



Countryside Access Plan
for the **Solent**
2008-2013





The Solent CAP area

Hampshire County Council would like to thank the many people – local residents, landowners and land managers, user-group representatives, local authority officers, elected members and a host of others – who were involved in the work to produce this plan.

The product of their efforts and support is a framework which will enable the County Council and others to work together to improve countryside access across Hampshire and to make it available for the widest possible range of people to enjoy.

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Introduction

This Countryside Access Plan (CAP) for the Solent area is one of seven area plans which, together with an eighth 'County Overview' CAP, form the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for the county of Hampshire.

The duty for local highway authorities to produce a ROWIP was established through the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. A ROWIP is intended to provide the means by which the highway authority will manage and improve its rights of way network to meet the Government's aim of better provision for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and people with mobility problems. ROWIPs are closely linked with Local Transport Plans, with the aim of delivering a more integrated approach to sustainable transport in rural and urban areas; where the two plans share common aims this also creates further opportunities for the funding of rights of way improvements.

Hampshire County Council's 'Countryside Access Plans' relate not just to the rights of way network but to the whole range of opportunities for people to enjoy Hampshire's countryside. These include areas designated as Open Access under CROW, sites managed by the County Council, by other local authorities and by organisations such as the National Trust and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, together with Forestry Commission woodlands, MoD land and permissive access provided by farmers and other private landowners.

Each area CAP should be read in conjunction with the County Overview CAP, which reports on the research done to produce the plans, identifies the County Council's main, county-wide aims

for improving access to Hampshire's countryside and explains how these plans are influencing the way the County Council delivers its services.

The area CAPs explore in greater detail the specific issues affecting enjoyment of the countryside in a particular part of the county and propose actions to address them. These actions are intentionally broadly-defined and aspirational. They do not necessarily relate to increasing public access to the countryside; many of them are about enhancing and improving the existing network.

The area covered by each CAP has been determined broadly by landscape character, as this reflects factors such as land use, demography, soil type and topography, which closely affect rights of way, countryside sites and other access to the countryside.

The CAPs were initially published as drafts for consultation, with a minimum of 3 months allowed for comment and feedback from the public, user groups, local authorities, government agencies and other organisations. Given the density of population in this area, higher level of feedback might have been expected for the Solent CAP than in the other areas. In the event, however, the level of response to the consultation draft was comparable with that received for other draft plans. A third of responses came from users (mainly walkers), 25% were from representatives of local authorities within the area and a further 20% from local residents and community groups. This document is a revision of that consultation draft, which has taken into account all the comments and feedback received.

The Solent CAP area

This plan relates to an area of approximately 26,000 hectares of South Hampshire that lies south of the M27, stretching from Southampton in the west to the West Sussex border in the east. It includes the boroughs of Fareham and Gosport, the southern part of the borough of Eastleigh and all of Hayling Island (Havant Borough). All these boroughs are unparished, with the exception of Eastleigh. Southampton and Portsmouth Cities also lie within the area; as unitary authorities, the two cities published their own ROWIPs during 2007. Officers within the three authorities (Hampshire County Council, Southampton and Portsmouth City Councils) have kept in close contact throughout the preparation of these three plans, sharing information as appropriate and working to develop a consistent approach to improving access across their boundaries. Southampton's ROWIP, like the Hampshire CAPs, takes a wider view of the access network, including in its review the city's many areas of recreational open space as well as rights of way. It is intended that this partnership approach will continue throughout the implementation of the plans.

Roughly half the population of Hampshire (more than 593,000 people) live within the Solent CAP area; the average population density is more than 5 times that of Hampshire as a whole. Population levels are expected to continue to rise as further development takes place in line with the South East Plan.

There is a dense and heavily-used road network across the area. Many of the major routes carry high volumes of commercial traffic to and from the ports in Southampton and Portsmouth and to industrial sites throughout the area.

The Solent area includes the estuaries of the Itchen and Hamble, together with

Portsmouth and Langstone Harbours and the western part of Chichester Harbour. Although the area is characterised by substantial conurbations, it also contains some outstanding countryside, much of which is important for nature conservation¹. This includes the River Hamble (SSSI, Ramsar, SPA, SAC), Titchfield Haven (SSSI, NNR, Ramsar, SPA, SAC) Portsmouth Harbour (SSSI, Ramsar, SPA) and Langstone Harbour (SSSI, Ramsar, SPA, SAC). Immediately to the east lies Chichester Harbour AONB (SSSI, Ramsar, SPA, SAC). There are also SSSIs at Southampton Common, Lee-on-Solent to Itchen Estuary, Browndown, The Wild Grounds, Gilkicker Lagoon and Sinah Common. Any access improvements that affect these protected, designated sites (particularly those that form part of the Natura 2000 network²) are likely to require an Appropriate Assessment.

The main Hampshire County Council countryside sites within the area are at Royal Victoria Country Park, Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve, West Wood Woodland Park, Netley Common, Hook with Warsash Local Nature Reserve (which includes Bunny Meadows) and Hayling Billy Coastal Path. Manor Farm Country Park (also a Hampshire County Council site) lies just outside the area and is an important destination for local people in the Solent area.

The New Forest is another popular countryside destination for local residents in the Solent area. The New Forest National Park Authority is therefore keen to be involved in any actions within the

¹ Ramsar Sites/Special Protection Areas (SPA)/Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)/Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)/National Nature Reserve (NNR).

² Natura 2000 is a European Union-wide network of protected areas which includes SPAs and SACs

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CAP that might affect the New Forest area.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust manages a number of sites in this area; those with public access are at Farlington Marshes, Great Salterns (Portsmouth), Milton Locks, Southmoor and Swanwick. There are also a range of countryside sites managed by the city and borough councils.

The Solent CAP area is crossed by several promoted long-distance walking routes. The Solent Way (60 miles from Milford-on-Sea to Emsworth), the Pilgrims' Trail (28 miles from Winchester to Portsmouth) and the Wayfarer's Walk (70 miles from Emsworth to Inkpen Beacon) are managed and promoted by Hampshire County Council. Other promoted routes include the Monarch's Way (615 miles following the route of Charles II's escape after the Battle of Worcester) and the Itchen Way (promoted by the Ramblers' Association) which follows the River Itchen between Sholing and Cheriton.

