5. Assessment of the network

5.1 The County Network

5.1.1 The main aim of the network assessment is to assess:

- the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public and
- the opportunities the PROW network provides for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation.

5.1.2 The Statement of Action (chapter 7) has been determined based on the findings of the overall network assessments and the wider consultation that has been carried out for the needs analysis in the Countryside users and their needs chapter (chapter 4).

5.1.3 As there is only a minimal level of open access land within the county of Nottinghamshire, the PROW network is the primary method for public access to the countryside. The vast network of urban routes provide links to urban fringe and the wider countryside and also provide traffic free routes to schools, shops, local services and the public transport network.

5.1.4 In addition to the PROW network there is a good provision of permissive open access and linear routes throughout the county. This is discussed in further detail under the heading 'Wider Access' later in this chapter (5.12).

5.1.5 Nottinghamshire has 3843 public rights of way totalling a network length of 2611.2 kilometres. The table below shows the total number and length (including percentages) of each PROW designation within the county. The four PROW designations are as follows:

- Footpath
- Bridleway
- Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)
- Restricted Byway (former Road used as a Public Path or RUPP)

5.1.6 Nottinghamshire's remaining RUPPs will eventually be reclassified as bridleways, restricted byways or BOATs.

Table 5 PROW network breakdown by percentage and length

Nottinghamshire Rights of Way Network Breakdown 2006

Designation	Footpath	Bridleway	BOAT	RUPP / RB	Total
No.	2980 (77%)	729 (19%)	113 (3%)	21 (1%)	3843
Length (km)	1794.9 (69%)	688.2 (26%)	100.8 (4%)	27.3 (1%)	2611.2

5.1.7 The number of footpaths far outweighs each of the other categorisations, which highlights that the network is much more accessible on foot than by any other means. 31% of the network length is available to equestrians and cyclists, which compared to the National (22%) and Regional (20%) figures is quite a large percentage. However, this figure is assuming all routes are usable. As discussed in the previous chapter, the fragmentation and maintenance issues of the bridleway network means that routes are frequently not available to all users. For example, the bridleway network may be unsuitable for cyclists because of equestrian use which on softer, wet surfaces can cause surface problems. Similarly, many surfaced bridleways are less well used by equestrians who generally prefer a softer surface. This is before other issues such as ploughing and cropping, vegetation growth and connectivity are taken into account.

Map 4 Density of PROW within Nottinghamshire

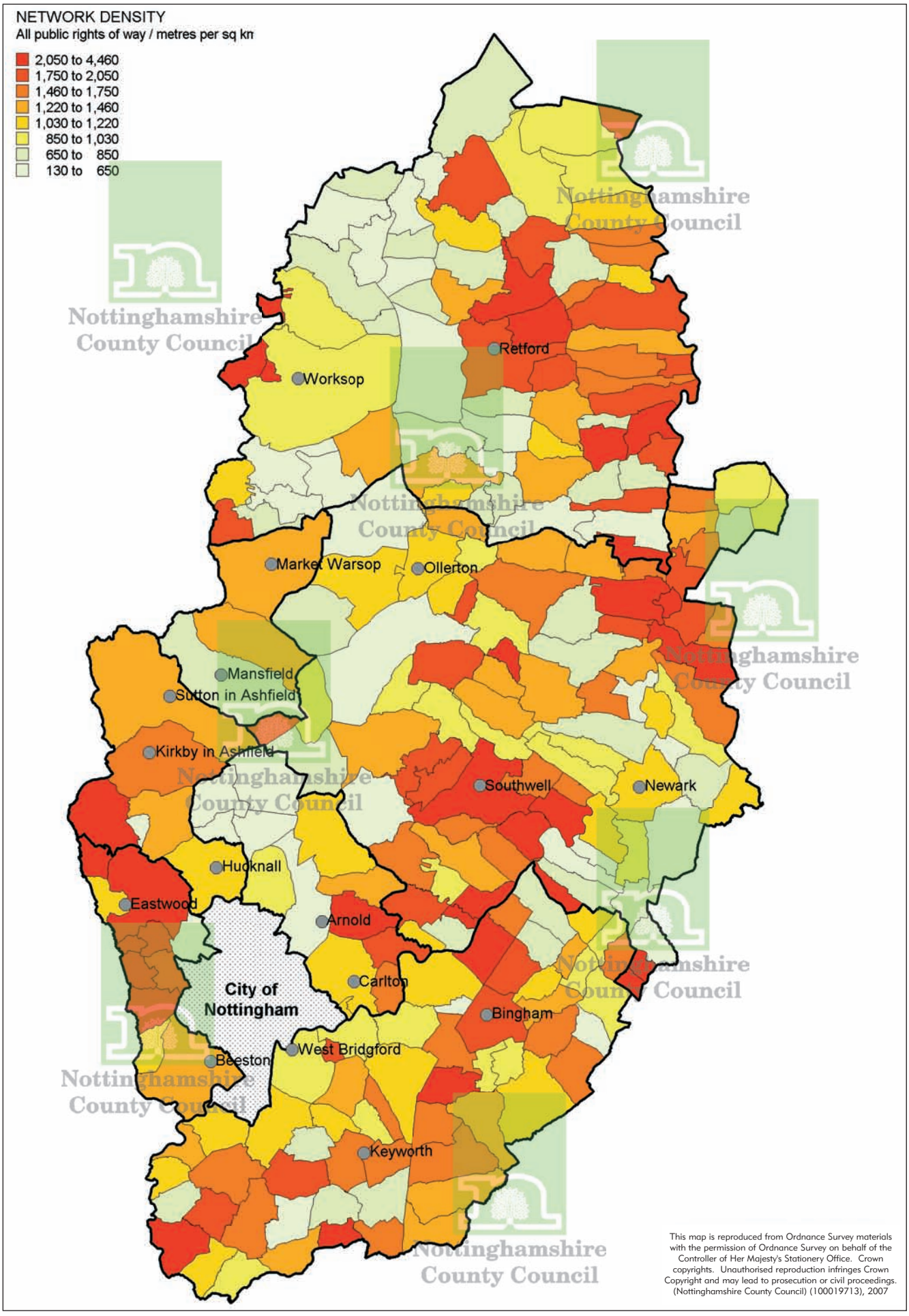


Chart 2 PROW in Nottinghamshire by percentage of network (%)

