities (e.g. toilets, cafes, cycle hire) and other supporting infrastructure, and thereby take some of the pressure away from other sensitive sites.

A number of different approaches to this issue have been discussed and trails of some of these different approaches have been carried out by access teams across the country. There was some discussion of zoning certain areas for different types of activity, with, at one end of the scale, some having highly restricted access essentially for conservation purposes only (e.g. SSSIs, NNRs - potentially fenced off and accessible only by fee paying customers etc), while at the opposite end of any such scale some areas could be designated as open access and used mainly for recreational purposes with free access to the public for this purpose. Other alternative techniques and approaches to manage these different needs and demands on the outdoors were also discussed in executive interviews and the workshops (e.g. managing timing of activities, routing of activities in highly sensitive areas).

Significantly, there was little disagreement around the assumption that the implications of this tension / driver could not be resolved without a more strategic view of the planning system as a whole, something that most people feel is lacking under the current arrangements. The discussions around this driver were also linked to discussion of the drivers around the fragmentation of leisure and increasing diversification. A number of people mentioned the need to develop a better understanding of the relative carrying capacity of specific sites and areas in order to determine the best way of managing access to such areas without having a detrimental effect on the environment. This is perhaps a necessary baseline and precondition to any attempt to take a more strategic approach to the planning of recreation in and around these sensitive areas.

2.7 Fragmentation of leisure

The change in leisure patterns and the diverse range and number of different outdoor recreation activities being pursued has led to many different demands being made on the same public spaces and land. It seems that the wide range of activities that now constitute outdoor recreation creates a number of major challenges to be addressed when planning for future needs.

Many of the new activities, while attracting ever increasing numbers, and therefore extending the reach of outdoor recreation, create tensions in terms of conflicting demands and pressures on the same areas of land. In the increasingly fragmented market of outdoor leisure pursuits, there are many different kinds of activities, with the role of public and private sector differing in each area.

For example, some of the newer activities, such as paint balling, require some form of supervision or infrastructure, and therefore tend only to be carried out on privately provided, designated and enclosed sites designed specifically for that purpose.

However, many other activities need no such external infrastructure (e.g. all terrain boarding). In these areas the major focus of the private sector is in providing / selling expert equipment (e.g. wake boards etc) which represents a significant investment in its own right, but which the user is then free to use

wherever they choose. In some cases, a particular type of land/ terrain may be more favourable. However, despite the sporadic provision of professional sites for such activities, anecdotal evidence provided in the executive interviews and subsequent workshops suggests that these facilities are poorly utilised by most users, who unsurprisingly prefer to use any nearby suitable site (e.g. a beach, or track) for free, rather than have to travel and pay someone to access an alternative privately managed facility where the rules of engagement may limit, rather than add to, the experience.

This can cause acute challenges, particularly when such activity includes the use of such public sites such as beaches, tracks or sites that are particularly environmentally sensitive. Not only can some activities preclude or discourage the use of the same site for other activities, but they can also lead to significant environmental damage, often unknown to the user.

This creates many challenges and questions for the nature of future planning frameworks.

Given the fragmented nature of the activities that now constitute outdoor recreation, it is unlikely that greater private sector provision will be the answer in every case. Many of those involved in executive interviews and the workshops felt that the private sector is better at understanding and providing what citizens and consumers want. In 'Paper 4 – Supply of places for outdoor recreation', it is suggested that the influence of private sector providers is a major opportunity to increase the supply of outdoor recreation facilities. However, in terms of planning, it needs to be recognised that market forces will not provide the solution in every area. Nevertheless it is also felt that greater private sector provision of sites and facilities will not be possible, or indeed a suitable solution in every case, largely because of people's attitude to paying for and planning such activities, particularly where cheaper/free alternatives are available within close proximity. Future spatial planning frameworks need to recognise this, particularly in relation to areas close to honey pot sites and sensitive area, and as a result both plan for, and incentivise, the use of alternative facilities in these areas.

Most of the stakeholders and experts felt that more work was required to better understand the nature and demand for the diverse nature of the different leisure activities that now constitute the fragmented outdoor recreation market and to feed this information into future planning.

There was also broad agreement of the need to engage and understand the diverse needs of the different segments of this increasingly fragmented market. The public sector would then need to respond by providing opportunities, in the form of appropriate space and facilities, in as many locations as possible. Recognising that it is impossible to provide all types of facilities in every location, it was nevertheless felt that local plans, especially near highly sensitive environments, should recognise the pressures that this increasingly fragmented leisure market and wider diversity of demand will make on public space and provide alternatives so that the core components of the natural habitat and

environment can be maintained. Subsequently, this fragmentation of leisure needs to be recognised in future spatial planning and incorporated into local planning frameworks, particularly in those areas where high value sites or environmentally sensitive areas may otherwise be under threat.

2.8 Diversification

Increasing diversification of rural land use and of related farm businesses is already influencing, and being influenced by spatial and other planning frameworks and decisions. Diversification itself has been driven by globalisation, a decline in the traditional UK agricultural industry (with agriculture's contribution to the national economy reduced to around 0.8% of GVA in 2003 compared to about 1.6% in 1993[6]), and more recently by reforms to the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy.

These reforms have resulted in a shift in the direction of Government support and incentives for farmers, away from subsidies and grants based on commodity production towards more agri-environment and wider enterprise schemes under the England Rural Development Programme. With further recent reforms to the CAP, continuing WTO (World Trade Organisation) pressures on more traditional commodity based support, and EU budgetary pressures, this shift in the emphasis of Government support seems set to continue, and could lead to tensions in the countryside as a number of different businesses, and different types of outdoor leisure activity are introduced side by side.

The need to pay greater attention to proactively managing land management activity in different areas could potentially be hampered by the nature of many of the agri-environment schemes, funded from the so called "second pillar" funding that has been expanded as a result of CAP reform.

Under such schemes, farmers are free to apply for various grants and subsidies associated with different forms of land management. They are also eligible to apply for grants from the Rural Enterprise Scheme, which effectively provides incentives for traditional farm businesses to diversify into other forms of economic activity including those supporting or providing outdoor recreation activity (e.g. tourist accommodation, pony trekking etc.).

The fragmented nature of these grants, subsidies and other incentives available to land managers suggest that the scope for a truly strategic spatial approach to managing countryside land is still some way off, despite improvements made under recent reforms and the introduction of the England Rural Development Programme, which includes tailored regional chapters – essentially representing strategic planning umbrella documents for each of the nine English regions.

The ERDP and its associated regional chapters have the potential to become increasingly important strategic influences on future land management and diversification of rural areas. However, at this stage it is not clear how much

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influence they will have on local activity compared to other strategic spatial frameworks such as regional spatial strategies. Most felt that in their current form they were not particularly influential.

