

Public access to rivers – Position Statement

For the majority of the last two centuries when our towns and cities grew rapidly, the rivers of the Don Catchment were on the whole foully polluted. There was limited public interest in visiting them, and little consideration was given to the provision public access. As a result the premises and boundaries of industrial works, commercial units, infrastructure and other developments were often set right up to the river edge, which in aggregate created a continuous physical barrier that blocked physical and visual access.

Today, however, we live in a very different world. Much of the industry that lined our rivers no longer exists, our rivers are in a state of ecological recovery and are pleasant places to be, and there is opportunity to integrate them into our urban fabric in a way that enhances the liveability and sustainability of our cities, towns and villages. Various organisations in the Don Catchment such as the Five Weirs Walk Trust, the Upper Don Trail Trust and the Don Catchment Rivers Trust, have worked to improve and promote access along our rivers. River corridors are in many ways ideal for walking and cycling routes. They pass through the heart of settlements, valley bottoms are mostly low gradient, and these blue-green wildlife and heritage rich linear features are pleasant and interesting places to spend time.

The Don Catchment Rivers Trust (DCRT) is **strongly in favour of improving public access to our rivers and streams** wherever it is feasible so that people in our catchment can enjoy these special and important features of our landscape. We are pro activities that create new public access, that make physical improvements that enhance access, including measures that facilitate access for people with disabilities, and the promotion of access, such as leaflets and awareness raising of routes through the media. We believe that urban design should embrace rivers and streams, and that it should provide adequate space for the river corridor so it can serve as an ecological corridor and a route for the public.

This sentiment is widely shared both nationally and locally. For example, the Sheffield Waterways Strategy Group advocates that people are placed at the heart of our waterways regeneration, and that access is secured along a citywide network of riverside parkways.