

## **“Access for All” – Audit Methodology and Pilot Audit of Environment Agency Flood Defences in Kent**

R&D Technical Summary W3-023/TS

Environment Agency flood defences can provide interesting routes for recreation in the open countryside. However, whilst accessible to the able-bodied person, many flood defences incorporate barriers (e.g. stiles or gates) that restrict access for people with locomotive disabilities. The Environment Agency has a duty to provide recreational opportunities wherever possible and in doing so, to take account of the needs of chronically sick and disabled people. It also has a duty to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

This project was undertaken to develop a method that could be used to assess the current state of access on flood defences.

A literature search was carried out on previous reports and audit methodologies on the subject. In the report ‘Paths without Prejudice’ (Countryside Agency 2000), the Countryside Agency developed a methodology suitable for use on open-countryside sites such as many of the Environment Agency defences. An Environment Agency consultant selected and tested the methodology on four stretches of defences in Kent over a total of 20km. Support and advice on disabled access matters was given by a member of the Disabled Ramblers.

The project found that:

- the methodology was a successful way of assessing flood defences for access and identifying barriers and could be applied on variety of flood defence types;
- there were many barriers to access along the flood defences surveyed in Kent; and
- the average cost to improve defences to an appropriate standard could be in the region of £1500/km.

The resulting Technical Report is designed for Environment Agency Recreation and Flood Defence staff, and other interested parties, and should provide a valuable tool when assessing the potential for

recreation opportunities along flood defences. It provides guidance on access audits and includes details of the methodology used. It recommends a range of access improvements along routes in Kent and suggests that these should be done in partnership with other organisations such as local authorities. The potential of specific flood defence stretches for improved recreational use should be considered strategically within the wider county network of routes. Consideration should also be given to land ownership, flood defence maintenance requirements, stock proofing and security matters.

The project supported the Agency’s Key Theme: “a better quality of life”.

This R&D Technical Summary relates to information from R&D Project W3-023 reported in detail in the following output:-

**R&D Technical Report W3-023/TR**  
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October 2002

Internal Status: Released to Regions  
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Project Manager  
Alexie Gilmartin, Southern Region

Project Executive  
Allison Thorpe, Southern Region

Research Contractor  
Shear Management Limited

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© Environment Agency  
Rio House  
Waterside Drive  
Aztec West  
Almondsbury  
Bristol BS32 4UD

Tel: 01454 624400  
Fax: 01454 624409