A key issue is the rather fragmented nature of the different funding streams that affect the rate and direction of diversification. In order to operate in a truly strategic fashion, some felt that these funding streams not only need to be more aligned and joined up among themselves (under the direction of a much stronger ERDP with decisions on funding controlled more at the local level within a nationally and regionally determined strategic framework), but also work in tandem with other funding streams and planning decisions made at the local level, as well as other strategic planning and spatial frameworks dealt with at the regional level (e.g. regional spatial strategies, regional economic and related sector strategies – e.g. tourism).

At present, the picture is very unclear, and the future direction of diversification was felt by some stakeholders to be so unclear that it was unlikely to have any major influence on future planning decisions and frameworks. In fact some stakeholders spoke, anecdotally, of existing planning frameworks and decisions often working directly against further diversification, particularly in relation to new innovative income streams, including those that provided or supported further outdoor recreation. While future diversification could theoretically present a potential opportunity, the majority view among those involved in the research process was that this was not being recognised by those with control over planning decisions and was unlikely to be so in the future based on current trends.

In summary there was a sense that diversification should be a key influence on future planning frameworks, but there remains a concern that it will be a peripheral influence on most planning decisions.

2.9 Growing tension over transport

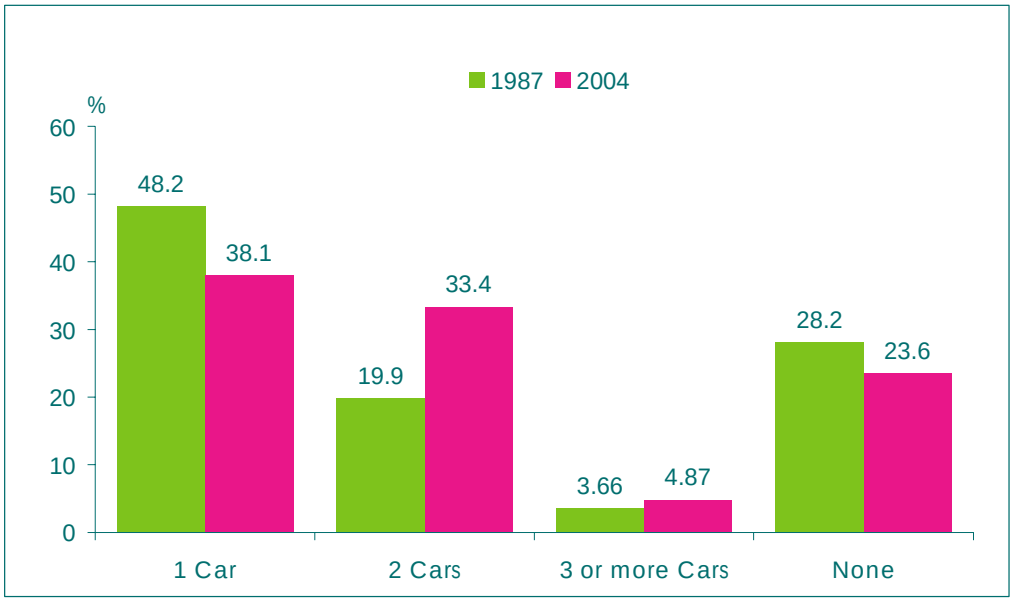
Future transport needs were seen as a significant influence on current and future planning frameworks, at all levels. However, most of those involved in the research process felt that transport issues and current trends in transport policy represented significant threats to outdoor recreation rather than positive opportunities.

Planning around transport was felt to be focussed on controlling and reducing levels of congestion, particularly in urban areas, rather than increasing access. Given the environmental impacts of transport, and the social impacts of reducing accessibility, this was felt to be a major issue for outdoor recreation, and one that poses particular problems.

While this focus of current policy on removing congestion may be thought to have a positive impact on high value sites or those in heavy demand, this was not felt to be the case by the majority of stakeholders. The dominance of personal transport and cars in particular was seen as a principal influence on

planning decisions, despite the recent rise of traffic calming schemes, road pricing etc. Many stakeholders felt that the car was becoming increasingly important for people to access outdoor recreation, and commented on the environmental and social impacts this would have in the long term, and potential for it to lead to new forms of social exclusion if road pricing and higher fuel costs were to be a reality of the future as many stakeholders and experts felt they would be.

Car ownership



Source: BMRB TGI 1987-2004

All these factors suggested trends in transport policy would have a negative effect on planning decisions in relation to outdoor recreation as they did very little to increase access to the outdoors for those groups in society for whom access was currently a key barrier. This was felt to be particularly the case for certain social groups, such as the elderly, the young and those with disabilities (most of whom were likely to be more dependent on public transport), as well as socially excluded groups in society.

A tension was also recognised in planning to provide greater access to the outdoors, (which might include providing more parking facilities for example) without decreasing the quality of the outdoor experience in itself.

Overall outdoor recreation was thought to be a marginal influence in the current transport planning debate, and despite the recent rise in traffic calming measures, most were sceptical that the needs of outdoor recreation would gain significantly more influence in this debate in the future.

The importance of supporting alternative means of 'group' transport, e.g. through schools, voluntary and community groups, was mentioned in this regard, in order to allow greater access to the outdoors among those who

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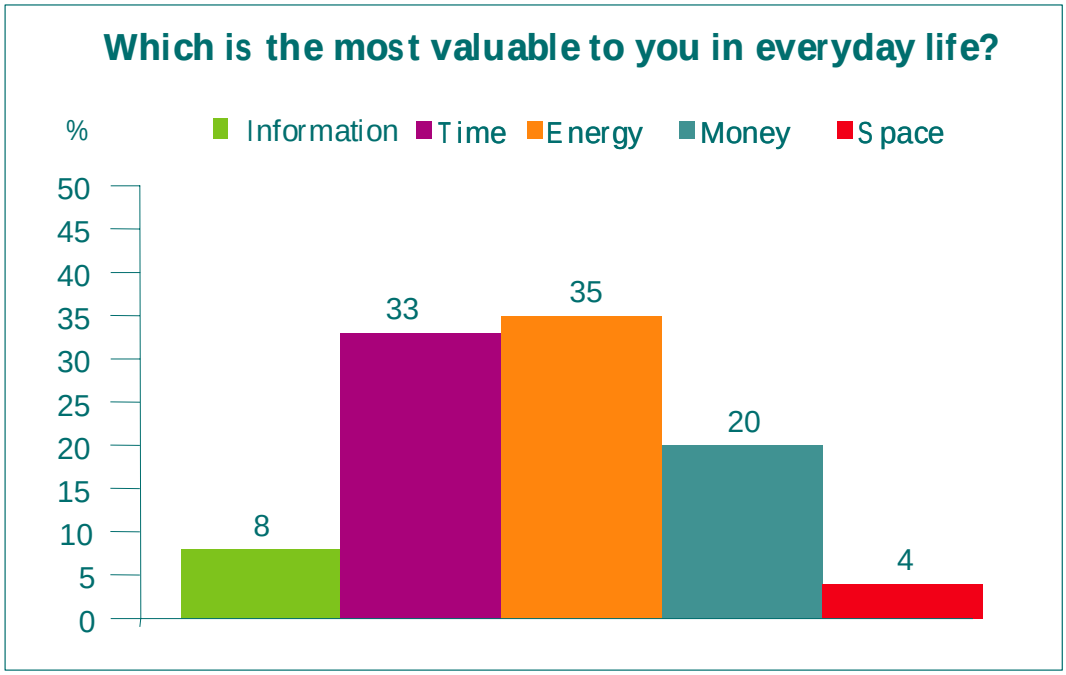
could not access their own means of private transport for this purpose. Without such trips, access to the outdoors for some would be extremely limited, with consequences for the long term health and well being of society and potential negative long term consequences for the environment as certain groups in society become disconnected from the countryside and the 'natural' outdoors.