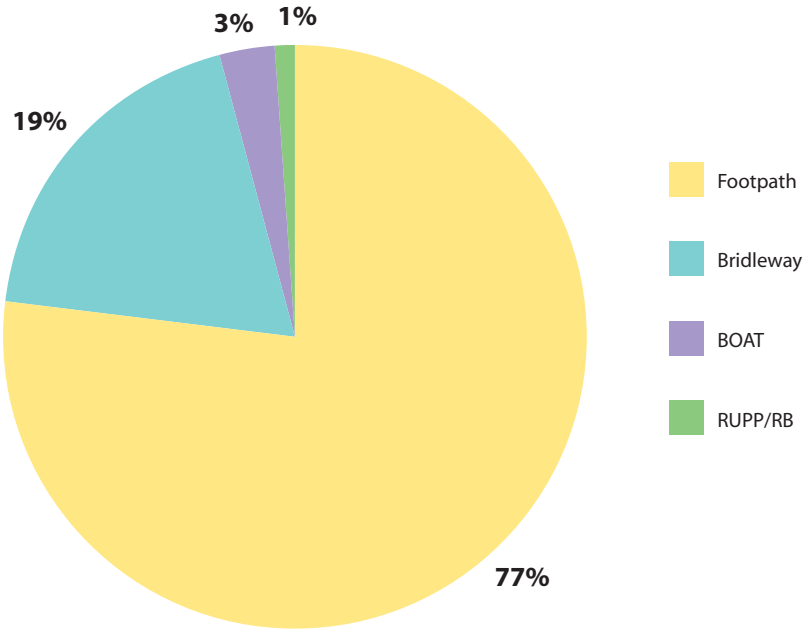
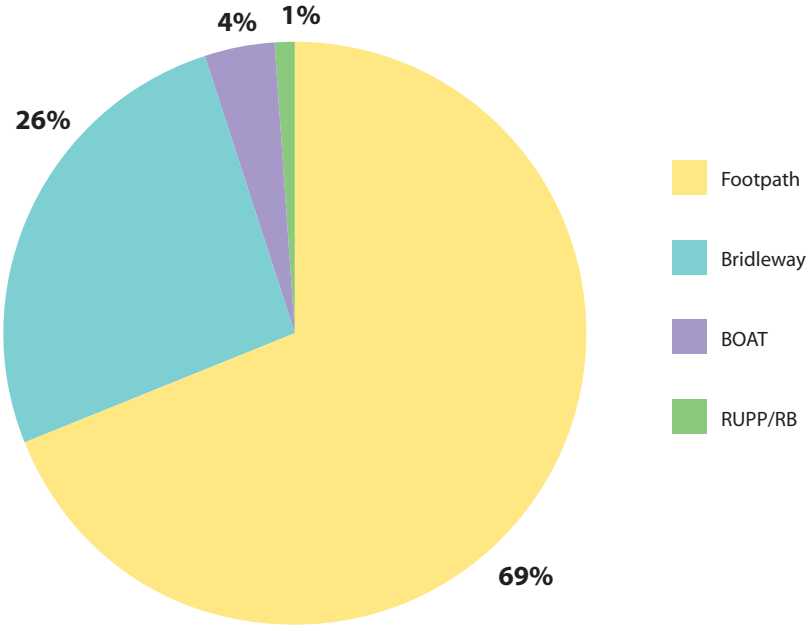
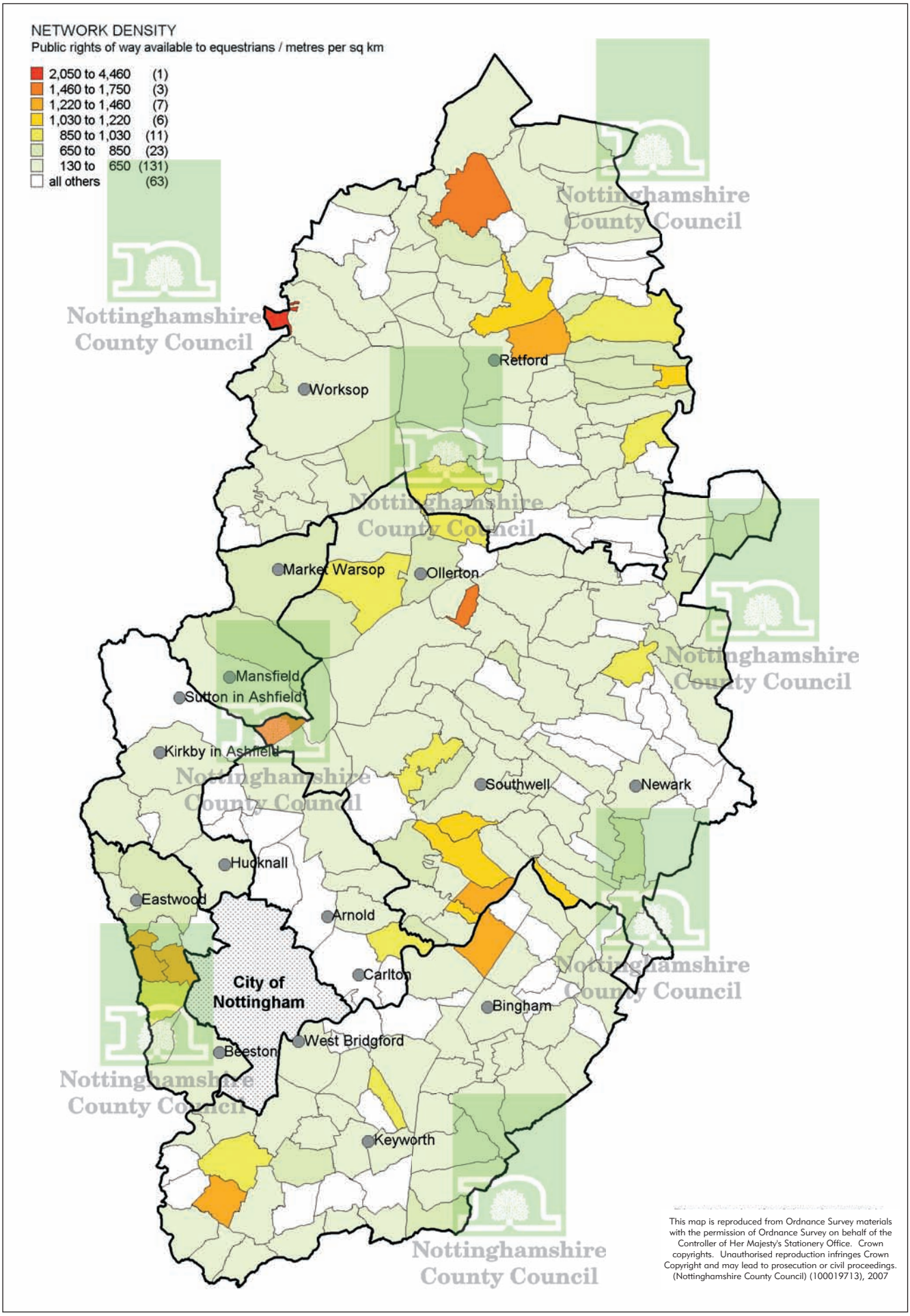


Chart 3 PROW in Nottinghamshire percentage by length of path (%)



Map 5 Density of PROW in Nottinghamshire available to equestrians and cyclists



5.2 *Making the Assessment*

5.2.1 In preparing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan Nottinghamshire County Council is required to assess:

a) the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public
b) the opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the Authority's area
c) the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

5.2.2 Both (a) and (b) above have been carried out in the form of:

- an assessment of the public rights of way (PROW) network in Nottinghamshire using the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 178 methodology (ease of use)
- an assessment of the wider access provision supplementary to the PROW network
- holding local consultation events to seek the views of existing and potential users of the PROW network.

5.2.3 The results will assist the Authority and give an indication in determining 5.2.1 (c) above. To further supplement the data collated in this report, the Authority recently commissioned the Fieldfare Trust (a national charity promoting disabled access to the countryside) to carry out an accessibility study in an area of the county.

5.2.4 It would be a huge strain on the County Council's resources to conduct a 100% BVPI survey of the PROW network within Nottinghamshire for the ROWIP. In order to cover as diverse an area as possible with the resources available it was decided to select four 5km grid squares across the county. Every PROW within each grid square was surveyed and inspected using the BVPI 178 methodology.

5.2.5 BVPI 178 is the national framework for comparing performance for public rights of way between local authorities. The methodology was devised by the County Surveyors Society (CSS) in conjunction with the Institute of Public Rights of Way Management (IPROW)[43] . The survey is conducted annually based on random samples of at least 5% of the PROW network. Every aspect of each path is assessed, for example waymarking, surface condition, structures etc, in order to give an overall ease of use figure. A path must pass all aspects of the survey to be classed as easy to use. As an example, if a route is fully waymarked and the infrastructure along it is in perfect condition, it will still fail if it is not correctly signed where it leaves the road.

