

CET/23/99

Public Rights of Way Committee
23 November 2023

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Please note that the following recommendation is subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

2) Introduction

This report provides an update on progress in reviewing The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (Devon on the Move, Rights of Way Improvement Plan Version 3). This follows on from a previous report considered at the meeting held on 9th March 2023.

3) Background

Introduction

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 related guidance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Natural England.

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.

The initial Rights of Way Improvement Plan (Devon on the move) was published in 2005. This was reviewed, with a summary document published in 2012.

Review

A review of the 2012 version of the RoWIP commenced in 2022, initially co-ordinated alongside an update the Public Rights of Way Annex to the Highway Asset Management Plan. The Highway Asset Management Plan has subsequently been approved and is now published on the Devon County Council website.

Initial consultation included workshop sessions with local partners participating in the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme, with discussion focused on what has changed within the last 10 years which did or could impact on use and management of the Public Rights of Way network. Suggestions for potential priority actions were also invited for consideration within the updated RoWIP.

Internal and external stakeholders have also contributed, including representatives for transport planning, ecology, landscape, heritage, agriculture, rural economy, protected landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks), and interest groups.

Drafting of the plan has been co-ordinated through a Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF) working group, reporting back through the full forum, with the review also considered by this Committee.

Next Steps

Good progress has been made, with emerging drafts of the revised RoWIP reviewed through the DCAF working group. Further work is currently being carried to finalise the draft plan, prior to seeking endorsement and approval.

The plan is being updated utilising the feedback to date. It will then be subject to further consultation, including being publicly available via the Devon County Council website at Have Your Say. Initial consultees, and other relevant stakeholders will also be contacted, providing opportunity for additional input.

The revised RoWIP will be subject to review through the DCAF working group in November, prior to consideration at the next Forum meeting in January. The intention is for the final version of the plan to be considered by this committee in March 2024.

Revised Timetable:

- November 2023 – Revised draft to be completed.
- 30 November 2023 – Review with the DCAF working group.
- November and December 2023 – Additional wider consultation on the revised draft.
- 22 January 2024 – Report to the DCAF.
- 7 March 2024 – Report to PRow Committee.
- April 2024 – Revised RoWIP published.

4) Options

The main alternative option would be to continue working based on the existing RoWIP. This is considered inappropriate as information informing priorities and actions will be out of date, with resource allocation not necessarily reflecting relevant needs.

5) Consultations

The review is being carried out in consultation with key partners and stakeholders including parish and town councils participating in the Parish Paths Partnership, and the Devon Countryside Access Forum.

6) Strategic Plan

The Devon Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) fits well with the Devon Strategic Plan – Best Place (2021 – 25) and actions to be fairer, healthier, caring, greener, and

prosperous. At the strategic level, public rights of way and access are of great importance to:

- connecting people and places (including Active Travel),
- the local economy (with the network providing essential infrastructure in support of recreation, leisure, and tourism),
- carbon reduction, biodiversity, landscape, and heritage (particularly provision for non-car based travel, contribution to climate change avoidance and mitigation measures, and as a key component of green infrastructure), and
- physical and mental health and wellbeing (with benefits directly attributable to exercising outdoors and contact with nature).

Directly relevant priorities set out within the Devon Strategic Plan include:

Responding to the climate emergency, especially:

- More opportunities for cycling and walking,
- Helping wildlife and landscapes to recover,
- Encourage sustainable lifestyles, and
- Continue to reduce carbon emissions across all our services.

Supporting recovery and growth, especially:

- Secure investment in transport infrastructure, and
- Maintain, and where necessary, improve our highway network and improve sustainable transport options

Tackling poverty and inequality, especially:

- Promote community cohesion.

Improve health and wellbeing, especially:

- Give people greater opportunities for walking and cycling to increase their physical activity.

Supporting people and communities, especially:

- Continue to support our vibrant community and voluntary sector,
- Enable a range of transport options, including public transport, and
- Engage directly with people in meaningful ways and encourage participation in decisions that affect them.

7) Financial Considerations

Updating the plan is cost neutral, being led by existing PROW staff. The plan will inform work priorities and resource allocation, with potential to support external funding bids.

8) Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio Economic)

Consultation on the RoWIP includes taking account of impacts, with inclusion of policies to ensure associated actions have either a neutral or positive effect.

10) Equality Considerations

The RoWIP is to be subject to appropriate assessments as part of the plan drafting process. Impacts will be positive, with policies to improve accessibility and social inclusion.

11) Risk Management Considerations

No risks have been identified.

12) Conclusion

The RoWIP is an important, statutory plan used to inform and guide work to manage, maintain and enhance the public rights of way and wider access network.

Meg Booth

Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Background Paper Nil

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