The Solent is an attractive destination for a wide range of visitors. There are many historical sites across the area; many of these relate to military activity and defence of the realm, dating back to Roman times and earlier. There are also extensive facilities for yachting and other water-based recreation; the Lower Hamble is one of the largest recreational boating centres in Europe and there are also marinas at Southampton, Gosport and Portsmouth.

The Solent area lies in that part of South Hampshire in which Hampshire County Council is working through the Partnership for Urban Southampton (PUSH) to create a better place for all who live, work and spend their leisure time in this area. This Countryside Access Plan supports the objectives of the developing Green Infrastructure Strategy for South Hampshire, which aims to create a planned network of multifunctional greenspaces, landscapes, natural elements in the towns and the links between them.

Vision

The Vision for this Countryside Access Plan for the Solent is:

To provide and maintain a sustainable network for access to the countryside, where local people and visitors can enjoy a range of recreational activities and appreciate the special qualities of this southern part of Hampshire.

Taking account of the aims and objectives within the PUSH Green Infrastructure for Urban South Hampshire, the Hamble Estuary Management Plan, and the Chichester Harbour AONB Management Plan, the aims of this Countryside Access Plan are:

- To strive for an access network that will meet the needs of a growing and diverse population as further development takes place in this part of Hampshire.
- To manage and promote the countryside access network in a strategic, coordinated way, in partnership with stakeholders.
- To provide a network that offers opportunities for promoting health and enhancing quality of life.
- To support the development of a wider range of transport options within the area for local people and visitors.
- To manage and develop the network in a way that takes account of landscape and wildlife conservation in the area.

This plan supports the overall vision for the Local Transport Plan of a strategy that enhances quality of life and economic prosperity by connecting people, communities, employment, goods, services and amenities.

Summary of Findings

The main issues identified in the research for this plan relate to the limited supply of routes and fragmentation of the local network rather than to condition and maintenance of paths and sites.

Countryside users often have to use or cross busy roads to link up paths and many as a result choose to drive to countryside sites and other areas with a more extensive network. High population levels in this part of South East Hampshire lead to high demand for these 'prime' access sites, putting the countryside under pressure and creating difficulties for those managing the land, whether for recreation, agriculture or wildlife conservation. There is a lack of information about local access

opportunities and a need for better coordination between the many local authorities and other information providers within the area. This is recognised by the Solent Forum, a stakeholder group which is working to achieve a more unified approach to promoting understanding and enjoyment of the whole of the area.

The following pages provide a rationale for each of the 8 issues identified within the Solent area and propose actions that could be undertaken to help to resolve them. The order in which these are set out is not indicative of priority.

Main issues

The Solent area is a highly-populated area with attractive and popular coastline and river estuaries and a number of very beautiful and popular areas of countryside. However:






1. The rights of way network is particularly fragmented in this part of Hampshire **(page 10)**
2. There is an undersupply of access resource for horse riding and carriage driving **(page 12)**
3. Countryside users are forced to use or cross busy roads to link up off-road access **(page 14)**
4. Many Solent area residents travel some distance to find accessible countryside; there is a high reliance on cars and the availability of car parking to access the countryside both within and beyond the Solent area **(page 16)**
5. The Solent area offers good potential for cycling, but improvements are needed to both the network and the associated infrastructure **(page 18)**
6. There is a strong demand for access to the coastal areas and river estuaries in this area, both by land and by water **(page 20)**
7. Lack of local 'greenspace' and rights of way puts pressure on existing publicly accessible sites, which may also be of high conservation value **(page 22)**
8. A coordinated approach to providing information is needed to facilitate and promote enjoyment of the countryside for all and to encourage responsible use **(page 24)**

Guide to the Action Tables

The tables in the following pages propose a range of actions to address the issues affecting enjoyment of the countryside in this part of Hampshire. The actions relate to a series of main aims. They provide examples of how these aims could be achieved in this part of Hampshire, but should not be regarded as an exhaustive list of all the possible ways of achieving those aims.

Estimated Costs

The following symbols are used to indicate the estimated costs:

-  Use of existing staff
-  Extra staff requirements
-  Costs could be met within current budgets for management and maintenance (e.g. projects up to £5,000)
-  Action would require planned investment/capital bid (e.g. costs between £5,000 – £50,000)
-  Action would require substantial investment from other sources such as Local Transport Plan, joint funding with partner organisations, grant aid (e.g. projects costing more than £50,000)

Timescales

Columns in the tables indicate whether the proposed actions are:

- Current, on-going work or projects
- Medium term (aim to achieve in the next 2-5 years)
- Long term, aspirational schemes

Lead Bodies and Potential Partners

The lead body is shown in bold, where it is known. The following acronyms are used in this column:

CLA	Country Land and Business Association
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
FC	Forestry Commission
HA	Highways Agency
HCAF	Hampshire Countryside Access Forum
HCC(CS)	Hampshire County Council (Countryside Service)
HCC(HH)	Hampshire County Council (Hampshire Highways)
HWT	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Landowners	Includes private and public landowners, including organisations such as National Trust and Forestry Commission
NE	Natural England
NFU	National Farmers Union
PCC	Portsmouth City Council
Parish councils	For conciseness, where parish councils are referred to this also includes town councils
SGS	HCAF Small Grants Scheme ³
User groups	Organisations such as CTC (Cyclists' Touring Club), BHS (British Horse Society), Ramblers Association, British Driving Society, Trail Riders' Fellowship, Land Access and Recreation Association
Users	People who walk, ride, cycle or drive on countryside access routes

NB: Lead bodies and potential partners are suggested as appropriate. Inclusion in this part of the table, however, does not automatically indicate that these organisations have undertaken to deliver the actions.

³ The HCAF Small Grants Scheme offers up to 50% funding to parish councils and landowners towards work to improve access to their local countryside

Issue 1 – The rights of way network is particularly fragmented in this part of Hampshire

The average density of rights of way in the Solent area is roughly half the density for the county of Hampshire as a whole (see Appendix 1).

This low level of provision does not apply across the area; consultation for the Langstone Village Design Statement, for example, found that most people felt access around the village was adequate. In other parts of the Solent area, however, the network of routes is both sparse and fragmented. Many paths are heavily used, due to a lack of alternatives. Ramblers, local walkers and dog walkers commented that there need to be better maintenance of the existing paths.