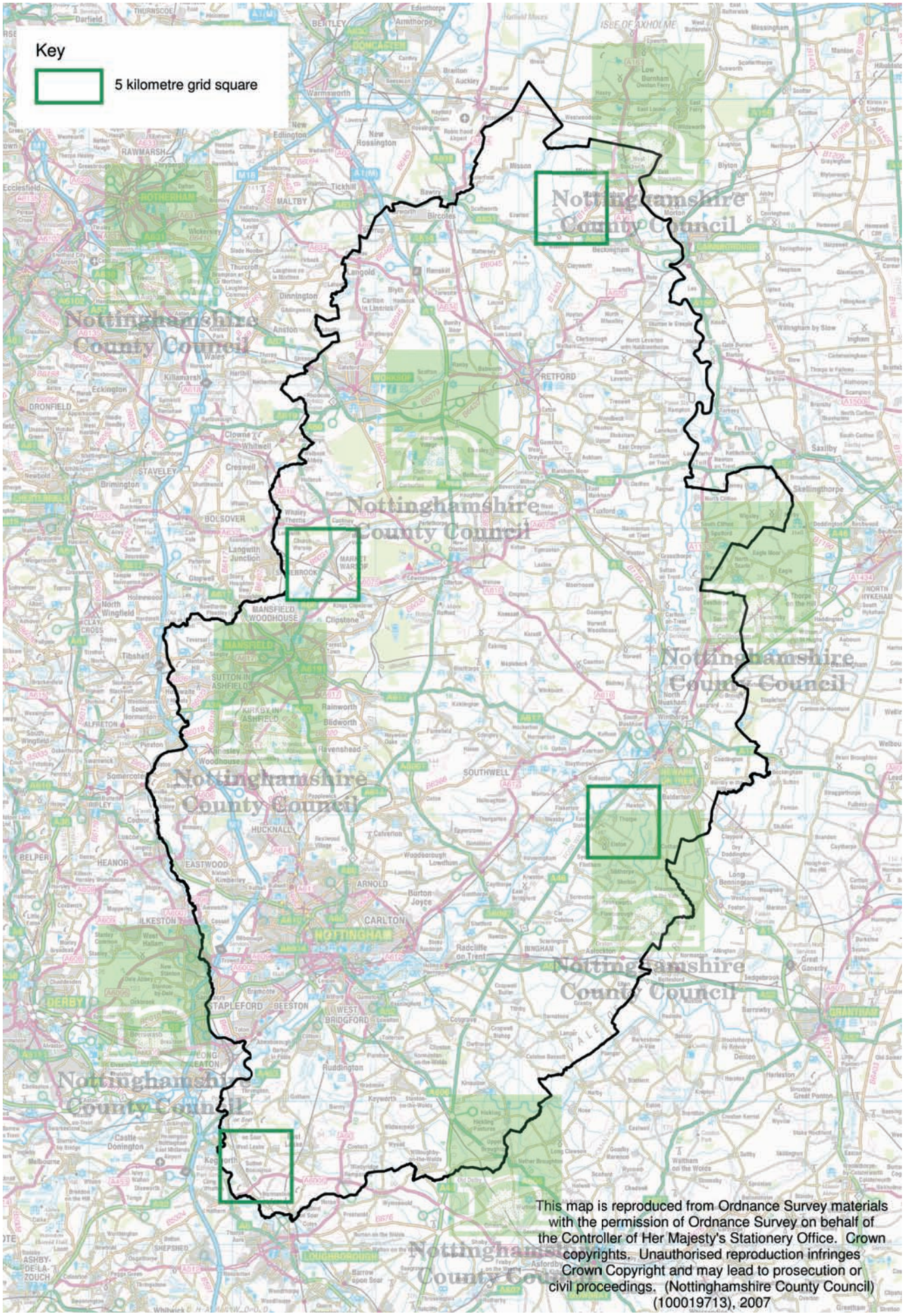
5.2.6 Four 5km square areas were chosen to represent different geographical regions within Nottinghamshire and also the diverse social and economic characteristics found within the county. See Map 6. The 5km grid squares were centred on the following places:

- Elston
- Gringley on the Hill
- Sutton Bonington
- Warsop.

5.2.7 By choosing areas with differing characteristics the assessment of the PROW network should highlight the diverse range of situations and problems that can be encountered by users of the whole network. It is hoped that this will also highlight the size and diversity of the task faced by the County Council in performing their statutory function of keeping PROW free from obstruction whilst trying to increase access and recreational opportunities.

[43] IPROW Good Practice Guide, Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers, 2006.

Map 6 Network assessment area overview



5.2.8 Social and Economic Characteristics of Grid Square areas

5.2.9 The chosen areas have been categorised based on socio-economic data (National Statistics 2001 Area Classification of Wards and Neighbourhood Statistics website)[44] and the general geographic characteristics of the area.

5.2.10 Elston - situated in east Nottinghamshire just south of Newark, covers a rural area dominated by agricultural land. Elston and the surrounding villages of Cotham, Hawton, Thorpe, East Stoke and Syerston are all small and appear fairly affluent in nature. Farndon lies on the outskirts of Newark and is much more densely populated than the other areas in the grid square.

5.2.11 Gringley on the Hill - situated in north Nottinghamshire midway between Blyth and Gainsborough, is a fairly large rural village. The landscape is largely dominated by agriculture and the census statistics suggests the area is reasonably affluent.

5.2.12 Sutton Bonington is situated in south Nottinghamshire. The grid square encompassing Sutton Bonington is dominated by semi-rural housing on its western side and agriculture on the eastern side. The villages of Sutton Bonington, Normanton on Soar and Kingston on Soar offer good links to the motorway and a short commute into Nottingham due to their close proximity to junction 24 of the M1 and the A453. In addition the villages fulfil the traditional elements of being aesthetically pleasing in that they offer access to and views of open countryside and river and canal sides. These are two factors recognised in the leisure day visits survey as being reasons families may make a day visit. The combination of the above factors coupled with the census statistics suggest that this is also a fairly affluent area.

5.2.13 Warsop – situated in West Nottinghamshire midway between Mansfield and Worksop, in the heart of the Nottinghamshire coalfield - has the characteristics of a small town (comprehensive school, shopping centre). It is a former mining community (coal mining still exists in the area but provides only a fraction of the employment opportunities it did in the 1980's) surrounded by former colliery sites the area has suffered economic decline since the collapse of the mining industry. The whole area encompassing Warsop and the smaller surrounding villages of Church Warsop, Meden Vale and Warsop Vale has, and still is, undergoing a programme of regeneration. The area within the grid square is urban in nature with the majority of PROW's linking different communities.

Table 6 Socio-economic data[45] for Elston, Gringley, Sutton Bonington and Warsop areas

Rural	Approx Population	Approx No of Households	Net Household Income (£/week)	AB (%)	C1 (%)	C2 (%)	D (%)	E (%)
Elston	2246	978	420	23.9	31.8	14.8	14.1	15.4
Gringley	750	317	480	32.2	30	12	11.2	14.6
Urban & Semi-Urban								
Sutton Bonington	2583	1031	460	33.7	28.2	11.8	12.2	14.1
Warsop	12365	5265	310	9.4	22.3	19.3	27.1	21.9

AB: Higher and intermediate managerial / administrative / professional
C1: Supervisory, clerical, junior managerial/ administrative / professional
C2: Skilled manual workers
D: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
E: On state benefit, unemployed, lowest grade workers

5.3 Local Consultation

5.3.1 In order to determine the public perspective of the adequacy of the current network provision, demands of users and the reason non-users do not use the PROW network, the County Council

[45] www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk

commissioned a consultant to design and facilitate a local consultation event in each of the four Network Assessment areas. The events were funded by the County Council and the Countryside Agency and were supported by the Nottinghamshire Local Access Forum. A full report on the local consultations can be found on www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/countryside

5.3.2 The events were organised as drop-in sessions. A wide range of exercises and activities were devised in order to give all participants an opportunity to freely express their opinions with the aim of helping to establish priorities for the future management of public rights of way and countryside access within the county.

5.3.3 The majority of feedback at the events was from walkers although horse riding was also strongly represented. Local landowners also attended the events in the more rural areas of Gringley and Elston. Findings from the events included:

- Current dissatisfaction at poorly drained path surfaces, fly tipping, difficult road crossings and the condition of structures
- Priorities for improvements are the development of traffic free routes, improved connectivity of the network with better links to countryside sites and better signage and waymarking
- Circular routes are popular
- Use of unofficial routes, unrecorded tracks and field edges is high
- Rivers and highways severing the network act as barriers for many users.

5.4 Current dissatisfaction

5.4.1 The main areas for dissatisfaction outlined above are by no means a definitive list but were the most frequent issues raised during the local consultation exercises.