2.10 Convenience culture

Convenience is becoming a quality that is increasingly valued by UK society. In a society where available time is limited, but increasingly valued, and lack of energy is also cited by increasing numbers of consumers as a valuable commodity in their lives, people see convenience as an important means of making the most of the time they do have available. Henley Centre's own research[7] shows that consumers are increasingly willing to spend money to save time, perhaps as a result of a perception that that they don't have enough time and energy to get things done.

Time and Energy are the resources that consumers most value in the UK



Source: Henley world 2003

The rise of convenience foods (e.g. ready meals, pre-prepared vegetables and sauces), convenience stores and 24/7 supermarkets is one such example of how convenience is key to the way many citizens run their lives. The rise in car ownership mentioned above is said by many to be another.

The insight gained from the focus groups builds on this analysis to show how this rise of convenience culture is becoming an increasingly important influence on our lives and our leisure patterns, and how these attitudes could therefore

influence future planning frameworks in relation to both urban and rural areas. It seems we are increasingly unwilling to travel far, or risk having any hassle or inconvenience get in the way of the enjoyment of our free time. The need for convenience to be planned in to take account of future needs seems clear.

"When you consider the investment that you have to put in on a gamble (for outdoor recreation) there are loads of easy alternatives"

"Sometimes you just want to have a family and duvet day"

"Planning takes time I simply haven't got"

"TV, DVD, Internet, PS2, … That's all before I've even left my bedroom"

"Everything I need is right here in town"

"We have so many things available at the touch of a button that there's no need to go outside"

"My time is precious. I have to work alternate Saturdays as well as all week, so when I get time I grab it."

"It's impossible to do anything new. You get stuck in a rut but at least it's easy"

"I haven't got the time or money to waste on things I know I am not going to enjoy"

"No-one has the time to organise anything like that. It's easier just to go to the pub."

"All my friends work different hours so we have to grab free time when we can"

Source: HenleyCentreHeadlightVision consumer focus groups to determine barriers to outdoor recreation among low-use groups, 2005

One aspect of the convenience culture that seems to emerge from the focus groups is the need to have everything made easy and on the doorstep, including opportunities for outdoor recreation. It seems part of the driver for this is that we want to be able to do things when we want to, often spontaneously, as indicated in many of the quotes above. An interesting impact of this is that when we do have a little time to spare, we go for safe, reliable options, the things and places we know, rather than trying something, or somewhere, new.

The influence of the convenience culture on consumer lifestyles and, through this, on future planning reflects a significant potential threat to the existing

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model and traditional view of outdoor recreation, which needs to be addressed in any future strategy. Too often the outdoors seems very distant, unpredictable (partly due simply to terrain and weather but also because of the facilities and experience) and therefore too risky an option to be considered. A new outdoor recreation offer, that is more convenient and open to spontaneous, opportune enjoyment closer to home may be crucial to future success of the strategy.

2.11 Lifestyles of children and young people

Linked to the convenience culture mentioned above is the changing lifestyles of children and young people, which seem to be more urbanised and based around the home, indoor environment than ever before. The lack of any sense of what an outdoor recreation experience might consist of is also a major barrier to participation. Insight gained from both the stakeholder interviews and from the focus groups with low and non participants in outdoor recreation points to this, leading to the development of a negative perception of outdoor recreation among certain parts of the population for a number of different reasons.

"Imagine if you said to the lads – 'I'm off out for a run/walk' – you'd never hear the last of it"

"The countryside smells. It's muddy and wet. Where's the fun in that?"

"Walking is for old people and anoraks"

"The countryside isn't set up for young people. They want excitement or a buzz"

"What is there to do when you get there?"

Source: HenleyCentreHeadlightVision consumer focus groups to determine barriers to outdoor recreation among low-use groups, 2005

Technology has had a major influence in this regard, leading to geography being less of a constraint in relation to communication and enjoyment of a shared experience. These advances have also led to the rise in popularity of new forms of in-home leisure activity such as computer gaming etc. The growth of in home leisure is also perhaps partly due to the emergence of new perceived risks in society.

Many we spoke to felt that perceived risks (in terms of required health and safety guarantees and possible legal action flowing from any accident) had led to a decline in the number of outdoors activities and trips run by schools and colleges, reducing once again children's exposure to the outdoors. Another reason given was parents' anxiety about allowing their children to

come into contact with outdoor recreation which could be perceived as containing an unacceptable degree of risk.

Certainly there is no perception among the young people we spoke to that the countryside has anything to offer to their generation, in terms of a rewarding experience or buzz. There was also a sense among these low and non-participants that the outdoors was expensive, in terms of the cost to get to / into anything worthwhile, but also in terms of - even the most basic - required equipment.

"I have nothing to wear. I mean I'm not going to wear my new trainers just to get them muddy"

"I don't earn much... I need to have something to show for all my hard work. That's why I like shopping"

"If I want a special day out I'll go to Manchester. The shops are better there."

"You pay out all that money and effort but for nothing in return"

Source: HenleyCentreHeadlightVision consumer focus groups to determine barriers to outdoor recreation among low-use groups, 2005

The demand for instant experience is a threat to many forms of traditional outdoor recreation, and points to a need for future planning frameworks to recognise the need to incorporate new types of activity, and not always in the countryside. The need for new types of activity, closer to home and in urban areas is something that should be considered if these low and non-participants are to be attracted to outdoor recreation in future.

Equally the role of education, green space strategies and importance of the early years when children first connect to the outdoors through school trips etc should not be ignored. Equally a number of people we spoke to during interviews and workshops talked of the opportunities that exist to show young people the extent of recreational activities that can be done outdoors. A number of anecdotal references were made to the results of work with socially excluded youths in this regard, which showed that young people can relate to the outdoors and the opportunities it contains if the initial barriers to access mentioned above can be broken down.