The fragmentation of the network is partly caused by the physical geography of the area. Portsmouth, Langstone and Chichester Harbours and the river estuaries of the Itchen, Hamble, Meon and Alver all form natural barriers to routes running east-west across the area. Ferries and bridges are key elements within the countryside access network, particularly in the south of the area. Users of the Solent Way cross the Itchen and Meon rivers via road bridges and rely on ferries at Hamble and Gosport. Costs of ferries are a concern to some people; though not high for an individual, they can be prohibitive for family groups, particularly those with cycles. Ferries can also be problematic for some people with mobility problems; some wheelchair users had had difficulty using the ferry to Portsmouth from Gosport.

Development in the Solent area has contributed to fragmentation of the network as countryside and 'greenspace' has been replaced by housing, industrial developments and roads. There is a dense network of trunk roads and urban highways; bridges and underpasses have been installed at key points along major

highways such as the M27 and A27, but they are limited in number. Some are also unappealing or problematic to users, e.g. bridge parapets that are too low for mounted horse riders to cross in safety and underpasses that are prone to flooding. In some places they are also associated with fear of assault.

There are various anomalies in the rights of way network that have historical or political origins; for example, a number of Hampshire County Council rights of way end at the Southampton city boundary, due to historical differences in the recording of rights of way in the two authority areas. Southampton City Council is working with the County Council to resolve these anomalies. There is a similar lack of connection between some footpaths in Portsmouth and those in the surrounding countryside.

Given this rather disjointed rights of way network, permissive access plays an important part in providing alternative off-road access and creating a better network than there appears to be from the map of rights of way. Permissive access is provided in some parts of the Solent area on land owned or managed by local authorities, on private land, (for example through formal agreements under agri-environment schemes) and through informal arrangements between local users and landowners. The difficulty with permissive routes is that although those provided under agri-environmental schemes can be identified from the appropriate Defra website, other permissions are often informally agreed with local people and are not recorded or shown on Ordnance Survey mapping. Landowners are often reluctant to publicise permissive routes and prefer to be able to withdraw permissions should they wish or need to.

Aims and proposed actions		Timescales and estimated costs			Lead bodies and potential partners
		On-going	Medium term	Long term	
AIM: Identify and secure new access that will provide high quality, useful 'missing links' in the network.					
So I.1	Work with city councils to resolve anomalies on the borders between authority areas.				HCC(CS) / SCC / PCC
So I.2	Work with users and landowners to identify priority routes that can be developed through e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging landowners to provide permanent (dedicated) or permissive access routes Opportunities provided by new development Influencing the work of the Highways Agency 	 ££			HCC(CS) / landowners / users / HA / District & city councils
So I.3	Consult and respond to strategic planning documents and agri-environment consultations to improve the network.				HCC(CS) / District & city councils / landowners / users / HWT
AIM: Encourage and support car-free travel.					
So I.4	Evaluate costs/benefits of providing subsidised family tickets for ferry crossings.			 ££	HCC(CS) / Solent Forum / District & city councils / landowners / users / HWT / ferry operators

Issue 2 – There is an undersupply of access resource for horse riding and carriage driving

Within the rights of way network in the Solent there is a particularly poor provision for equestrian users – of the 160 km of routes shown on the definitive map of rights of way in this area there are only 9.5 km of bridleway and only 3.5km of byway . In effect, horse riders have access to 8% of a rights of way network which in itself is depleted in comparison to the rest of the county, while carriage drivers can legitimately use only 2%. This compares with 28% and 11% respectively for Hampshire overall. Bridleway and byway density in the Solent (in metres per hectare) is 15% of the average density of equestrian access for Hampshire overall.

The number of horses kept within the Solent area is unknown, but substantial; local riders estimate that at least 485 horses are kept in the Stubbington/Titchfield, Segensworth, Warsash/Locks Heath/Abshot and Newgate Lane areas. Planning consent for new equestrian establishments is not conditional on the extent of the local bridleway and byway network. Owners have a strong desire to keep their horses as close as possible to where they live in order to minimise the travelling time needed to tend and exercise their horses. There are therefore a substantial number of stables and horse paddocks in areas of high population density, housing horses for riding and for driving, which have no direct access to 'safe' (i.e. off-road) routes, byways or bridleways.






Unless they have permissive use of private tracks, carriage drivers are almost completely dependent on the road system and can be seen even during peak traffic times exercising their horses along busy roads.

Riders in the Solent area who were consulted for this plan said that most of them generally want to be able to ride out on reasonably safe routes for periods of

between 1 and 3 hours. Circular routes are preferred (in a Hampshire-wide survey of equestrian users, 67% of equestrians expressed a strong preference for circular routes) and the ideal is to have a selection of different routes. In the Solent area, riders rely heavily on the minor road system and permissive riding access to supplement the lack of bridleways and byways. For example, the Registered Riders Scheme provides a series of off-road permissive routes in the east of Hayling Island, where there is otherwise only the Hayling Billy trail, which runs down the west side of the Island.

Some permissive schemes, such as those provided at West Wood and at the Chilling Estate, are difficult to reach because of the lack of bridleway links and the volume of traffic on the roads. Some riders resort to 'boxing' to these areas of permissive routes. Others find access via 'grey' routes, i.e. riding along footpaths or across land without the owner's permission. Local riders report that some landowners and a small minority of residents are unsympathetic and in some instances quite hostile to horse riders.

Riders consulted for this plan mentioned that new bridleway provision that was a condition of residential and industrial development has yet to be created. They feel this is indicative that equestrian access is not given sufficient priority within the area; they also asked that there should be more emphasis on creating new bridleways and safer links to both permissive and statutory routes.

Aims and proposed actions		Timescales and estimated costs			Lead bodies and potential partners
		On-going	Medium term	Long term	
AIM: Identify and secure new access that will provide high quality, useful 'missing links' in the network.					
So 2.1	<p>Work with users and landowners to identify priority routes that can be developed through e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging landowners to provide permanent (dedicated) or permissive access routes Opportunities provided by new development Influencing the work of the Highways Agency 	 ££			HCC(CS) / landowners / users / HA / District & city councils
So 2.2	Consult and respond to strategic planning documents and agri-environment consultations to improve the network.				HCC(CS) / District & city councils / landowners / users / HWT
So 2.3	Consider how the process for upgrading paths to bridleways could be simplified.				HCC(CS) / Landowners / horse riders
So 2.4	Give priority to claims for bridleways or restricted byways in the Solent areas.				HCC(CS)
So 2.5	Take account of provision of off-road riding routes in consideration of applications for equestrian developments.				HCC(CS) / District & city councils

Issue 3 – Countryside users are forced to use or cross busy roads to link up off-road access

This issue has been raised as a concern by all types of users consulted for this plan. The dense road network in this developed area and the associated fragmentation of the rights of way network mean that it is almost inevitable that users have both to cross and to use the roads to link up off-road paths.