5.4.2 Problems with geology and drainage are difficult to solve without the need for major investment. Of course it is easier to maintain routes that have been resurfaced in recent times. However, poor drainage can have a severe knock on effect on the usability of public rights of way and this in turn can cause public dissatisfaction. It is important to be sympathetic to the needs of users where possible, but it is also necessary for users to be reasonable and to accept that routes may be difficult to use when it is wet. The County Council are trailing an experimental traffic regulation order on a bridleway which has the effect of temporarily diverting a path from crossfield to fieldedge due to water logging on the definitive line.

5.4.3 Fly tipping is a nationwide problem but is not in essence a rights of way issue. The main problem is that in some instances public rights of way can help facilitate fly tipping by providing easier access to remote locations. There are, however, no simple solutions. One popular method is to try and restrict access but this is not practical. Increasing awareness as to where to report problems with fly tipping, available facilities for the disposal of rubbish and the possible penalties incurred if caught fly tipping may help to reduce the problem.

5.4.4 Condition of structures. The number of rights of way in the survey area represents approximately 5% of the county's PROW network (128.5 km / 2611.2 km). The survey recorded a total of 93 structures. By factoring this figure, it can be assumed there are a total of 1860 structures countywide (1% of the network equals 18.6 structures). The assessment identified nine structures that need replacing giving a 10% failure rate. Therefore 10% of 1860 equates to an estimated 186 structures in need of repair or replacement across the county.

5.5 Analysis of current use of the network in the assessment areas

5.5.1 Elston – Path links between the villages within the grid square are few and far between highlighting a fairly fragmented network. This coupled with the relatively sparse population in the area and an apparent lack of tourism opportunities suggests that the PROW network is not widely used. The possible exception to this is a limited amount of use by local people with

dogs, ramblers and a few local horse riders. Urban paths in Elston and Farndon are well used for access to services and shops.

5.5.2 Gringley on the Hill – There is an extensive bridleway network between Gringley and Everton and a few routes also link Gringley with Misterton. The main recreational draw for this area is the Cuckoo Way along the towpath of the Chesterfield Canal and this route attracts a large number of walkers. The PROW network through Gringley is severed by the A631 and the River Idle meaning several routes halt at the point where they reach the road or river. It is suggested that these factors help contribute to the relatively low usage of the PROW network.

5.5.3 Sutton Bonington - Due to the nature of the features (river and canal) in the western half of the grid square, the road network and its proximity to other urban conurbations there appears to be a market for small scale tourism in this area. A number of pubs offer river and canal side seating areas and are family orientated. The eastern half of the grid square houses an extensive bridleway network (severed in places by a minor but fast and well used road network). The network also provides good links between outlying villages, which when combined with the above factors suggests the PROW network is well-used. In 2002 the village was selected to host the County Council's Quiet Lanes Project. See section 5.14 for further details.

5.5.4 Warsop – The Warsop area is densely populated, especially in relation to the other areas included in the survey, and is urban fringe in nature. A number of routes within the area are either surfaced jitties between premises or form short links between communities. The network to the north east provides access to more open countryside. The grid square is bordered by recreational sites and facilities (Sherwood and a number of Forestry Commission woodlands) to the north and east. The network within this grid square is well used as much of it serves as links to schools and facilities from Warsop's outlying housing estates as well as being a recreational resource for the local population.

5.6 Results and analysis of the assessments

5.6.1 The network assessment was carried out on every PROW within each of the grid squares. The total number and length of routes surveyed in each grid square is detailed in table 7. The total length of public rights of way surveyed equates to 5% of the total PROW network in Nottinghamshire.

Table 7 Total length of PROW surveyed in each grid square

Rural	No of Routes	Total (in km)
Elston	30	23.2
Gringley	33	29.3
Urban & semi-urban		
Sutton Bonington	47	41.1
Warsop	50	34.9
Total	**160**	**128.5**

5.6.2 The number of routes in each grid square highlights there is a higher density of routes in urban and semi-urban areas.

5.6.3 Surveys were undertaken between January and April 2006. It should be noted that at the time of year the survey was undertaken, natural upgrowth, a common obstruction during late spring and summer, was not a factor during this survey. It would be natural to assume that had the survey been conducted during the summer months the ease of use figure may have been slightly lower because of natural upgrowth.

Table 8 BVPI results for network assessments (percentage pass)

	Signs	Waymarks	Stiles etc	Bridges	Obstructions	Ploughing & Cropping	Surface	Overall (Length)	Overall (No.)
BVPI Figure (% pass)	86.1	65.2	89.7	94.2	79.2	77.8	88.4	47.6	50.1

5.6.4 The figures in the above table show the overall pass BVPI score for each criterion within the survey for the whole of the Network Assessment. The Overall Length column is the actual BVPI ease of use 'pass' figure for the network assessments. The 'Overall No.' column is what the BVPI ease of use figure would have been if the results were shown as the **number** of routes that pass rather than the **length** of right of way surveyed.

5.6.5 The average BVPI figure for each of the individual criteria works out at 81.06%. It is easy to be misled and believe that on that basis, the overall pass rate (ease of use figure) should be a similar amount. The main point to bear in mind is that a route has to pass all the individual criteria to constitute an overall pass. Therefore, as only 65.2% of routes passed on waymarking, the maximum overall score achievable on the network assessments was 65.2%, assuming that all the other criteria had a pass rate of 100%.

5.7 *Key Findings from the assessments*

5.7.1 The key findings of the Network Assessments for each area are detailed below:

5.7.2 Elston:

- Network density is low compared to other areas
- Large areas have no PROWs or access provision
- The network is very fragmented to the west and severed by the A46 and the River Trent which have no crossing points
- There are large areas of permissive access to the east of the area through Defra Conservation Walks scheme and the Woodland Grant scheme
- There is evidence of large scale equestrian use on some footpaths in order to connect with the permissive and definitive bridleway network
- There is a good bridleway network around Hawton. The only link to the permissive bridleway network is by riding on a busy road with an overgrown verge
- The bridleway network west of Hawton has very little evidence of equestrian use but forms good circular walks for dog walkers from south Newark housing estates.
- There is good access to the National Cycle Network to the east
- There is a high number of larger scale obstructions compared to other areas
- There is 100% signage in this area but waymarking is poor
- Small circular routes close to Elston and Syerston provide good circular dog walking routes. There are some issues with dog fouling and control.

5.7.3 Gringley on the Hill:

- The network is severed by a busy main road (A631) and the River Idle which has no crossing points
- Many routes start and finish on busy roads with no further off road links
- One crossfield route has a dog leg which users miss out in favour of 'trespassing' on a desire line across the field
- Non-definitive desire lines alongside stretches of the River Idle connect dead-end definitive routes

- The Cuckoo Way runs alongside the Chesterfield Canal for its duration in this area and provides good links for walkers between local villages
- The Cuckoo Way provides limited opportunity for cycling and none for equestrian use
- There is an extensive bridleway network on the western side of the square extending to Everton which provides opportunities for lengthy traffic free rides
- The more strategic routes, which provide a link between villages, have fewer problems and were easier to use
- Large scale problem with missing bridges over dykes on 2 remote routes.

5.7.4 Sutton Bonington:

- There is a very dense network that appears to be very well used, especially to the west alongside the River Soar
- The only crossings of the River Soar to connect into Leicestershire's rights of way network are road crossings
- The area is rich in pasture with few instances of ploughing and cropping issues. A large number of stiles have been replaced with kissing gates
- Many small scale problems that could be negotiated with little trouble constituted a fail under the BVPI methodology
- Waymarking was the issue that caused the most failures
- Good network of bridleways to the east of the area and extending north, are fragmented by busy road crossings
- Some sections of bridleway are unusable for cyclists due to legitimate equestrian use poaching the soft ground.