2.12 Mental health and well being / Drive for physical activity

Participants in the workshops and other discussions tended to group issues relating to mental health, well being and the drive for physical activity together in relation to planning. A separate paper (Paper 3 – Health and outdoor

recreation) covers the ground behind these issues and their relationship with outdoor recreation in more detail.

However, most felt that the greater focus on these areas, by both consumers and the Government was a positive development. The fact that society's own desire for greater well being has increased, as a result of greater affluence and increased stress, was seen as a positive factor which could lead to a renewed emphasis on the importance of outdoor space, as has been identified by commentators such as Florida[8] and Kaplan[9]. Similarly, Government's renewed concern about poor public health (e.g. obesity[10], smoking) and its subsequent cost to the NHS has raised calls for us all to take greater care for our own health, seems certain to be at the centre of a number of important policy and planning debates.

Those who discussed these issues in the workshops felt that the recognition of this increasing public health and well-being 'threat' represented an opportunity to allow outdoor recreation to feature in relation to future planning frameworks and interventions.

Many felt that, in order to exploit this opportunity, effective marketing and a clear evidence base would be key, in order to ensure that both decision makers, planners and the general public understood that outdoor recreational space (or 'healthy living spaces' as one workshop participant put it) were figures in to future plans.

2.13 Changing Government priorities

The nature of Government priorities was seen as something that was bound to change over the long term, and would have a significant impact on future planning frameworks. However, the current trends, giving a bigger priority to sustainability and public health concerns represented a positive trend and opportunity for outdoor recreation in future planning.

For many the a key concern was how long these issues would remain a priority relative to other concerns, such as health, transport etc and also, how well decision makers understood the links between outdoor recreation and other priority outcomes such as public health, education, crime, social exclusion and overall economic productivity.

The danger that shorter term economic and social outcomes would dominate Government policy and spending patterns was for many a key concern and a major threat, despite the current trend representing a positive and timely opportunity.

2.14 Summary

The drivers above raise a number of uncertainties about how future planning frameworks will evolve. These uncertainties include the precise nature of the

frameworks and where the balance of power and influence will lie between national, regional and local level, to the balance of different priorities within these future frameworks. These uncertainties and the nature of Natural England's influence over them in relation to the future of outdoor recreation, are discussed further below.

3. Barriers to outdoor recreation

3.1 Introduction

The desk research, executive interviews and workshops were also used as a means of identifying barriers to the supply and demand of outdoor recreation which future planning frameworks should try to address, including links to some of the prioritised drivers discussed above. In addition, to unlock these barriers further, three focus groups were carried out in August 2005 with people who were non – or low participants in outdoor recreation.

Although the focus groups were carried out with low or non-participants in outdoor recreation (and therefore represent a bias sample of the whole population , they do suggest a number of barriers or obstacles that need to be overcome or taken account of if current and future spatial and other planning frameworks are going to work in support of outdoor recreation.

Participants selected were filtered for being low or non users of outdoor recreation and came from a cross section of society. They were arranged into three age groups: young adults (between 17 and 21years), young families (those with children between four and eleven years old) and seniors (over 55 years). All participants filled out an in-depth pre-task questionnaire, followed by discussing the issues in a two hour focus group, allowing the barriers to be explored in depth.

Some of these barriers are institutional, others more a result of social and cultural trends and attitudes.

3.2 Political and institutional barriers

First of all the **complex nature of current and potential future planning frameworks**, operating as they do at a multitude of different levels, can cause difficulties. A number of discussions mentioned the need for a more strategic outlook in relation to planning for outdoor recreation at all levels, from the very top (e.g. EU and national level), to the local implementation (which would include not only local authorities, but communities themselves, and individual planners and landscapers). All have a role in implementing the detail of any future strategy for a more co-ordinated outlook in relation to outdoor recreation.

Similarly the **wide range of conflicting demands on future planning frameworks** creates a barrier to a greater focus on outdoor recreation. There is a danger that other priorities, at either national, regional, local or community level take priority over the need to provide for outdoor recreation. This is a barrier that is unlikely to decrease in importance over the next 15-20 years.

A further barrier that was raised in interviews and workshop discussions was the **lack of really detailed knowledge or understanding about the precise nature of future demand** and need for outdoor recreation. While all recognised the diversity of demand was likely to further increase, it was unclear exactly what level of demand there would be in 15-20 years time for different types of activity in different geographical areas. The complex nature and uncertainty about the precise nature of future demand was in itself a severe obstacle to a more strategic approach to incorporating outdoor recreation into future planning and spatial frameworks in a more precise way.

A related issue raised by stakeholders was a realisation that **the public sector would be unable to provide all types of facilities in every location**. Equally the private sector was unlikely to be an answer in many areas, partly due to lack of appropriate consumer demand and the need for a sustainable market size to provide a market incentive for private sector investment. In many areas, even if sufficient potential consumers existed, the price they would be willing to pay for access to such facilities would not provide a sufficient return for investors, particularly when free access to adequate facilities could be found elsewhere (albeit with potential environmental consequences).

Related to the points above, another barrier mentioned in several discussions was the **lack of a clearly defined and articulated economic and social rationale** for integrating outdoor recreation into future planning. This was a particular issue in relation to influencing agendas at national, regional and local level, to achieve a sufficient recognition of the benefits that could be provided by integrating outdoor recreation needs into things such as the sustainable communities plan, local area agreements, unitary development plans etc.

Another barrier identified in workshop discussions to incorporating outdoor recreation into future planning frameworks is the **need to manage the needs of outdoor recreation with the needs of the environment,** particularly in relation to the protection of natural resources and biodiversity. The inevitable tension between increasing outdoor recreation and environmental protection and conservation was an issue raised in the majority of executive interviews. A related issue is conflict between different types of recreation. The ability of future planning frameworks to successfully address this tension was questioned by the majority. However, in terms of the overall impact on the environment, some felt that this was a minimal concern, given that large scale development, particularly green belt development and major construction projects (e.g. airports) have a much greater negative impact on the environment, for example, by increasing pollution, noise and damaging natural habitats.

Equally, some felt that although a planning solution could be found (for example by zoning off certain areas *only* for conservation, and using other zones primarily for recreational purposes), the effective implementation and delivery of such solutions would be difficult, given the **logistical problems of policing such arrangements**. Related to this a number of stakeholders

mentioned **the lack of effective powers required effectively to regulate and punish irresponsible behaviour** in these zones.

