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# DARFIELD-UPON-DEARNE ENHANCEMENTS

# ACCESS STATEMENT

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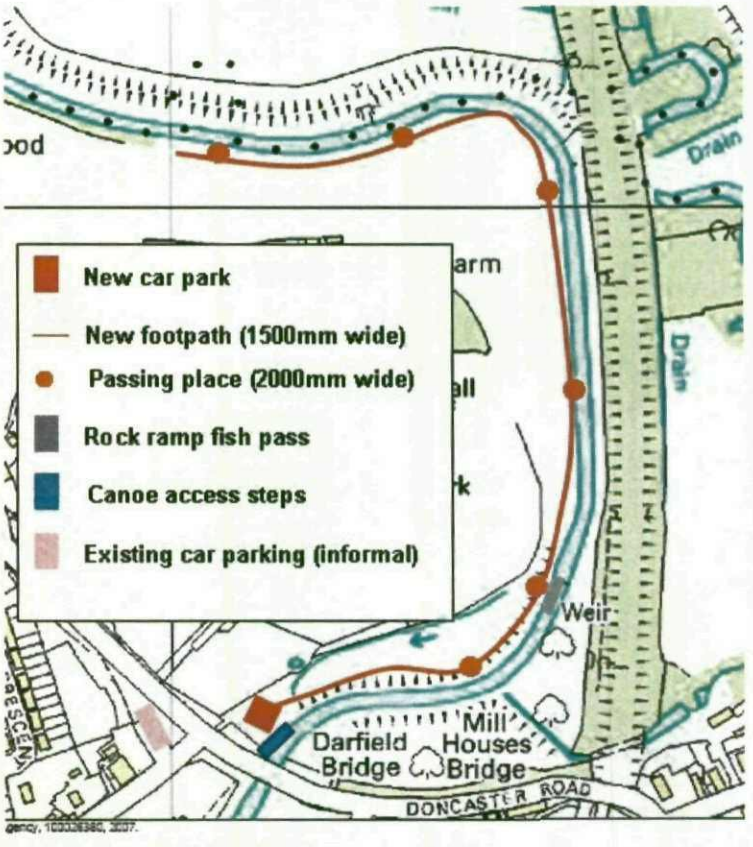
## 1.0 BACKGROUND

The Environment Agency, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Darfield Community Association, Barnsley Development Agency, Villages Four Community Partnership and Houghton Main Angling Club are working in partnership to enhance the environment alongside the River Dearne, upstream of the A635 Doncaster Road, in Darfield (Figure 1).

We are applying for Planning Permission to improve this Environment Agency owned land alongside the River Dearne, to benefit people and wildlife. Our improvements will help to transform the riverside into an easily accessible, well managed and wildlife-rich place.

The project is fully in line with the vision of the Dearne Valley Green Heart Partnership, a group which includes the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, as well as the Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham local authorities. Dearne Valley Green Heart aims include working with local people to open up access to the countryside, helping people to get active, encouraging visitors to the area and make the valley a 'cleaner, greener place'.

**Figure 1.** The project site alongside the River Dearne at Darfield, showing indicative locations of car park, footpath, passing places and rock ramp fish pass.



Our planning application forms part of Darfield Community Association's own community regeneration project 'Darfield Green Heart', which seeks to:

- Increase local awareness and appreciation of the natural environment
- Enhance the green infrastructure of Darfield, and
- Develop a sustainable community enterprise project based on the town's natural assets.

The community's need and desire for the project is supported by analysis of public consultation carried out by the Community Association as part of their scoping study for the Darfield Green Heart project. The consultations highlighted concern over the use of green spaces in the area and supported the Association's proposals to improve local recreational opportunities and the environment.

We will improve physical access to green space in Darfield by creating 900 m of footpath together with parking facilities (Figure 1). The path and 11-space car park will both be suitable for disabled access. The car park will allow Darfield to become a starting point for walkers joining the popular Dearne Way, which runs close to the site. The footpath will connect the car park to 22 recycled-plastic angling platforms, installed upstream of Darfield weir by the Environment Agency in 2008.

A canoe launch / recovery point will be built near to the car park (Figure 1), allowing canoeists to enter the river in Darfield and then paddle downstream to the new Olympic training facility at Manvers.

The existing weir will be replaced with a rock ramp fish pass (Figure 1). This will provide a valuable habitat feature in a heavily modified section of river, as well as benefiting wildlife by allowing free passage for fish along the river channel.

New interpretation boards and pamphlets will encourage intellectual access, as well as publicising the site. New signage for walkers, anglers and canoeists will also be provided. The site will be used as part of Houghton Main Angling Club's outreach programme and also as a centre of activity for the Darfield Community Association's 'Young Green Heart' youth engagement programme.

