Written evidence submitted by Bridget Pickthall (RUT0013)

- Benefits of ROW network
- Improving access for all
- Improving planning decisions
- Landowner incentives
- Improve rural public transport

Farmer’s wife living in South Cumbria, member of Cumbria Local Access Forum. Horse rider and walker with experience of community ROW initiative, Hincaster Trailway.

1. The British network of Rights of Way is a unique asset and a national treasure. It is widely recognised that access to the ROW network has a multitude of benefits to the economy, tourism and the health of the nation. Tourism can regenerate rural economies and provide opportunities for work and business.

2. Accessibility to the countryside should be encouraged wherever possible by provision of multi-user paths. Upgrading existing ROW by eliminating stiles and making gates 1.5m wide would go a long way to improving access for all users. Whenever possible existing ROW should aspire to higher rights i.e. footpath to bridleway. Local communities and organisations could assist local government departments and contribute to these improvements by identifying the need and accessing funding for works through grant schemes.

3. Decisions during the planning processes should include full liaison with all appropriate organisations to include Local Access Forums, walkers, cyclists, horse riders and disabled users.

4. Landowners must be encouraged to improve existing access, provide new routes and aspire to higher rights by payments through suitable stewardship schemes.

5. Public transport links to the countryside are continually under threat. Too few paying users make many routes unsustainable. The current free bus pass to pensioners must be reviewed and replaced with a scheme which contributes to the service, similar to the senior citizens’ railcard. Bus companies must be assured that rural routes are economic.

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