As development in the area continues the traffic volumes, which are already high, are likely to increase. Traffic congestion is a problem at peak times throughout much of the area and many minor roads are used as ‘rat runs’ during these periods.

This means that at times even unclassified country roads can represent a barrier to walkers, horse riders and cyclists and a deterrent to exploration and enjoyment of the local area.

Parents of small children are reluctant to go on walks that involve negotiating narrow country roads:

“Road safety is of paramount importance – parents are unwilling to go on walks which involve pushing a buggy along narrow stretches of country road without pavements.”

This is equally a concern for those who are less mobile or who have impaired vision. There is also the difficulty that maps do not differentiate between roads that have pavements for pedestrians and those that do not.

Cyclists try to avoid areas of heavy traffic, especially for leisure cycling, and many look for quieter back roads to avoid busy traffic areas. Novice cyclists and children have few routes within the area where they can develop their cycling skills. Both cyclists and horse riders report a general

lack of consideration and frequent instances of abuse from car drivers.

“Many riders are very restricted as to where they can hack. The hazards on the road make hacking virtually impossible for children and young people.”

“Some riders are too frightened to hack out at all. Others only do so at off-peak times.”






In some places road verges have the potential to provide walking and riding routes, but often these are cut either too infrequently or to insufficient depth to be usable.

There are few official statistics available on road traffic accidents involving horses, but in a survey of equestrian users in Hampshire⁴ 13% reported that they had had a road traffic accident and 69% reported at least one ‘near miss’.

The same survey found that poor sight lines at junctions and having to cross busy roads are a problem encountered by nearly all carriage drivers (90%) and the majority of horse riders (78%). This is an issue for cyclists and pedestrians as well, particularly for those who are less mobile or have sight or hearing loss. For equestrian users the difficulty is increased in other ways by the unpredictable nature of horses and the distance that the rider or driver sits from the front of the horse.

Resolving some of these problems would potentially address a major disincentive to participation in active travel and recreational use of the countryside access network.

⁴ Assessment of Use and Demand for Equestrian Access to the Countryside, HCC 2004

Aims and proposed actions		Timescales and estimated costs			Lead bodies and potential partners
		On-going	Medium term	Long term	
AIM: Seek alternatives to road use for non-motorised users.					
So 3.1	Identify and prioritise the management of existing and creation of new routes that avoid roads.	 ££			HCC(CS) / Defra / Landowners / users
So 3.2	Identify verges that could be managed to provide safer links in the access network and agree standard of maintenance required.	 ££			HCC(CS) / HCC(HH) / parish councils & community groups / users
AIM: Raise awareness of non-motorised users' needs in management and modification of the road network and in new road schemes.					
So 3.3	Develop and sustain contact between rights of way teams, users, Hampshire Highways and Highways Agency to encourage more consultation about road maintenance and new road schemes.				HCC(CS) / HCC(HH) / HA / users
So 3.4	Identify and consult on traffic management schemes to reduce traffic density and speed on minor roads.			 £££	HCC(CS) / HCAF / police / parish councils & community groups / local residents / users
AIM: Improve safety where the on- and off-road networks intersect.					
So 3.5	Identify key crossing points and prioritise for improvement (e.g. traffic management, better sight lines, refuges, controlled crossings, etc).		 £££		HCC(CS) / users / HCC(HH) / landowners

Issue 4 – Many Solent area residents travel some distance to find accessible countryside; there is a high reliance on cars and the availability of car parking to visit the countryside both within and beyond the Solent area

Many people in this area choose to travel some distance to visit the countryside. This is for various reasons: there may be very little open space nearby; they may not know what is available locally; or the nature of local access may be off-putting because of poor surfaces, busy roads, lack of circular routes, poor provision for people with limited mobility, restrictions on use, or concern about being on their own in certain areas.

“You have to drive to get anywhere that you can let the dogs off the lead.”

“People drive from Gosport to Royal Victoria Country Park because they feel safer there than at countryside sites within the Borough.”

Popular sites for walking include Titchfield Haven or Royal Victoria Country Park, or to Whiteley Woods, north of the M27. Cyclists from Portsmouth and Gosport looking for longer recreational routes on rural roads often head for the Forest of Bere, but will use the car to avoid having to negotiate the busy urban road network and the steep climb up Portsdown Hill.

Horse riders with trailers or lorries drive to areas of good off-road riding, some choosing to do so even for short distances in preference to riding on busy roads.

Nationally, only a very small proportion (7%) of people visit the countryside by public transport⁵. This is partly because people prefer the flexibility of having a car, but also involves other factors. Public transport is generally geared towards weekday travel to work, so routes and timetables tend not to meet requirements for weekend, recreational visits to the countryside. Buses and trains are difficult to use with young children, pushchairs, dogs and wheelchairs. There is limited








provision for carrying cycles, pushchairs and mobility vehicles, and fares can be expensive for families and groups. There is often a lack of ‘on-site’ information about routes and frequency of services. In short, getting out to the countryside can be very difficult for those without the use of a car.

In 2001 Hampshire County Council piloted a scheme to provide bus links to the countryside from Gosport, Portsmouth, Fareham and Havant. This was funded for 3 years from the Countryside Agency Rural Transport Partnership fund. Evaluation of the project concluded that it could not continue without this funding.

This high dependency on car use makes parking – its availability, condition, location, adequacy, security and cost – a major consideration for those visiting the countryside the Solent area. People avoid car parks that are potholed or muddy, or are a focus for car crime. Limited parking in ‘honeypot’ areas such as Hamble leads to obstruction of gateways and verges, and similar problems arise around Royal Victoria Country Park, where visitors park on verges to avoid parking charges. Height barriers installed in rural car parks to deter travellers also exclude horse riders from trailers and lorries to travel to areas of good off-road riding.

Many people consulted for this plan would like to get into the countryside directly from where they live. This would particularly benefit people with disabilities and parents of small children, who may not have access to a car, or for whom the use of a car transforms a short outing into a major expedition (particularly when combined with road congestion, e.g. around Gosport). Dog walkers would also welcome more local provision for short routine walks.