5.7.5 Warsop:

- There are a large number of paths
- The bridleway network is fragmented
- Many routes start and finish at busy roads
- There are lots of urban jitties linking different estates
- A large number of barriers aimed at restricting illegal use of motorcycles do nothing to prevent it and serve only as barriers to legitimate users such as people with pushchairs and mobility scooters
- The area is surrounded by areas of permissive access (Woodland Grant Scheme and Forestry Commission managed land)
- The network is key in linking smaller communities to the main centre of Warsop
- The former colliery site has caused problems with map anomalies but has potential for increased access opportunities, including a newly opened cycle track into Derbyshire
- Waymarking was good compared to other areas surveyed but signposting provision was variable
- Poaching was a problem around a stile on a path. This was caused by a cattle feeder left adjacent to the line of the footpath
- A local footpath group are very active in the area, reporting problems and carrying out minor access improvements.

5.8 Summary of key findings from assessments

5.8.1 Looking at the key findings above, it is possible to draw conclusions about the PROW network and wider access in general and also the difference between the rural, urban and semi urban networks.

Table 9 Network provision, problems found, average distance per problem and average number of faults per failed route in each area of the Network Assessment.

Rural	Network provision (No of routes)	Network provision (in km)	No. of Problems Found	Av distance per Problem Found	No. of paths that failed	Av No. of faults per failed path
Elston	30	23.2	27	0.86	15	1.8
Gringley	33	29.3	39	0.75	20	1.95
Urban & semi urban						
Sutton Bonington	47	41.1	33	1.25	24	1.38
Warsop	50	34.9	30	1.16	19	1.58

5.8.2 The Rural Network

5.8.2.1 It was found that rural areas appear to have a far less dense network of public rights of way but with routes longer in length on average than in urban areas. Table 9 above highlights that obstructions are much more frequent in rural areas. These factors combined mean that when using the PROW network in a rural area, users are much more likely to encounter an obstruction or a greater number of problems than they would on a walk or ride of similar distance in an urban setting.

5.8.2.2 Over half the routes surveyed in rural areas were found to have some form of obstruction. Ploughing and cropping was obviously more of an issue in rural areas. Waymarking was also particularly poor in rural areas. This could possibly be explained by fewer officer hours being spent in these areas due to fewer problems being reported.

5.8.2.3 The higher percentage of problems encountered in rural areas can partly be attributed to the amount of use. Generally, a large percentage of problems relating to public rights of way either do not get reported or are tolerated by the majority of users, save for issues where public safety is at risk for example. Additionally, there may be a perceived lack of information and possibly knowledge of whom or where to report problems to. These factors combined mean that the less well used a route is the more unlikely it is that a problem on that route will be reported to the highway authority and therefore, the longer it will take to deal with the problem.

5.8.2.4 Permissive ROW and wider access provision seems to be much more widespread in rural areas. In the Elston area, two large networks of Woodland Grant Scheme permissive footpaths and Defra Conservation Walks permissive bridleways greatly supplement the network and help provide traffic free routes between the villages. Similarly, in the Gringley on the Hill area, permissive routes also provide good alternative off road routes and links between definitive dead-end paths.

Table 10 Average distances for routes that passed and failed in rural areas.

Rural	Elston	Gringley
Average length of pass (m)	836	1005.4
Average length of fail (m)	714	809

It is worth noting that the average length for routes that pass is significantly higher than the average length for routes that fail.

5.8.3 The urban and semi-urban network

5.8.3.1 There are more routes 'formally' surfaced with less crossing farmed land - meaning that agricultural issues are much less likely. However, although fewer problems were found per path length, a larger number of paths had a problem meaning the overall ease of use figure was quite low for these areas.

5.8.3.2 The average length of a route that failed in an urban fringe area was significantly higher than that of a route that passed. This means that despite a reasonable number of paths being free from obstruction and easy to use, the actual length of the network classed as easy to use was much less.

5.8.3.3 Another explanation for finding fewer problems on urban fringe networks is that the increased level of usage tends to lead to problems being reported sooner than on less well-used routes. This increased usage can be put down to factors including greater population levels and the places, services and facilities that the urban fringe PROW network links together.

Table 11 Average distances for routes that passed and failed in urban and semi urban areas.

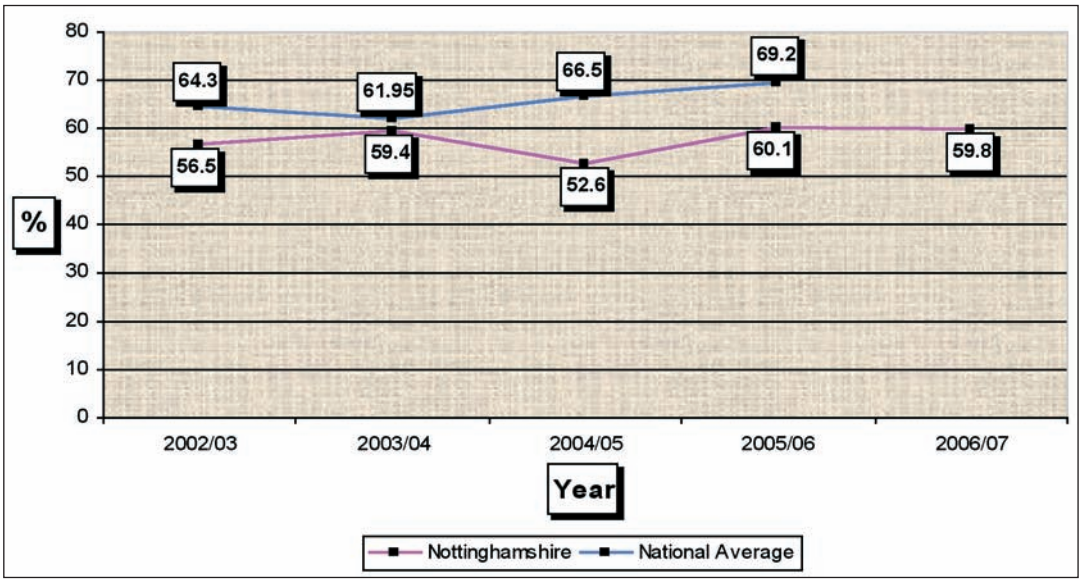
Urban & Semi Urban	Sutton Bonington	Warsop
Average length of pass (m)	669.8	608.4
Average length of fail (m)	1069.6	843.7

5.8.3.4 The permissive ROW and wider access provision appears to be less in these areas. What is available appears to be concentrated in areas surrounding population centre or providing increased access to more rural areas. Also in these areas there is, to a degree, a certain amount of 'tolerance' from land managers to trespass. For example, the use of private fieldedge margins for access, usually dog walking.

5.9 *Comparison with Nottinghamshire's actual 2006 BVPI figures*

5.9.1 The previous five years BVPI 178 results are presented in the table below. The average national BVPI 178 figures for Highway Authorities are shown for the 4 year period 2002-2006. (Results not published for 2006/07)

Chart 4 Nottinghamshire and national average BVPI 178 scores 2002/03-2006/07



5.9.2 Based on the figures above the average BVPI score for Nottinghamshire over the last 5 years is 57.68%. In comparison, the BVPI score for the network assessment is 47.6%, a difference of almost 10%.

5.9.3 There are a number of possible reasons for this difference:

- Accuracy of results - The BVPI methodology is recognised as being accurate to within 5%, allowing for a maximum 10% difference between the two figures
- Different surveyors – The main county survey is carried out by a number of volunteers whereas the network assessments were carried out by two Local Authority officers. Interpretations of the methodology may differ slightly. One surveyor may decide a stile needs replacing and therefore fails whereas a different surveyor could think the same stile is safe to use but requires attention and therefore passes
- Fewer people carried out the network assessments – The two officers carrying out the network assessments may both interpret the methodology more stringently than the larger number of volunteers that carry out the actual assessments, resulting in a large difference in the results
- Application of the BVPI methodology – The BVPI methodology was designed using a random 5% sample of the entire network and not the whole network approach. The network assessments were carried out on a 100% of 4 areas totalling 5% of the network, therefore, every problem that constitutes a fail in each of the areas was identified. It is possible that by choosing 4 different areas a completely different result may have been achieved. A random 5% sample of the four areas may have returned a much higher overall result but would not have highlighted the network problems that the assessment did.

