

Devon Countryside Access Forum, 31st January 2023 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) is produced by Devon County Council in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and taking account of guidance issued by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The key purpose is to encourage and guide improvements to the public rights of way network to provide a better experience for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, horse and carriage drivers, people with mobility problems, and people using motorised vehicles, for example, motorbikes.

At a strategic level, Public Rights of Way are of significant importance in;

- Connecting people and places
- Supporting health and wellbeing
- Contributing to green infrastructure (including for biodiversity, landscape, heritage, and climate change)
- Facilitating recreation and tourism (vital to the local economy)

The initial Rights of Way Improvement Plan (Devon on the move) was published in 2005. This was reviewed, with a new summary document published in 2012. The table below sets out the main headings for the objectives set out within the 2012 plan, with the document available to view on the Devon County Council website at [Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2](#).

1. MANAGEMENT OF THE ACCESS NETWORK

- A** Legal: Definitive Map and Statement
- B** Legal: Public Path Orders
- C** Maintenance
- D** Signing and waymarking
- E** Information and communication
- F** Road safety
- G** Planning
- H** Access Land
- I** Permissive access

2. PROVISION FOR USERS

- A** Users with limited mobility
- B** Walkers
- C** Horse-riders and carriage drivers
- D** Cyclists
- E** Motorised users
- F** Dog walkers

3. THE WIDER CONTEXT

- A** Environment
- B** Tourism and economic development
- C** Health
- D** Agriculture
- E** Partnerships

The legislation sets out that the RoWIP should be reviewed every 10 years.

This includes considering the role of the plan in:

- (a) meeting the present and likely future needs of the public
- (b) opportunities provided for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and enjoyment
- (c) accessibility to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems
- (d) such other matters relating to local rights of way as the Secretary of State may direct.

In accordance with this legislation, a review was instigated in 2022. This has been co-ordinated alongside updating the Public Rights of Way Annex to the Highway Asset Management Plan (ref. [Highway Asset Management - Roads and transport \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk)), which is due to be published in 2023.

Initial consultation has included workshop sessions with local partners participating in the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme. Discussion has focused on considering what has happened in the last 10 years which did or could impact on use and management of the Public Rights of Way network; and suggestions for priority actions to include within an updated RoWIP.

Feedback has subsequently been considered by a DCAF working group which met on 24th November 2023, with the main points outlined within the draft table, attached as an annex to this report. This table summarises key themes from the last 10 years, alongside appropriate objectives.

Review of the RoWIP (including oversight) is also being considered by the Devon County Council Public Rights of Way Committee.

Recommendations on next steps:

1. That the RoWIP is updated in a similar format to the 2012 review i.e., as a stand-alone document. This will include an annex providing examples of improvements / good practice delivered in the last 10 years; information setting out how delivery of the plan will be monitored and reviewed; and links to relevant research, policy and guidance.
2. That the draft summary table be distributed to relevant internal and external groups – including the Environment, Transport Planning, and Equality and Diversity teams (at DCC), Exmoor and Dartmoor National Park Authorities, AONB units, Devon Ramblers, Open Spaces Society, Devon TRF, Devon BHS, P3 members, South West Coast Path Association, Disabled Ramblers, Countryside Mobility South West (N.B. this is not a definitive list of the relevant groups). This wider consultation period will be to mid-March 2023.
3. That a draft of the updated RoWIP be considered at the DCAF meeting in April, with the working group potentially meeting prior to this (at the end of March) to consider the wider feedback.

Devon Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Themes: changes in the last 10 years, and proposed actions (December 2022)

Topic	Issue (summary examples)	Activity / Priorities	Current RoWIP
Development / Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population growth • Landscape character • Demand / levels of use • Impact on existing infrastructure • Opportunities for new / improved paths • Risks re. negatively impacting on character and use of existing paths • Traffic 	<p>Active Travel: create new routes and enhance quality of existing paths to support and encourage non-car based travel. This includes improving connectivity between residential areas, recreational destinations, places of work, public transport, and other local facilities</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements: create new routes and enhance quality of existing paths to meet existing needs and to mitigate impacts arising from new development. This should seek to optimise the contribution that paths provide to green infrastructure, and social inclusion</p> <p>Design and Materials: ensure that path creation and improvements are sensitive to local character, heritage and biodiversity; and positively contribute to Devon County Council's target to reach net zero carbon by 2030</p> <p>Planning Policy and Plans: influence and inform development management to optimise and improve access as an important part of green space and green infrastructure. This includes contributing to delivery of local and national guidance e.g., National design guide - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>	<p>Legal: Definitive Map and Statement</p> <p>Legal: Public Path Orders</p> <p>Information and Communication</p> <p>Road Safety</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Walkers</p> <p>Cyclists</p>