Linked to the lack of powers is a related but powerful issue concerning **the degree to which citizens will allow 'everyday behaviour' and leisure activity (e.g. dog walking) to be regulated or prohibited in certain areas**. A number of stakeholders talked of the damage that can be done to sensitive environments through everyday outdoor recreation such as dog-walking (for example disturbance to ground nesting birds), and pointed to the possibility of regulating behaviour. However, they recognised the difficulty of any attempts to prohibit such activity in certain areas (particularly in the likes of national nature reserves, ESAs and SSSIs).

3.3 Social and cultural barriers

Other more social and cultural barriers that need to be factored in the changing needs for outdoor recreation are shown in the insights provided during the focus groups with low and non participants in outdoor recreation, which supported anecdotal evidence and comments obtained from stakeholders in the workshops and interviews and other evidence relating to social attitudes to outdoor recreation.

For example one workshop was clear that the **need to provide "everything on everyone's doorstep"**[11] was critical. Issues concerning the **need to make outdoor recreation accessible, convenient and also connected to other**

facilities and experiences were felt to be critical factors if future planning frameworks are to succeed in increasing both the volume of, and interest in, outdoor recreation.

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"You never see Beckham in Heat magazine – "England Captain goes for a walk – shock". Do you?"

"Since when have anoraks been trendy?"

"It's for granddads and geography teachers getting high off fresh air"

"Looking cool in front of their mates is important"

"Legoland has become the trophy destination for kids of their age"

"What your kids think of you is important"

Source: HenleyCentreHeadlightVision consumer focus groups to determine barriers to outdoor recreation among low-use groups, 2005

Judging by the focus groups that were carried out with low and non – participants in outdoor recreation, there are a **number of potential cultural barriers among young people to outdoor recreation** that any future attempts to incorporate outdoor recreation in future planning frameworks will need to recognise if they are to be successful.

Evidence from the focus groups involving those with low participation in outdoor recreation suggests that **younger people have very negative images of "the outdoors", which do not play well to their obsession with image and desire for a "cool" experience**.

Even for very young children – it seems 'bragging rights' are important. Equally, parents of children feel pressure to be "cool" in the eyes of their offspring, and are anxious not to disappoint. The need for planning to recognise the important of great design and visual appearance as part of creating an overall experience will be critical if facilities are to be appealing to these groups.

Equally, **cost and perceived hassle** of planning a trip to the outdoors are key barriers and emphasise the need for opportunities for basic outdoor recreation to be planned into all future new developments to make it more convenient and less costly for young people to access such opportunities.

"All the interesting stuff costs money"

"Planning takes time that I simply haven't got"

Source: HenleyCentreHeadlightVision consumer focus groups to determine barriers to outdoor recreation among low-use groups, 2005

This emphasises the need to plan in outdoor recreation in a way that makes it **convenient to access for young people and effectively free at the point of delivery** if it is to attract young people. This in turn, given the nature of public

investment that may be required, points to the need for a clear social and economic rationale for such planning and investment.

Another related barrier or obstacle to overcome is the **perceived wealth of cheap, accessible and easier alternatives** that young people and families have in terms of leisure activity.

"TV, DVD, internet, PS2 ... that's all before I've even left my bedroom."

"We have so many things available at the touch of a button that there's no need to go outside."

"A DVD is great time to spend with the kids, it gets me off my feet too"

"If you take the kids to town you all come away with something new, stress free and it doesn't cost too much"

"I go to the shops, the pub and visit friends, it's just what I like to do."

Source: HenleyCentreHeadlightVision consumer focus groups to determine barriers to outdoor recreation among low-use groups, 2005

A further perceived barrier, for all groups, but particularly felt by families and older people, is a **lack of facilities or suitable experiences for *all* the family**. This points not only for a need for any newly developed facilities or offers to take account of the needs of all the family – young and old - if they are to attract families and other groups of people to participate in outdoor activity, but also to provide good basic facilities (car parks, toilets etc) the lack of which are often sighted as a barrier to outdoor recreation.

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"I'm not sure there will be everything I need for the children - and my mum"

"It's all of us going and all of our free time, so it's important that we all have fun"

"You don't want to spoil other people's day by being a nuisance"

"Good food, clean bathroom and a good car park but in a lot of remote places that's not always possible"

"English attractions should have refreshments that reflect their heritage. Cream teas not foreign franchises."

Source: HenleyCentreHeadlightVision consumer focus groups to determine barriers to outdoor recreation among low-use groups, 2005

3.4 Summary

The barriers outlined above are very different in their nature. The institutional and political barriers are major obstacles to achieving a sustainable increase in outdoor recreation, and managing the needs of outdoor recreation against other priorities, such as the conservation of the natural environment. Some of this may be overcome by additional resources. However, a critical input would be a greater understanding of a number of factors, including future demand for different types of outdoor recreation across the country and related study and evidence around the ideal maximum carrying capacity of various sensitive sites. These barriers all point to the need for a more strategic approach to the planning of outdoor recreation in coastal, rural, particularly in and around sensitive natural habitats

The second set of barriers are more deep rooted and cultural. They are much harder to 'change' as a result, pointing to the need for any future strategy to 'accept' these attitudes and embed them into thinking about future plans and strategy. Attitudes towards the outdoors and the habits and behaviours of citizens in a modern society, point to the need for future planning to make the outdoors more accessible more convenient and, where possible, more of an experience that can be tapped into when the urge arises. This has major implications for urban planning in particular, but also points to the value of hubs which can create additional level of consumer experience and excitement with regard to outdoor recreation across all parts of the country.

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4. Uncertain outcomes and opportunities to influence

In order to identify the areas of future uncertainty we analysed the relationships between the future drivers of change, to identify issues which were both important in terms of future planning frameworks and uncertain in terms of their outcome for outdoor recreation.

The process through which this analysis was carried out is described in more detail in 'appendix A – Mapping the impact' and also in 'Paper 6 – Impact of outdoor recreation'. Essentially the process maps the relationship (in terms of impact) between all of the major influences, to determine both the importance of their impact on the future of planning frameworks and outdoor recreation, as well as the uncertainty of that impact. The result of this mapping is an impact matrix, which shows on one hand the importance of each driver, and on the other the degree of uncertainty and therefore potential for influence that particular factor provides for the future of outdoor recreation.

The resulting impact matrix for the future of planning frameworks and outdoor recreation is shown below, with supporting commentary to follow.

Impact matrix

High Importance	Future of planning structures Changing Government Priorities Convenience culture		Changing Urban Landscape Health & well being
Medium Importance	Lifestyles & attitudes of Children and Young People	Fragmentation of leisure	Integration of conservation and recreation Sustainable communities Tensions over transport
Low Importance		Diversification	
	Low influence	Some potential to influence	Significant potential to influence

4.1 Drivers over which there are few levers of influence

What this analysis tells us is that issues such as future planning structures, changing Government priorities, the convenience culture and attitudes of children and young people are drivers that are very important to the future of planning and outdoor recreation. However these are also issues over which

there appears to be very little scope for the Natural England partnership to significantly influence through planning frameworks and outdoor recreation.