5.10 General findings from the network assessments

5.10.1 In assessing the 4 areas, each with its own unique and individual landscape, social and economic characteristics, an array of different problems and issues with the PROW network have been identified.

5.10.2 Of all the problems encountered during the assessment, lack of waymarking, ploughing and cropping issues, and waterlogging and rutting of natural surfaces were the most common. All other aspects such as signposting, stiles and gates and bridges showed reasonably high pass levels in comparison. To put this into context, 86.1% of routes passed on signposting but if that was equated countywide, 538 routes would need either a replacement sign or the existing sign repairing.

5.10.3 Less than 7 out of 10 of all the routes in the survey areas are adequately waymarked. Again, put into context on a countywide basis this would suggest over 1100 routes are not adequately waymarked.

5.10.4 Rural routes are more likely to have barriers to usage but are less likely to have these problems reported due to insufficient usage. This does raise the question of allocation of funds. Should large amounts of the annual maintenance budget be spent resolving problems for the few, or should more of that money be focused on prioritising more urban and frequently used routes that provide good strategic links between communities and facilities?

5.10.5 Busy roads and rivers cause network fragmentation and severance creating many dead-end routes. Such routes often have little or no public benefit and attract minimal usage. Improvements to such routes need to be prioritised in order to increase the safety and the connectivity of the network, especially in areas where PROW network density is poor. Additionally resolution of definitive map anomalies could be done in conjunction with schemes that offer increased connectivity of the network.

5.10.6 There is extensive provision of permissive access and linear routes throughout the county which offer recreational opportunities and help to supplement the PROW network. However, it is essential to provide information and mapping to reap the benefits of this provision.

5.10.7 Where definitive access is unachievable permissive access agreements to link definitive routes should be sought in an attempt to reduce the crossings of major roads, railways and rivers. Schemes that improve the connectivity of the network should be prioritised.

5.10.8 Better education is required for dog walkers in respect of trespass with dogs through them not being kept on a lead or under close control. This may help the relationship between dog walkers and landowners / managers. There may be scope for the provision of bins. However, the bins need to be emptied on a regular basis which can sometime prove difficult due to resources.

5.10.9 Both the network and needs assessments identified trespassing as a significant problem. Major improvements in waymarking throughout the county can assist both in the general improvement of the PROW network and therefore BVPI performance, but also in decreasing the number of instances of trespassing.

5.10.10 Much of the PROW network is historical and does not necessarily fit in with modern farming practices. Many routes do not have a logical alignment, for example, a cross-field path may have a dog leg in the middle of a field meaning that when you reach the other side of that field you have travelled a greater distance than if you had walked in a straight line. It is natural instinct to walk the straight line rather than the definitive route, especially if the definitive route is not clearly defined. From the landowner's perspective, it may be less hassle to re-instate the more direct route during the course of normal agricultural practice and it is possibly more common sense to do so. However, no provision is made in law for diversions to be carried out easily on the grounds of common sense and the definitive line should be re-instated. Better liaison with landowners is needed to highlight the possible outcomes of such situations.

5.10.11 Where possible landowners / managers should be encouraged to place cattle feeders and water providers away from the line of public rights of way to reduce the effects of poaching around structures and the general rutting of routes.

5.10.12 The erection of barriers in an attempt to prevent illegal motorcycle use and anti-social behaviour should be discouraged due to the problems these structures cause to those with bicycles, horses, prams, pushchairs and mobility scooters. Often these barriers have a short life and the users they attempt to restrict find an alternative means of access to the same site. By removing barriers, which are often unauthorised and are not serving the function they were installed for, accessibility can instantly be improved.

5.11 Accessibility audit in Warsop

5.11.1 The Accessibility study carried out by the Fieldfare Trust in the Warsop area found that only one short section of public footpath met the BT Countryside for All[46] criteria for full accessibility. Taking into account the density of the PROW network in this area and the importance it holds in linking the local communities, this suggests the network in this area holds little or minimal value to people with visual or mobility impairments.

Horse stile, ineffective at restricting motorbikes.

46 www.fieldfare.org.uk

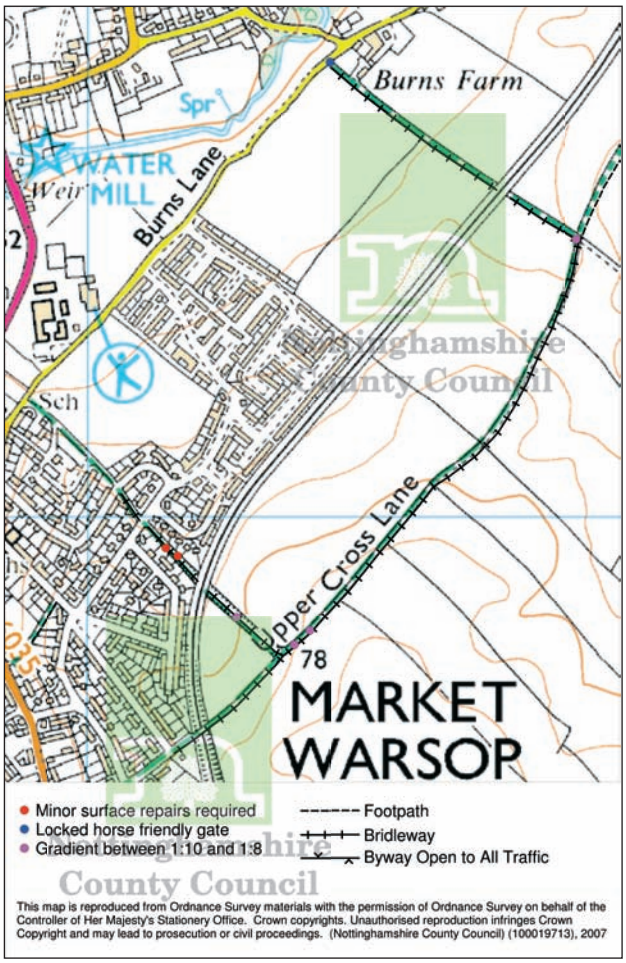
5.11.2 Poor drainage, surface damage and physical barriers, either legitimate or otherwise, were the main factors in routes failing to be classed as 'accessible'. It was found that only a very small percentage of barriers were carrying out the function they were installed for. Many of these served only as a barrier to access for people with pushchairs, in mobility scooters or wheelchairs or people with restricted mobility.

5.11.3 The application of the 'least restrictive option' approach to structures in the Warsop area would enable much greater accessibility to many more routes. Small scale surface and drainage improvements, where practical, would further increase accessibility. Examples of this are highlighted in Maps 7 and 8. Please note, these examples are used for illustrative purposes only.

5.11.4 The public footpath across the Carrs (Map 7) provides an off road link between Church Warsop and the central services of Market Warsop. The removal of the barrier at the entrance to the footpath off the B6031 (highlighted by a blue star) would enable people with pushchairs and users in wheelchairs or mobility scooters to use the route. The width of the bridge and the gradient up to it could still be problematic for some users, although, capability could be decided upon by the individual according to their own abilities. Further surface improvements (at locations highlighted by red stars) would potentially open up the footpath and bridleway to the west. Again, people with restricted mobility may be unable to use these routes but the paths in this area would be available to more potential users through small improvements.

Map 7 Church Warsop area highlighting ease of potential accessibility improvements

Map 8 Market Warsop area highlighting ease of potential accessibility improvements



5.11.5 Map 8 shows an area to the east of the centre of Warsop. Currently, a locked 'horse friendly gate' (see photo) restricts access to the Bridleway at Burns Farm. If this was to be removed and a few surface improvements were made (highlighted by red stars on the map) the route would still not deliver full accessibility under the BT Countryside for All guidelines, but would offer barrier free access. This could be used with Burns Lane, a lane that attracts minimal traffic levels, as a circular route. It would then be the decision of the user as to ability to overcome the natural gradients along the route.

Inappropriately named horse friendly gate

5.11.6 The PROW network in Warsop is very dense and many of the routes are surfaced. It can be assumed that the poor nature of accessible network provision in this area is an indication that the vast majority of the PROW network within the county is largely inaccessible to people with visual or mobility impairments.