⁵ Great Britain Leisure Day Visits Survey 2002-03

Aims and proposed actions		Timescales and estimated costs			Lead bodies and potential partners
		On-going	Medium term	Long term	
AIM: Provide, maintain and promote good quality routes that link town and countryside.					
So 4.1	Work with planning authorities and developers to ensure that appropriate, attractive local greenspace and car-free links to the wider countryside network are retained and provided within new developments.		£££		HCC(CS) / district & city councils / developers
AIM: Raise awareness of non-motorised users' needs in the management and modification of the road network and in new road schemes.					
So 4.2	Work with Hampshire Highways to ensure project appraisal for new road schemes includes needs of walkers, cyclists and riders.				HCC(CS) / HCC(HH) / district & city councils / users
AIM: Encourage and support car-free travel.					
So 4.3	Identify and promote existing public transport and other car-free transport options between conurbations and the wider countryside.	 £			District & city councils / HCC(CS) / users
So 4.4	Identify and develop key sites and routes with good levels of accessibility and pilot transport scheme for people with disabilities.		££		HCC(CS) / local disabled access groups/ district & city councils
So 4.5	Examine feasibility of improving public transport provision to meet leisure needs.		 £		District & city councils / HCC(CS) / Transport providers
AIM: Optimise the provision and management of parking.					
So 4.6	Pilot schemes to make more effective use of existing car parking facilities e.g. village and community halls.		 £		HCC(CS) / HCAF(SGS) / parish councils & community groups
So 4.7	Make car parking available for trailers and horseboxes at key sites for access to riding routes.	 ££			HCC(CS) / District & city councils

Issue 5 – The Solent area offers good potential for cycling, but improvements are needed to both the network and associated infrastructure

High population density, coupled with the physical geography of the area (2 major conurbations – Portsmouth and Gosport – are located on peninsulas) contribute to substantial road congestion in the Solent area at peak travel times. A higher proportion of Gosport residents cycle to work than in any other part of Hampshire; many of them choose to do so because it is quicker and cheaper to take a bicycle on the ferry to work in Portsmouth than to drive the longer distance around Portsmouth Harbour, particularly during rush-hour.

The terrain within the Solent area is relatively level and therefore has certain advantages for cycling. There are some good cycle routes in parts of the area, but the network is disjointed. For example, there is an excellent route between Portchester and Portsmouth, but the route through Portchester and on to Fareham is incomplete. There is also a lack of 'safe' (i.e. off-road) routes for family cycling.

Where there is a lack of legitimate routes, some cyclists resort to using footpaths, which can cause problems with legitimate pedestrian users.

Sustrans is developing the NCN2⁶ across the Solent area between Southampton and Portsmouth. The route splits between Warsash and Havant with a northern section through Fareham and to the north of the harbours and a southern route along the coast, using the Hamble, Gosport and Hayling ferries. It will be some years before it is complete, but sections are in place and Sustrans is also developing a network of local routes linking residential areas with schools and colleges.

Southampton City Council's Active Travel Plan encourages residents and visitors to incorporate exercise such as walking and cycling into their lives whilst carrying out their everyday activities around the city. A network of high quality cycle routes would enable local authorities to extend this initiative across the area; however, in some places (e.g. Portsmouth, most of which is on an island) accessibility is both particularly poor and challenging to address.






All of the ferries in the Solent area take cycles, but provision for cycles on trains is both limited and inconsistent, making journeys difficult to plan reliably, particularly for family groups.

Another difficulty reported by cyclists is the lack of cycle racks at key sites and attractions including Titchfield Abbey, Netley Abbey, Portchester Castle and Royal Victoria Country Park. One local supermarket has recently removed the cycle racks from outside the store.

Cyclists commented that there are some good local recreational routes e.g. Fareham to Whiteley and around Langstone Harbour, but these are not currently promoted. There is reported to be little waymarking of cycle routes in the area, and although most local authorities publish cycling maps, they do not connect and it is difficult to find a route across district boundaries.

Local cyclists reported that some districts appear to be more supportive of cycling development than others. They also felt that there was a general lack of understanding of the needs of cyclists in the design of cycle routes.

⁶ NCN – National Cycle Network

Aims and proposed actions		Timescales and estimated costs			Lead bodies and potential partners
		On-going	Medium term	Long term	
AIM: Raise awareness of non-motorised users' needs in the management and modification of the road network and in new road schemes.					
So 5.1	Liaise with Hampshire Highways to ensure project appraisal for new road schemes takes account of cyclists' needs.		££		HCC(CS) / HCC(HH) / cyclists
So 5.2	Identify and foster cycling 'champions' (Member and/or senior officer) within local authorities, to promote cycling within a wide range of agendas, e.g. sustainable transport, health promotion.				City & district councils / HCAF / cyclists
AIM: Provide, maintain and promote good quality routes that link town and countryside.					
So 5.3	Continue to develop and promote cycle routes to link conurbations within the area to each other and the countryside, including 'family friendly' routes.	 £££			City & district councils / HCC(CS) / Sustrans
So 5.4	Develop and promote a coordinated "Active Travel" initiative across the area, encouraging use of walking and cycling routes in conjunction with public transport.		 ££		HCC(CS) / City & district councils / public transport providers / landowners / users
AIM: Encourage and support car-free travel.					
So 5.5	Provide cycle racks at key sites e.g. country parks and countryside sites, visitor attractions, supermarkets.	 ££			HCC(CS) / City & district councils / HCAF(SGS)

Issue 6 – There is a strong demand for access to the coastal areas and river estuaries in this area, both by land and by water

The coast and river estuaries of the Solent are among the most attractive countryside in Hampshire, valued highly by both residents and visitors to the area. People travel long distances to enjoy the sea views, wildlife and marine activity in the harbours and estuaries; also to participate in activities on or beside the water (yachting, bathing, surfing, angling and exploring the rivers and harbours by dinghy and canoe). Where coastal paths are level and well-surfaced, they are particularly valued by people with limited mobility because of the lack of steep gradients and the range of interest.

The user need and expectation survey conducted for the Southampton City ROWIP showed that access to the waterside was the third most popular activity for which rights of way in the city were used, for access both along the waterside and to the water itself.

Horse riders would also welcome the opportunity to ride along some parts of the shore.