<p>Information, Education and Technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media • Smart Phones • GIS • Webpages • Information provision • E-bikes • Attitudes 	<p>Communication: utilise a range of media to optimise understanding and awareness of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Delivering the RoWIP ❖ Accessing the countryside ❖ Feeding back and reporting <p>Community Engagement and Campaigns: work collaboratively in identifying and communicating key messages – for example veterinary practices and The Kennel Club on guidelines for safe, enjoyable, and responsible dog walking</p> <p>Information and Guidance: support and influence production of easily accessible, effective guidance on accessing and enjoying the countryside, and minimising associated impacts</p> <p>Adapting to Technological Advances: work flexibly to optimise opportunities arising from technological advances over the plan period</p>	<p>Information and Communication Partnerships</p>
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<p>Agriculture / Land Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm traffic – volume and size of vehicles • Livestock and crops – restricting access • Shoots and hunts • Working landscapes – impact of dogs straying and trespass • Carbon offsetting e.g., tree planting etc. • Land use changes – loss of farmland to development 	<p>Community Engagement and Campaigns</p> <p>Information and Guidance</p> <p>Planning Policy and Plans</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements</p> <p>Alternative Routes: work cooperatively with landowners and occupiers to identify opportunities for additional temporary permissive routes to enable people to bypass sensitive locations. This can only be done if the legally defined route remains available, and there is no misleading signage, intimidation, or obstruction</p>	<p>Legal: Definitive Map and Statement</p> <p>Legal: Public Path Orders</p> <p>Information and Communication</p> <p>Permissive Access</p> <p>Dog Walkers</p> <p>Agriculture</p>
<p>Population Profiles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in dog ownership • Ageing population 	<p>Information and Guidance</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements</p>	<p>Walkers</p> <p>Dog Walkers</p>

<p>Accessibility / Social Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in mobility scooters – importance of recognising the advancement in size, length, and range of mobility scooters • Growth in range and availability of E-bikes • Better understanding of need, including the importance of protected characteristics and tackling issues such as racism • Gaps gates and stiles – least restrictive • Aging population • Blind and partially sighted people • Importance / value of the unsurfaced Unclassified County Road (uUCR) network – ‘Green Lanes’ / Quiet Lanes • Availability (or lack of) public transport connections to green spaces 	<p>Information and Guidance: including identifying and promoting guidance on and for different categories of mobility scooter (with examples)</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements</p> <p>Communication: including uUCRs: as a layer on interactive maps</p> <p>Community Engagement and Campaigns: including a potential project with the Trail Riders Fellowship re. uUCR mapping</p> <p>Adapting to Technological Advances</p>	<p>Users with mobility problems</p>
<p>Public / Animal Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ash Dieback • Covid • Avian Flu • Increase in awareness and appreciation of the value of local path networks (particularly during periods of restrictions on movement due to the Covid pandemic) 	<p>Alternative Routes</p> <p>Community Engagement and Campaigns</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Information and Guidance</p>	<p>Agriculture</p>

<p>Climate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetation growth – longer growing season and increasing number of cuts • Surface water / flooding • Storm damage • Erosion / cliff falls 	<p>Planning Policy and Plans</p> <p>Active Travel</p> <p>Design and Materials</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Information and Guidance</p> <p>Community Engagement and Campaigns</p> <p>Alternative Routes</p> <p>Adapting to Technological Advances</p>	<p>Environment</p>
<p>Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Recovery • Rural landscapes • Pollution / littering • Invasive species • Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces 	<p>Planning Policy and Plans</p> <p>Design and Materials</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Information and Guidance</p> <p>Community Engagement and Campaigns</p> <p>Alternative Routes</p>	<p>Environment</p>

<p>Health and wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in demand for walking, cycling and equestrian provision – but is this a long-term trend • Connection to nature • Multi / shared use paths 	<p>Planning Policy and Plans</p> <p>Active Travel</p> <p>Design and Materials</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Information and Guidance: including targeted information to encourage greater use by under-represented and excluded people e.g., looked after children, children with special educational needs and disabilities, and blind and partially sighted people</p> <p>Community Engagement and Campaigns: including supporting social / green prescribing; and promoting research opportunities with universities and other further education establishments. This should include adding to the evidence base to demonstrate the physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation, and impacts from actions delivered as part of the RoWIP.</p> <p>A good example is work commissioned by the South West Coast Path Association with the University of Exeter – available to read at The South West Coast Path Health & Wellbeing Assessment Report 2020 by southwestcoastpath - Issuu</p>	<p>Health</p>
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Local Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Travel • Growth in holiday accommodation – inexperienced and less well-informed path users • Recreation and leisure / demand for trails • Increase in home working • Importance of the network to local business involved in management and maintenance activities (Framework Contractors) 	<p>Planning Policy and Plans</p> <p>Active Travel</p> <p>Design and Materials</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Information and Guidance: including working with Tourist Information Centres</p> <p>Community Engagement and Campaigns</p> <p>Adapting to Technological Advances</p>	Tourism and Economic Development

Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austerity • Reduced public transport (especially rural buses) • Partnership working • Volunteers • Corporate Social Responsibility • Grants 	<p>Visitor Payback / Visitor Giving and Sponsorship: identify opportunities to encourage and enable people and business to contribute financially - for example as outlined in Visit England guidance at visitor_giving_helpsheets.pdf (visitengland.com)</p> <p>Participation and Involvement: support and extend the ways in which individuals and groups can directly participate and contribute to maintaining and improving recreation and access. This includes through volunteering, work experience, apprenticeships, education, training, and skills development.</p>	Partnerships
Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • England Coast Path / Coastal Margin • Deregulation – ‘right to apply’ • 2026 Cut-off / lost paths • Brexit and changes to agri-environment policy 	<p>Coastal Access: work closely with Natural England and local partners and stakeholders to complete the designation process for the England Coast Path. This includes delivery of implementation works for the National Trail and associated access improvements to coastal margin</p> <p>Planning Policy and Plans</p> <p>Active Travel</p> <p>Design and Materials</p> <p>Recreational Infrastructure Improvements</p> <p>Alternative Routes</p>	<p>Legal: Definitive Map and Statement</p> <p>Legal: Public Path Orders</p> <p>Access Land</p>

		Communication Information and Guidance Community Engagement and Campaigns Adapting to Technological Advances	
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