The challenge with these factors is to calculate a response which accepts that these factors will be important influences on the future of planning frameworks and outdoor recreation and takes them into account in future strategy.

Appropriate responses might include for example, looking for ways of making opportunities for outdoor recreation more convenient, appealing and accessible to children and young people and those who value convenience, accepting that these groups will not change their lifestyles to participate in outdoor recreation unless it is planned into their surroundings and made more convenient to access in terms of location and cost. Similarly a future strategy needs to be robust against changes in Government priorities and changes to future planning systems given the important influence that changes in these areas (as a result of changes in other, mostly political factors) will have on outdoor recreation.

4.2 Secondary influences

The place of **diversification** in the matrix, represents something that is of less importance in terms of its impact on the other factors, and its overall impact on the planning of outdoor recreation. This typically represents an issue that is influenced by a number of the other key factors in the system (i.e. the matrix), and will change direction according to these factors, but is not, by itself, a key influence on the overall future of planning frameworks for outdoor recreation. It could play a role in relation to the supply of outdoor recreation, as changes in land use resulting from diversification may provide opportunities to influence the supply of outdoor recreation facilities, but only if the necessary incentives (in terms of grants and planning permissions) were in place. In itself diversification does not appear likely to influence future planning frameworks[12].

This is consistent with the influence of the other factors, such as Changing Government priorities, the balance between different types of recreation and changes to planning structures and perhaps also fragmentation of leisure, all of which will have an influence on the future shape and direction that diversification takes.

As diversification itself is not one of the most significant driver of change, it should perhaps not be given such focus in terms of future strategy unless there are some potentially easy ways of gaining influence over it. Something to be considered in this regard might be the level of priority and focus given to supporting and providing outdoor recreation facilities within planning policy guidance and also within funding and marketing for schemes such as the Rural Enterprise Scheme. These might provide opportunities for relatively resource efficient ways of influencing these factors in a positive direction for the future of outdoor recreation. In doing so they could facilitate bigger incentives (from the market and the public sector) for current and future generations of land owners to be more innovative in their business choices than previous

generations and therefore more likely to adopt businesses that support the goals of outdoor recreation.

It is perhaps worth noting that the position of diversification in the matrix outlined above, in relation to planning for outdoor recreation differs considerably from the position of diversification in the matrix on page 29 of 'Paper 4 – Supply of places for outdoor recreation'. This is due to the more dominant influence diversification could have in relation to the supply of places for outdoor recreation. In essence, while diversification will have a major and significant impact on the supply of places for outdoor recreation, it is unlikely to be such a highly significant factor (relative to other factors) in determining the shape and nature of future planning frameworks. This is also supported by the results of the workshop discussions where diversification was a major focus of discussion in relation to the supply of places for outdoor recreation, but received less discussion in relation to discussions about future planning frameworks.

4.3 Critical uncertainties

Other factors are more important in terms of their impact on future planning frameworks and seem to offer more potential leverage for the future strategy. These areas are the areas of greatest future influence and potential opportunity in the system, but also typically represent areas of potential uncertainty in terms of the direction of future influence on the system.

They may therefore represent factors that could become significant threats (or at least missed opportunities) if they are not influenced in a positive direction (in this case for the future of outdoor recreation). Their reliance on other factors and openness to influence (from factors such as changing Government priorities, the future of planning structures etc), make them factors that represent unpredictable outcomes in terms of their impact on planning frameworks and also on outdoor recreation. Overall this analysis confirms the views of stakeholders who were present at the workshops. Many of them felt that this group of issues and influences on the future could present both threats and opportunities, depending on how they were dealt with.

In the above analysis these factors include the fragmentation of leisure, the balance between different types of recreation, and issues relating to sustainable communities, health and well being, the changing urban landscape and tensions over transport. They represent key areas to focus on when developing future strategy.

One such example is the tension over transport issues. Recreation is currently viewed as a marginal issue in relation to transport issues. Equally there is a great degree of uncertainty about how future transport policy in the UK will be factored into future planning. On one hand there is increasing car use and congestion in many areas of the country which leads to a demand for more road building, and less provision of public transport. This could lead to an ever

increasing reliance on the car for access to recreation, and potential increasing congestion around popular and high use recreation sites.

Other uncertainties and potential areas of influence and focus for future strategy include the extent to which the public expression of concern over health and well being issues will express itself in relation to future planning debates and how far any such debates will see provision of healthy living / outdoor recreation spaces as a key factor to consider in future developments (e.g. the delivery of the Government's plans for sustainable communities)

Similarly the balance between different types of recreation in many areas of the country will be crucial to future planning, particularly in green belt and rural areas where future land management will presumably need to include an element of all types of recreation. The future management of the demand for different types of recreation will not only impact on future planning frameworks but the kind of activities that can be enjoyed in each area, which in turn will drive which groups engage in outdoor recreation. This links crucially in the debate about how best to plan for the increased fragmentation of outdoor recreation activity and emphasises the importance and difficulty of providing sufficient, convenient opportunities for all different types of activity across the country.

These areas and other related challenges are explored further below.

4.4 Summary

A number of potentially significant opportunities seem to arise from the analysis above and the major factors likely to influence future planning frameworks over the next 20 years.

The current focus on creating sustainable communities and the changing urban landscape offers clear opportunities to plan outdoor recreation into future urban and rural landscapes. This subsequently provides opportunities to provide greater, more convenient access to outdoor recreation for generations who may otherwise be 'lost' or at risk of becoming disconnected from the outdoors.

Recent debates over the classification of green belt land have once again raised the issue of the future of the green belt and related urban fringe areas. Many of those we spoke to saw the increase in population in the UK, coupled with the decline in household size as leading to an inevitable increase in the amount of new housing development required and the related potential development of the urban fringe. Certainly many of the new growth areas highlighted for future development in the sustainable communities plan are in and around the urban fringe. The goals stated in the Sustainable Communities Plan for the development in and around these areas mention the creation of new green spaces, such as those in the Nene Valley which will "give the [Milton Keynes – South Midlands] growth area a green resource of potentially national

significance benefiting leisure tourism, biodiversity and sustainable economic development".[13]

One workshop group spoke animatedly about the urbanisation of the countryside and the creation of an integrated continuous landscape for living, with borders between urban and rural becoming harder to define. This is reflected in the key elements of the Government's current plans for sustainable communities, which talk of:

- 'Liveability' (including "improved parks and better public spaces"); and
- 'Protecting the countryside'[14]

These clear statements of intent bode well for the future, as do early indications from initiatives such as the redevelopment of the riverside in areas such as Newark in Nottinghamshire. However, given the fragmentation of leisure activity, the importance of providing a number of different and varied types of space for outdoor recreation should not be underestimated. In relation to this, it remains unclear what kinds of varied provision are being made for outdoor recreation outside of the provision of traditional green space. **Alongside the provision of convenient access, the provision of a variety of opportunities within close proximity to each other in new communities will be a critical factor in the future strategy's success**, especially in relation to children and young adults.