5.11.7 One problem with delivering a PROW network that is as inclusive as possible is the lack of measurable criteria for accessibility within the current Best Value survey methodology. The introduction of the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005 has placed a duty on service providers to make reasonable adjustments to help people with disabilities access that service.

5.11.8 Resources are largely channelled into network improvements that will increase BVPI figures as this is how the County Council is judged on performance. The lack of need to assess accessibility in determining the BVPI score for ease of use of the PROW network potentially means minimal resources are available to carry out accessibility improvements.

5.11.9 There is a need to ensure all improvements to the PROW network deliver the least restrictive access solution in terms of the removal of physical barriers and the minimisation of environmental factors (gradients, surface problems) where possible. This has to be done within environmental and budget constraints but it is important to deliver the least restrictive option that can be achieved in a given situation and to ensure all chosen options are justifiable.

5.11.10 It is important to provide users and potential users with a choice rather than a single option. Consideration should be given to identifying and delivering specific projects within the county that either meet the BT Countryside for All guidelines or at least deliver barrier free access. Groups that represent people with disabilities should be consulted in the design and delivery of any scheme designed to improve accessibility.

5.12 Wider access

5.12.1 There are a number of sites across the county offering informal permissive area access as well as numerous permissive linear routes. These can help in providing good recreational opportunities and in many cases form good links with the PROW network. In addition, the 'Quiet Lanes' project could offer good links between fragmented areas of the PROW network for all users. See section 5.14 for further details.

5.12.2 Permissive access can be beneficial for all parties. Provision of new access can result in higher payments under agricultural schemes (Defra Environmental Stewardship Scheme).[47] This is a greater incentive for landowners as it supplements their income.

5.12.3 Users benefit from permissive access in that it offers greater recreational and access choice and in many cases enhances the PROW network. Maintenance of permissive access is often the responsibility of the access provider. Under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme payments to landowners are on the proviso that the routes are maintained to set standards. Routes managed by organisations such as Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust are often maintained by volunteers looking to gain practical countryside management skills.

5.12.4 Many sites offering permissive access, for example Sherwood Pines, provide safe environments for families and groups. They often also provide access to interesting resources such as water courses and wildlife habitats and largely cater for leisurely family walks or dog owners.

5.12.5 Permissive access can help to ease the pressure on the PROW network in areas where it is well used. Alternatively it can help increase usage of the network where it is underused by improving connectivity. This can be beneficial in providing links and greater connectivity where the PROW network is fragmented. It can also offer traffic free routes between communities. One example is the Defra Conservation Walks' permissive bridleways and the Woodland Grant Scheme[48] permissive footpaths in the Elston 5km square. Map 9 shows the PROW network of the area. Map 10 shows how the permissive access network in the area supplements the PROW network. Contrary to this, other areas of permissive access are more inaccessible and can only be reached by road. Whilst offering a recreationally facility, in many instances this resource could be improved by facilitating access from off-road sources, either permissive or definitive. This would improve the quality of the journey removing the need to use the main highway network. In cases where there is no alternative but to walk or ride along a main highway it is beneficial to prioritise the cutting of vegetation from roadside verges.

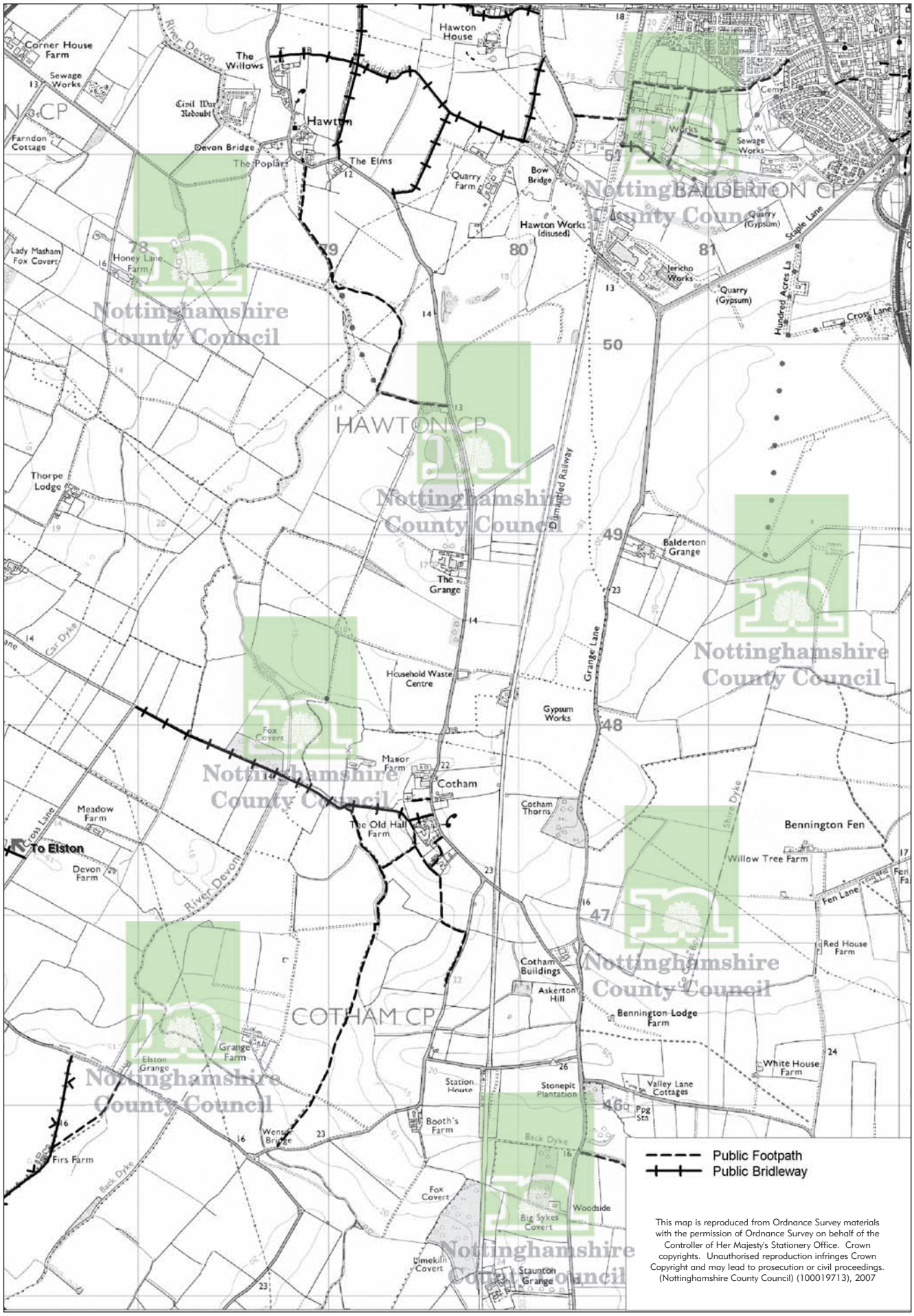
5.12.6 The example shown in Map 10 highlights both of the above points. The permissive bridleway network supplements the existing PROW network and minor roads in the area to provide an off-road link between Hawton, Balderton, Cotham and Elston. Unfortunately, the permissive network in the centre of the map and the bridleway network at Hawton is separated by a busy county road which attracts a high volume of usage by heavy goods vehicles. Any equestrian or cyclist wishing to access the permissive network from the north has to do so by using the aforementioned road thus risking possible conflict with vehicles.

5.12.7 With greater consultation in the early stages of developing the permissive access network it is possible that benefits to potential users could have been even greater. For example, it may have been possible to form an agreement to prioritise roadside verge management, enabling equestrian users to ride alongside the road rather than on it. Alternatively, by negotiating with local landowners and managers a compromise could potentially be reached in providing permissive fieldedge bridleways.