Improved access to the coast is a priority in the Government's Rural Manifesto 2005. However, coastal erosion and rising sea levels are already causing problems on paths along some parts of the Hampshire coast. At Royal Victoria Country Park the coastal footpath depends on the sea wall being in good repair, while on the Hamble the low-lying Bunny Meadows coastal footpath is often overtopped during storms, leading to erosion of the supporting structures. Maintaining or improving defences to protect such paths may not be sustainable, given the high cost, impact on the environment and future sea level rise.

Parts of the shoreline are too unstable to sustain safe paths. For example, near Warsash the Solent Way no longer follows the low-tide route due to an area of quicksand; the route is now signed along an inland path. Many other sections of coastal paths are likely to be affected by rising sea levels and erosion in the near future.

Hampshire County Council has completed a coastal access audit and is working with the Environment Agency, Natural England and district councils on a long term strategy for vulnerable areas within the County Council's ownership. The potential for continued and improved coastal access to will depend on Shoreline Management Plans, which are being developed to provide policies for sustainable management of flood defence and coastal protection.

Although the New Forest National Park lies outside the Solent CAP area, the National Park Authority would wish to be involved in any projects that might affect the Solent European Marine Sites (sites designated as important for their habitats and species).

Southampton City and the boroughs of Gosport and Fareham have planning policies that aim to protect and increase access to the coast and waterfront, wherever this is practicable and compatible with nature conservation.

In research for this plan, people commented on the lack of public hard for launching dinghies. There are a number in popular areas such as the Hamble estuary; at other hard and pontoons along the coast and estuaries, it is difficult to determine their availability for public use. A further barrier to use of these is the lack of secure parking for boat trailers and tenders. Location of launch sites is a particular concern for users of canoes and dinghies, who would like more public launch points further upstream in quieter waters:

“The more beautiful upper reaches of the Hamble are accessible only after a long paddle from Swanwick shore, the only launching point with nearby car parking.”

Other areas are inaccessible for launching or indeed any access to the water, because they are privately owned, occupied by marinas, ports or industrial sites, or part of a nature conservation area.

Aims and proposed actions		Timescales and estimated costs			Lead bodies and potential partners
		On-going	Medium term	Long term	
AIM: Ensure information is easy for all to find and understand.					
So 6.1	Promote existing sites and facilities for launching small craft.		£		HCC(CS) / Harbour authorities
AIM: Enhance and increase opportunities for enjoyment of access to the coast and waterways of Hampshire.					
So 6.2	Complete coastal access audit.	£			HCC(CS)
So 6.3	Extend SCC Policy for access to waterfront to be included in any waterside development into other areas.				HCC(CS) / City & district councils
So 6.4	Clarify status of coastal and estuary paths where this is uncertain and upgrade (where possible) for cyclists and other users.	££			HCC(CS) / Users / Landowners
AIM: Identify and secure new access that will provide high quality, useful 'missing links' in the network.					
So 6.5	Develop the circular trails proposed in the 'Solent Circles' project.		££		Solent Forum/ HCC(CS) / districts
So 6.6	Prioritise the provision, maintenance and promotion of routes with visual and physical access to the coasts and estuaries				HCC(CS) / users

Issue 7 – Lack of local ‘greenspace’ and rights of way puts pressure on existing publicly accessible sites, which may also be of high conservation value

Some of the more popular countryside sites within the Solent CAP area are important areas both historically and for wildlife conservation. The river Hamble, for example, is both part of the Natura 2000 network and one of the richest rivers in the region for archaeology.

The pressure of over-use and misuse of sites affects public enjoyment of the countryside in the area. The value of these sites relates closely to their tranquillity, wildlife, scenery and heritage, and it is particularly important to maintain a balance between access and conservation. At present, the environmental carrying capacity of sensitive sites along the Solent is under-researched⁷.

Continuing development imposes increasing pressure on countryside in the area, combining an increase in population with loss of open space. This has particular impact in areas like the Gosport peninsula, where it is difficult both for people and for wildlife to travel to find alternative countryside or habitat outside the locality. Some of this pressure could potentially be eased by improving the network and linkage of paths.

Land managers who are responsible for wildlife sites have particular concerns about birds being disturbed, for example by walkers and cyclists who leave designated routes and cross stretches of shingle where birds may be nesting or feeding, or by walkers with dogs:

“Disturbance of roosting, feeding and nesting birds by dogs is probably the biggest conservation concern at Hook /Warsash... disturbance by each individual dog may be minimal but at popular sites for dog walking, the effects are cumulative.”

Research by Hampshire County Council showed that many of the concerns about public access to wildlife sites are shared by farmers and private landowners. In a survey of 572 farmers and private landowners in Hampshire⁸ ‘dogs not under control’ was the problem most frequently experienced and the majority of farmers and landowners (82%) felt dog owners to be unaware of the problems their animals can cause in the countryside, from fouling to worrying livestock and disturbing wildlife.







The majority also reported many other problems with illegal activities (trespass, vandalism, misuse of motorised vehicles, etc) that are associated with public access. These tend to be more severe around urban areas, with additional problems in some places such as drug abuse and discarded needles.

It is likely that these problems contribute to many farmers’ and landowners’ reluctance to increase public access to their land. In the Solent CAP area, 32% of those responding to the survey said they would prefer to exclude the public from their land altogether, compared with 17% for Hampshire overall. Many feel that the inconvenience and problems caused by increasing access could not be offset by financial incentive; for them to feel more positive about access there would have to be a significant shift in responsible behaviour by the public, as perceived by landowners.

These land management and conservation issues need to be taken into account in the process of establishing new routes and public open space.

⁷ ‘Around the Solent’, Solent Forum

⁸ Survey of farmers and landowners, HCC 2006

Aims and proposed actions		Timescales and estimated costs			Lead bodies and potential partners
		On-going	Medium term	Long term	
AIM: Ensure that access improvements do not adversely affect wildlife conservation and seek, where possible, to enhance biodiversity.					
So 7.1	Identify and map sensitive areas where conservation interest is of paramount importance, with reference to, e.g. the Solent Forum's Wader Roost Strategy.	 ££			City & district councils/ Solent Forum
So 7.2	Commission research into environmental carrying capacity and apply findings e.g. to identify robust sites or instigate a programme of 'recovery' closure periods.		 £		Solent Forum
AIM: Encourage cooperation and understanding among users and between users and land managers.					
So 7.3	Apply good practice to the management of walkers with dogs at countryside sites.	 £			HCC(CS) / city & district councils / landowners and other access providers
So 7.4	Support and coordinate initiatives to encourage people to enjoy and learn more about landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage through guided walks, school visits and events.	 £			HCC(CS) / Solent Forum / City & district councils / Land owners and managers
So 7.5	Develop liaison between local landowners and farmers, access managers and users, e.g. through CAP action groups, joint work parties, local meetings and events.	 £			HCC(CS) / HCAF / landowners / district & city councils / CLA / NFU / users
AIM: Minimise the financial burden of access management.					
So 7.6	Ensure that Hampshire County Council and other local authority staff are kept informed of new funding opportunities available to farmers so that they may help promote funding for access improvements where appropriate.				HCC(CS) / City & district councils