Another opportunity arises from the renewed concern, both in Government and among wider society, about public health issues, wider quality of life and well-being, and the related drive for improved levels of recreation and physical activity.

Linked to this, many of those we spoke to felt that the recent award of the 2012 Olympic Games to London would create a major opportunity through heightened interest and a real feel good factor around all types of outdoor recreation, including those on land and on water. This gives a timely opportunity to engage all generations in outdoor recreation, and should also result in major refurbishment of some facilities with the help of Government funds. It also presents a major opportunity to link healthy living messages for all age groups to a new excitement and energy for the outdoors.

Some stakeholders also feel that the future of planning structures also represents opportunities for a more strategic and integrated approach to spatial planning which could help to resolve some of the tensions over transport and also allow a proper management of the different demands of various types of recreation, in a more mutually supportive way.

A common theme of these opportunities is that many of them are time limited, concerning opportunities to influence strategies, plans or events that may only exist in the short-medium term (e.g. the next 5-10 years), and which may not change further for a generation. For example the drive for greater physical activity supported by resources linked to the 2012 Olympic Games is a unique and time limited opportunity that is likely to exist only for the next 5 years or so.

Similarly the programme of development associated with the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan and the changing nature of the urban landscape involves a scale of regeneration of urban areas and public spaces not seen in the UK for 30-40 years. This scale of redesign and development, planned to take place over the next 5-10 years or so (but decisions on which will potentially be taken over the next year or two), is unlikely to be repeated for a generation. These developments represent major opportunities to embed outdoor recreation into future planning frameworks. However, as such a scale of investment and focus on such programmes is perhaps unlikely to be repeated for another generation, they also represent a risk if outdoor recreation is ignored in these programmes of development which are designed precisely to last for the generations to come, and therefore not be repeated or undone in the short-medium term.

A similar time limited window of opportunity relates to discussions about the 'Northern Way', a Government led initiative concerning the North of the country that will take decisions on the resourcing and planning of transport and other infrastructure developments in the North of England that will take decisions on the nature of transport and other supporting infrastructure in the North of England for perhaps the next 20-30 years.

A similar issue arises in relation to the future of Local Government and related governance structures around local planning frameworks. The Lyons Review of Local Government Funding (now expanded to cover wider questions about the future role and shape of Local Government, and current discussions about the future of Regional Government and the degree of national influence on things such as planning decisions, all point towards decisions being made in the next 2-5 years that will have long term implications for the shape and nature of future planning frameworks and the way that outdoor recreation is dealt with within these frameworks.

Immediate action on these issues is crucial if these opportunities are not to be lost. Equally, if these opportunities are not seized the resulting strategies and plans could become negative influences on the future of outdoor recreation.

Some felt that the timing of the opportunity and the synergy between many of these factors represents a unique opportunity to influence a number of key planning frameworks in a positive way. The links between the well being and public health agenda, the creation of more sustainable communities and debates about the demand for different types of recreation needs at a time when the transformation of urban landscapes, changes to rural land management and major improvements in transport infrastructure (e.g. the Northern Way) are all taking place simultaneously presents a unique opportunity to properly consider the role of outdoor recreation in a strategic way as part of future Government policy and spatial planning. This is perhaps best reflected in comments made by participants in the York workshop that outdoor recreation needs should be considered as part of "an integrated, continuous landscape for living" across both rural and urban areas.

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In summary then, some key influences on future planning frameworks appear to create a unique, if challenging, opportunity for a clear strategy for outdoor recreation to be properly considered as part of overall planning frameworks in the next 5-10 years. However, this opportunity appears to be time limited and will need an immediate and concerted effort if it is to be successfully exploited. If the opportunity is not exploited, or these issues are not addressed in any way by the future outdoor recreation strategy, there is a risk that decisions will be made that are detrimental to the future of outdoor recreation for a number of years to come.

Key challenges that emerge from these opportunities and suggestions of ways to approach these key challenges are explored in the next section of this paper.

5. Critical issues

5.1 Introduction

Based on the combined output of the research discussed in this paper, this section explores the key insights, critical issues and key challenges that have emerged from this research process. The issues identified below are those that the Henley Centre believes the future outdoor recreation strategy will need to address if future planning frameworks are to work in a way that is favourable to outdoor recreation.

5.2 Are outdoor recreation arguments fully understood in relation to national, regional and local planning structures?

The need to integrate the needs of outdoor recreation into other planning frameworks will require significant influence to be held with decision makers, at national, regional and local level. These decision makers and planners will be challenged with balancing a number of conflicting priorities and will require clear supporting evidence if they are to consider incorporating the needs of outdoor recreation alongside these other priorities.

This will need a clear business case on the benefits of outdoor recreation to be prepared and compiled, on the basis of data that is probably already available. This should include links across to the benefits in terms of improvements in physical and mental health and well being, as well as other secondary social and economic benefits such as links to improved concentration and productivity levels, educational attainment which in turn can positively influence the performance of the economy. These secondary linkages to wider social and economic benefits are critical if outdoor recreation issues are going to become a non-peripheral agenda in such decisions.

One workshop participant described the agenda as “rejuvenating landscapes, rejuvenating lives”. In order to complete the description a third element could be added - “rejuvenating the economy” thereby pointing to the fact that outdoor recreation can make an important contribution to the well being of our environment, society and economy in line with sustainable development principles. This would also help outdoor recreation with the key goals of partners at all levels such as the Department of Health, ODPM, RDAs and Local Authorities.

The proposed creation of the new Agency, with a more focussed, yet cross cutting, outdoor recreation remit provides the basis for the confederation partners to both build this business case and to use it effectively in discussions with key partners at all levels of government.

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5.3 Can outdoor recreation be made more convenient?

Convenience is partly about outdoor recreation being located close to home or "on the doorstep" of communities and individuals. These issues are largely covered above in discussions about the need to 'build in' opportunities for outdoor recreation into sustainable communities and other new developments in rural and urban areas.

However, the other aspect of convenience is the ability to access a consistent experience in a time efficient, hassle free and often spontaneous way. The ability to participate in outdoor recreation "as and when we want to", "without preparation / planning", "on our own or with others" is a key determinant of how convenient outdoor recreation is. For certain experiences, such as certain honey pot sites, or other major attractions, significant numbers of people are willing to both plan and travel for the experience. However, such outdoor recreation experiences seem to be few in number for the great majority in society, who consider many experiences to contain little in the way of guarantees and return on their time / energy investment.