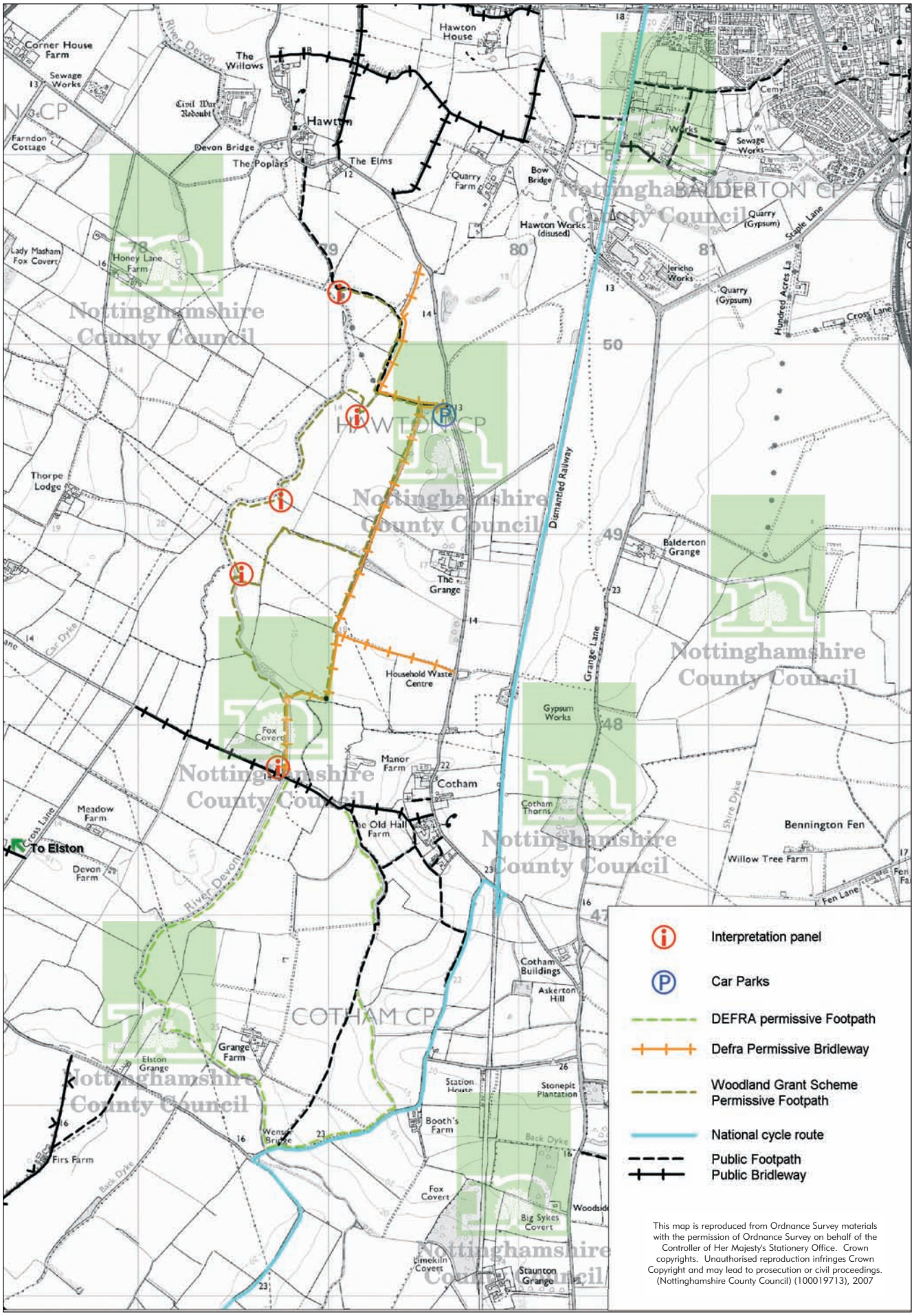
5.12.8 The interpretation panels on site does not indicate the status of the PROW network where it joins the permissive network. This could deter equestrians and cyclists from using the available routes as it may appear to them there is no further access beyond the site. Also, people with visual impairments could potentially find the colour contrast makes the information on the panels difficult to read. Improved consultation in the development of new permissive access opportunities could also lead to improved interpretation that caters for all potential users of the site.

[47] www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/es/default.htm
[48] www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/wgs/default.htm

Map 9 Rights of way network south of Newark highlighting poor connectivity



Map 10 Rights of way network south of Newark overlaid with permissive access routes, highlighting how permissive access can improve connectivity of the existing rights of way network



5.12.11 Generally there is a lack of information on the extent of the wider informal and linear access provision within the county. A number of different organisations and bodies, for example district and parish councils, the Environment Agency, British Waterways and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, offer such facilities but there is little or no definitive guide. Even the Ordnance Survey maps show little of the permissive access available. Information is often only obtainable through internet searches, local knowledge or accidentally coming across a site where access is offered.

5.12.12 Nottinghamshire County Council is currently undertaking an in depth survey of the wider access provision within the county as part of the ROWIP and the Sherwood 'Living Legend' Project.[49]

5.13 Key findings for wider access:

- The permissive access provision in Nottinghamshire is extensive in places offering excellent recreational opportunities
- There is a lack of available information as to the location and extent of permissive access within the county
- It is acknowledged that some of the access is small scale and is purely of local benefit
- Early consultation between the Authority and interested groups in the designation of new permissive access could help to improve the facility provided in terms of connectivity with the PROW network and improved design and accessibility to assist in providing for more potential users
- Permissive access that forms part of incentive agreements (e.g. Defra Environmental Stewardship) tend to be well maintained as this forms part of the agreement
- Lack of consultation in new access agreements can lead to structures being installed that do not meet British Standards. Examples are one step stiles or kissing gates with insufficient widths, which would be classed as obstructions if they were used on the PROW network.

5.14 Quiet Lanes

5.14.1 The Quiet Lanes initiative was developed by the Countryside Agency with support from the Department of Transport and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

5.14.2 Quiet Lanes are defined as minor rural roads or networks of minor rural roads considered appropriate for shared use by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other vehicles. The aim of Quiet Lanes is to maintain the character of minor rural roads by seeking to contain rising traffic growth. It is not a mechanism for traffic calming where the desired output is a reduction in the number and speed of traffic.

5.14.3 In 2002 the Council trialled this concept, and after consultation with the county's Parish Councils, Sutton Bonington was chosen to host the Council's inaugural Quiet Lanes pilot project. A circular route was identified by the Parish Council that would provide both on- and off-road recreational and utility access between two areas of the village. The route included two minor rural roads and sections of the public rights of way network, with a view of upgrading an existing definitive footpath to bridleway status. However, due to the difficulties of upgrading this route, the scheme focussed on the two minor roads. This comprised:

- Quiet Lane signing at the entry and exit points of the area
- new seating along the route to provide a resting point for the less able (and also a viewing point)

[49] www.robinhood.co.uk

- new road surface to mimic an unsurfaced route to encourage slower speeds
- removal of direction signs to discourage through traffic
- improvements to the lay bys on the routes to encourage use.

The trial identified a number of positive and negative outcomes; specifically that:

(a) There was little interest or ownership of the scheme by the village except for people living on the Quiet Lanes, who perceived it as a mechanism for rural traffic calming,

(b) Proposals for Quiet Lanes need to be part of a wider network of routes, e.g. rights of way, to add value and purpose to the new designation,

(c) There was extreme difficulty in developing non-obtrusive but effective physical measures to reinforce the Quiet Lanes character,

(d) The Police were not supportive of any formal changes to the speed limits as they considered them to be unenforceable.

5.14.4 The use of the Quiet Lanes designation is inappropriate for situations requiring positive traffic calming, i.e. where the aspiration of the public is to provide some form of rural traffic calming to reduce an existing through traffic or speeding problem. The Quiet Lanes designation is, however, considered appropriate for lanes that already have relatively low vehicle usage and where this designation will significantly improve the connectivity of the rights of way network by using the highway network to join otherwise disconnected routes.

5.14.5 There is wider scope for considering schemes that will benefit non-motorised users by improving the connectivity of the rights of way network. It is therefore recommended that the future implementation of Quiet Lanes is considered only as an integrated element of the rights of way network.

Sutton Bonnington Quiet Lane