Issue 8 – A coordinated approach to providing information is needed to facilitate and promote enjoyment of the countryside for all and to encourage responsible use

Local people consulted in the course of producing this plan remarked on the lack of coordination of information provided across the area. There are many different local authorities and other organisations within the Solent, all providing a range of leaflets, websites and other information about the sites, access routes and attractions that they manage, so there is no shortage of information. However, it is felt that this is not altogether effective in informing people about opportunities in the area or in helping them to use the access network effectively. City and district councils within the area all produce maps of cycle routes within their areas (see Issue 5), but there is no continuity between them, making it difficult to link routes across the districts.

Parents with young children and those with mobility problems generally require a greater level of detail in order to decide where to go and to plan their visit. These groups are less likely to set off along paths if they do not know what the route is like in terms of distance and condition, and whether or not it is 'access friendly'. Where routes do meet the needs of less mobile users, it is important that they are promoted and that information is sufficiently detailed and available in a suitable format to enable potential users to decide whether they will be appropriate and enjoyable or not.

Another difficulty identified by users is the lack of information about permissive routes. These do not appear on any Ordnance Survey mapping. Although some providers do produce maps of permissive access (for example Hampshire County Council has a leaflet showing permissive




bridleways at the Chilling Estate), most permissive access is known about through word of mouth and is therefore of benefit only to those local people who are 'in the know'.

Information needs to be provided at a point where people will both see it and be receptive to it – for example, it has been suggested that cycle routes should be promoted at gyms and activity centres and that local health walks leaflets should be available via parent and baby groups, libraries and doctors surgeries,

“.....three places where parents of young children spend masses of time!”

A range of on-site information is provided by the different authorities, but both users and site managers feel that this is currently inadequate. Cyclists commented on how few waymarked routes there are and suggested that more waymarking would encourage new cyclists. Some site managers feel that interpretation and information boards are of limited value on sites used mainly by local people, as they will tend to read them only once. They are also targets for vandalism. Many people commented that personal contact is the most effective medium for providing information. Events, guided walks and a warden on site provide opportunities for two-way communication; however, these cannot be available to all users, existing or potential, at all times.

Through the 'Solent Circles' project, Solent Forum is intending to establish and promote 10 to 14 new interpreted walks around the Solent coast, based on existing rights of way.

Aims and proposed actions		Timescales and estimated costs			Lead bodies and potential partners
		On-going	Medium term	Long term	
AIM: Ensure information is easy for all to find and understand.					
So 8.1	Develop better liaison between local authorities and other information providers to coordinate provision to an agreed, consistent standard across the area, e.g. through Recreation & Heritage liaison groups or Hampshire Action Teams (HATS).				HCC(CS) / City, district & parish councils / Solent Forum / HWT
So 8.2	Produce a 'Total Map' of cycle routes in the Solent area.		 ££		Sustrans / City, district & parish councils / HCC(CS)
So 8.3	Complete the 'Solent Circles' project.		 ££		Solent Forum

Notes

Extent of rights of way network

Length of rights of way in the Solent CAP area

	Area (ha)	Length (metres)			
		Footpath	Bridleway	BOAT ⁹	RB ¹⁰
Solent area	26,112	149,428	9,576	3,729	0
Hampshire overall	376,866	3,301,200	746,600	223,800	286,200

(Note: these totals are indicative rather than absolute, as they include the whole length of any right of way that extends beyond the CAP area.)

Density of rights of way network in the Solent CAP area

	Overall Density (metres/hectare)		
	Walking network (all RoW)	Riding and cycling network	Carriage driving network
Solent area	6.23	0.51	0.14
Hampshire overall	12.09	3.33	1.35

⁹ BOAT – Byway open to all traffic




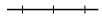




¹⁰ RB – Restricted byway

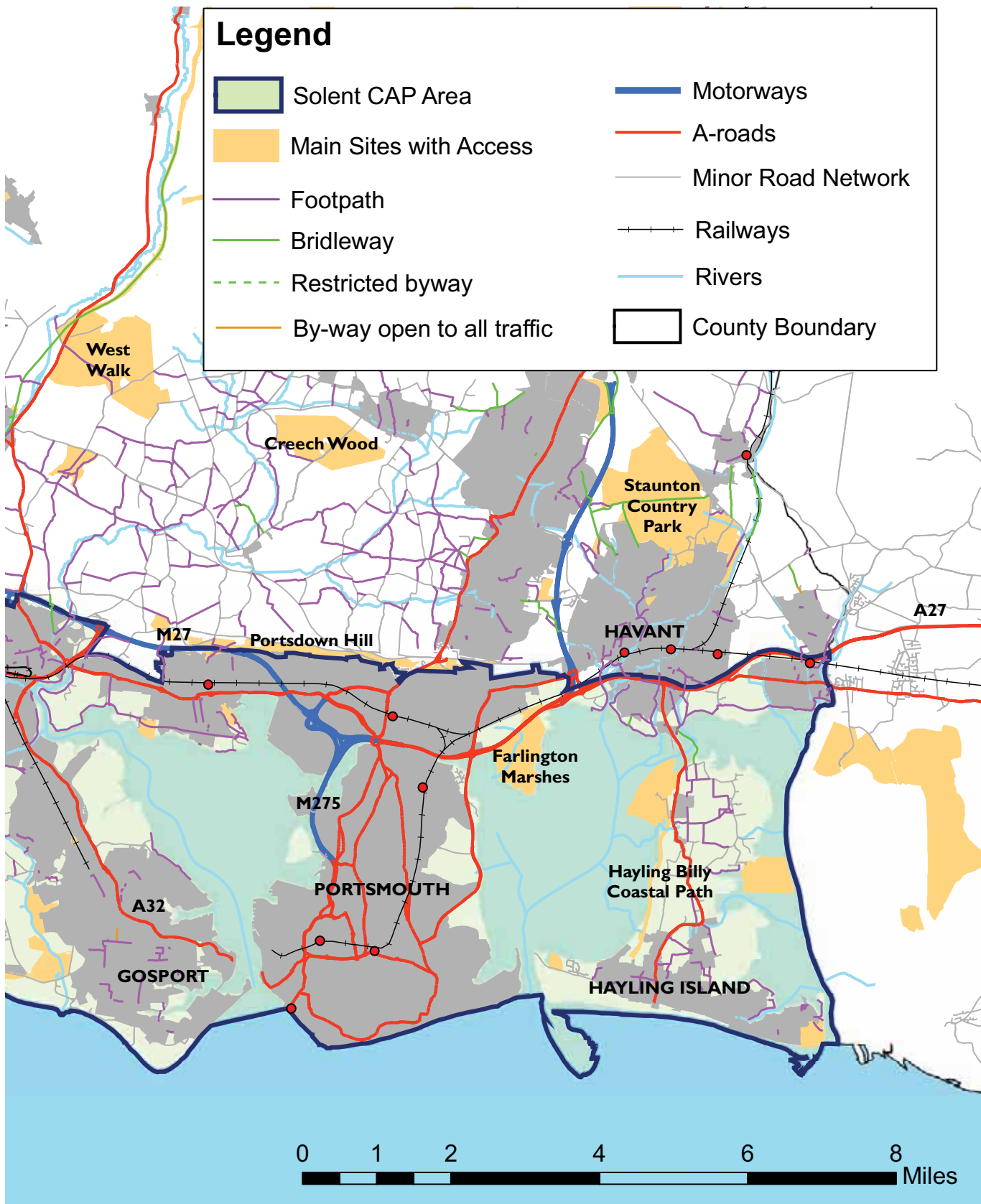
Overview of access in the Solent CAP area