This points to the need for future planning frameworks to include a greater emphasis on providing co-ordinated zones of a diverse range of opportunities for high quality outdoor recreation in all parts of the country. This would include quality green space, or other "tranquil space" in and around local communities as well as actively planning other varied facilities such as skate parks, cycle routes and other "infrastructure" that can be accessed spontaneously and safely by all groups in society without too much planning or other effort.

5.4 How far will leisure and outdoor recreation arguments be heard in current and future transport debates?

Current transport policy appears to be dominated by concerns about congestion. However this does not address many of the key issues relating to the future of outdoor recreation, concerning accessibility for certain social groups and the need to manage access to 'honey pot' sites with the quality of the outdoors experience.

Issues concerning conservation of honey pot sites are not widely regarded in current transport debates, nor in relation to wider debates about provision of public transport and related issues of social exclusion and accessibility.

With public concerns about transport provision related more to the absence of personal mobility, rather than access to the outdoors, there may be a need to place greater emphasis on planning local community transport initiatives and networks which individuals can use if they want to access the outdoors. This would help supplement the creation of more convenient outdoor recreation opportunities which is described above.

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5.5 How can we plan more effectively to manage the needs of different types of recreation activity?

Managing the differing needs of different types of outdoor recreation (e.g. opening up, managing and maintaining rights of way) is a key challenge.

The development of a strategy for outdoor recreation suggests a desire to increase and encourage outdoor recreation, yet this could be damaging to the environment or to other forms of outdoor recreation. Even the most basic forms of outdoor recreation, (e.g. walking, dog walking, cycling) can lead to environmental damage in some areas. Yet it remains hard to effectively police or prohibit certain activities in certain areas.

Equally, society's desire to have their outdoor recreation too heavily managed could deter interest and participation in outdoor recreation, given the barriers of time, energy, cost and the subsequent desire for spontaneity and convenience. In addition the fact that the free exploration of the outdoors remains at the heart of a significant amount of outdoor recreation activity indicates that the nature of the experience itself may be somewhat damaged if certain activities are precluded in certain areas. At the very least this would a move contrary to direction of policy on rights of way.

Nevertheless, the need to pay attention to the potential damage of recreation on the natural environment, destroying the very attributes of the outdoors that society will continue to value, is a serious issue and one that needs to be considered in relation to the future outdoor recreation strategy. Whether this is an issue that should be resolved by tighter planning controls and more effective policing of certain types of outdoor recreation activity is a policy decision. More effective marketing and education of citizens about the implications of their actions may also provide at least part of the solution.

There is also a range of issues concerning the seemingly conflicting needs of different types of recreation activity (e.g. 'tranquil' activity such as picnics, walks, and bird watching contrasts with 'high energy' activity such as quad biking, paintballing, all terrain boarding etc).

Once again, there are a number of potential solutions that could be adopted, some involving regulatory sanctions and zoning of certain activities into certain areas, and others involving more effective marketing, and provision of information to educate participants about suitable places, facilities and the impact of certain recreation activities, both on others enjoyment and the surrounding environment.

If these different activities can be managed more effectively, within a framework that provides benefits in terms of the level of outdoor recreation and environmental protection, it should result in an enhanced outdoors experience for everyone, thereby increasing the volume of participation and interest in outdoor recreation.

5.6 How can demand for high value / honey pot sites be better managed by future planning frameworks?

Evidence, in the form of views and anecdotes from stakeholders, and data on visitor numbers and congestion at certain sites across the country, as well as the insight gained from the focus groups, suggest that there will be continuing high level of demand for certain outdoor sites and experiences. These so-called honey pot sites, unlike many types of outdoor recreation attractions and facilities attract visitors from all over the country, perhaps because of their natural beauty, or the guaranteed high quality experience that they provide.

However, they also cause problems in terms of planning, especially in relation to the environment and the supporting infrastructure (e.g. transport networks, car parks etc).

Due to the very nature of some of these attractions, many of them products of the forces of nature over thousands and millions of years, duplicates cannot be formed in other parts of the country with ease. However, it may be worth giving thought to some of the suggestions received from stakeholders about trying to create more interconnected outdoor recreation 'hubs', of high quality connected activities and facilities around the country, in order to reduce at least some of the demand on some of the most vulnerable sites, and also to provide a more integrated outdoor experience, around which supporting infrastructure can be more cost effectively developed and higher levels of demand can be more effectively managed.

A number of pilot projects along these lines appear to have been successfully facilitated in some parts of the country, and the lessons from these could be more widely shared.

5.7 Can future planning frameworks help make enjoyment of the outdoors an integral part of our lives?

The answer to this question has to be "yes". The question is whether this is something that society currently desires, which is more a question of demand for outdoor recreation. However, the need to plan a series of varied, convenient and accessible opportunities for outdoor recreation into all environments (urban, suburban and rural) is crucial if this is to be achieved. It seems that modern society will demand many different types of outdoor recreation, some traditional, some not.

If outdoor recreation is going to become a more integral part of our lives, as many stakeholders believe it should, then outdoor recreation must be integrated into all future planning frameworks in the same way that most other basic services and entitlements are at present. For many social groups this does not seem to be the case at present and as a result they become disconnected with the outdoors and do not enjoy, or in many cases value the

benefits, in terms of improvements to mental health and overall well being that it can deliver.

This in turn raises an interesting and brave question for the future strategy, which cannot be answered here. Given the benefits to health and well being, should we all (as citizens) expect an entitlement to outdoor recreation in the future? Perhaps if future planning frameworks treated outdoor recreation in this way it would become a more integral part of everyday life for us all.

5.8 Final words

Many of the challenges raised by the critical issues and key questions above appear to present time limited opportunities. However, these opportunities could evolve into potential risk or negative influences if the strategy fails to recognise them and respond in the relatively short term.

For example, in relation to the changing urban landscape, there is a small, and potentially opportune time window to influence future planning frameworks and decisions. If this short term opportunity is lost, future planning in this area could easily ignore outdoor recreation needs and the resulting frameworks could pose potential threats to the future of outdoor recreation.

The future strategy may therefore wish to look at the issues arising from this paper as a priority, particularly the requirement for a clear business case for including the needs of outdoor recreation, the need to think about the outdoors in a broader context of an urban, as well as a more traditional rural, context, and the need for a clear unity and focus when discussing these issues with relevant Government Departments and other decision makers at the regional and local level.

If the issues raised in this paper are not recognised, they could represent a major threat to outdoor recreation resulting from a failure to respond swiftly to a series of major opportunities.

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[8] Kaplan – 'Coping with ADD: the surprising connection to green play setting' Environment and Behaviour, January 2001, Taylor, Kuo and Sullivan

[9] One in every ten children and one in every five adults in the UK are clinically obese according to figures published in 2002 by the National Audit Office

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