## 2.0 EXISTING USE

The river bank is already popular with walkers, dog walkers and anglers (Table 1). The Houghton Main Angling Club lease fishing rights upstream of Darfield weir, from the Environment Agency.

At present, mobility-impaired people, the elderly, or those with prams / pushchairs, have difficulty accessing the site. The banks of the river are often muddy and rutted. Despite being near to the centre of Darfield, the site is somewhat hidden from view and is not necessarily inviting to the general public. Whilst some people drive (unauthorised) vehicles onto the flood bank, suitable, parking is only currently available off Pinfold Lane, on the other side of the busy A635 Doncaster Road from the project site (Figure 1).

**Table 1.** Recreational use of the project area during 27.5 hours of observation in September 2009 and 11.75 hours of observation in October 2009. Data collected by Darfield Community Association.

| | | *Number per hour* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **September** | minimum | maximum | average |
| Dog walkers | 0.0 | 6.4 | 2.2 |
| Walkers | 0.0 | 4.0 | 1.0 |
| Anglers | 0.0 | 3.3 | 0.8 |
| Others | 0.0 | 1.1 | 0.3 |
| **October** | minimum | maximum | average |
| Dog walkers | 0.8 | 5.0 | 2.8 |
| Walkers | 0.0 | 6.7 | 2.5 |
| Anglers | 0.0 | 8.0 | 3.4 |
| Others | 0.0 | 2.7 | 0.9 |

In recent months, the river bank has become even harder to walk, as unauthorised 4×4 access has led to deep ruts developing. The Police have been contacted by the Community Organisation following suspicion of the 4×4's being used for illegal activity, including poaching (a butchered deer carcass has been found on site). Whilst monitoring site use in September and October 2008, the Community Association recorded off-road vehicles using the site on five separate occasions.

## 3.0 FUTURE USE

The car park and footpath will enable safe, controlled access to the site. Future usage is to be monitored through surveys conducted by the Community Association, as well as angling day ticket sales and competition records from Houghton Main Angling Club.

The car park will provide spaces for 11 disabled users, but is unlikely to be full very often, even with increased use of the site. A car park of this size is still required however, to provide spaces during angling competitions, and to allow vehicles with trailers (canoes) to safely enter.

Heavy boulders placed around the car park will prevent unauthorised vehicles from driving along the flood bank, reducing erosion and making the site a more pleasant, safer, place to visit. Lockable 'goalposts' at the car park entrance will prevent caravans and large commercial vehicles from entering, whilst still allowing access for Environment Agency operational staff.

A right turn pocket and arrow will be painted onto the A635 Doncaster Road to enable traffic approaching the car park from the Doncaster direction to turn into the car park safely. This has been designed by Barnsley MBC's Highways Department.

The car park and footpath combined will allow a wider range of people to access the site than is possible at present. The site is likely to be particularly popular with the disabled, who will be able to enjoy the riverside views and associated wildlife. The footpath will also make the location more attractive for the elderly, and for parents with young children.

Angling will be accessible to a wider range of people. At present, the ground conditions discourage anglers from taking the full range of tackle, bait and nets that they might otherwise use. Whilst wheelchair users will be able to access the river bank, the British Disabled Angling Association have unfortunately assessed the site as not being suitable for use by disabled anglers, due to the distance of the fishery from the car park. The steepness of the banks also meant that angling platforms, accessible to all, could not be built at Darfield, due to the amount of excavation that would have been required to construct access ramps of suitable gradient.

Improving access to the river will allow the Houghton Main Fishing Club to organise competitions, earning revenue for the club. Competitions are already starting at this location, following the installation of platforms in 2008. However, provision of a car park and footpath will make the venue more attractive. Due to the limited number of platforms, competitions will remain relatively small scale. In the 2009 / 2010 coarse fishing season, Houghton Main have booked two club matches on the river, each of which will have about 20 competitors. Another angling club has also booked the river for an angling match. This contest will have about ten competitors. Increasing numbers of competitions will put Darfield 'on the map' as a place to fish,

bringing economic benefits to the town. Day tickets for the fishery will be going on sale in local shops.

The rock ramp fish pass will assist the ecological recovery of the River Dearne, allowing the development of a more sustainable fishery at Darfield. Cascading water over the rock ramp will make it an attractive visual feature, helping to draw people to the site. The rock ramp has been designed such that canoeists can paddle over it. However, canoe access to the river is being placed downstream of the weir, to minimise interaction between canoeists and anglers.

The car park and canoe steps will allow the site to be used to introduce people to river canoeing. The British Canoe Union plan to use the site to enter the Dearne and then paddle downstream to their stillwater training facility at Manvers.