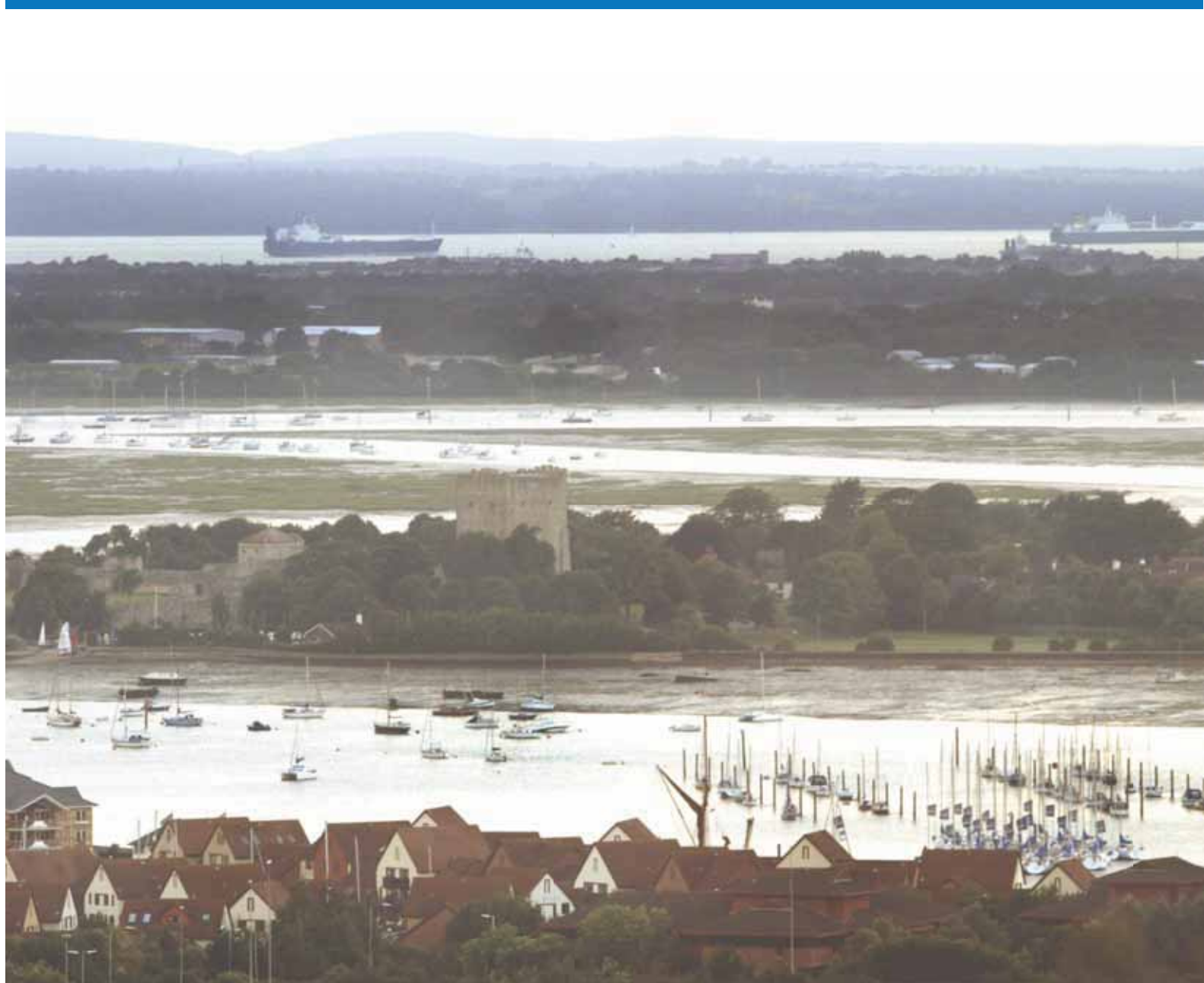
Showing rights of way, roads and main sites with access



Legend

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|--------------------|
|  | Solent CAP Area |  | Motorways |
|  | Main Sites with Access |  | A-roads |
|  | Footpath |  | Minor Road Network |
|  | Bridleway |  | Railways |
|  | Restricted byway |  | Rivers |
|  | By-way open to all traffic |  | County Boundary |





For further information: 0845 603 5636*
(free textphone) 0845 603 5625

www.hants.gov.uk/countryside-access-plans

* Calls will cost up to 4p per minute for BT customers. Calls made using other service providers or mobiles may cost more. Alternatively, call 01329 225398 – standard and local rates apply to this number.