

Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Highway Infrastructure Asset Management 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.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the report be noted.

1. Introduction

This report outlines arrangements to review and update two key plans that set out priorities and actions pertinent to management, maintenance, and development of the public rights of way network.

2. Background/Proposal

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

- 2.1 Devon County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (known as the RoWIP) has been drawn up in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and takes account of guidance issued by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- 2.2 The key purpose is to consider how improvements to the public rights of way network will provide a better experience for:
 - walkers
 - cyclists
 - horse riders
 - horse and carriage drivers
 - people with mobility problems
 - people using motorised vehicles, for example, motorbikes.
- 2.3 The legislation sets out a requirement to review the plan at least every 10 years, with particular reference to consideration of:
 - (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.

- 2.4 At a strategic level, the RoWIP has an important role in supporting delivery of the Devon County Council Strategic Plan (Best Place).
- Connecting people and places.
 - Supporting health and wellbeing.
 - Contributing to provision of green infrastructure – biodiversity, landscape, heritage, climate change.
 - Providing for recreation, leisure, and tourism – and the local economy.
- 2.5 The RoWIP was first published in 2005 and reviewed in 2012. A further review is currently underway, with any appropriate amendments and variations to be published in early 2023. This review includes consultation and liaison with key partners and stakeholders including the Devon Countryside Access Forum, and parish and town councils (especially those within the Parish Paths Partnership). This is centred on considering changes over the last 10 years which have or are likely to impact on use and management of the PRow network, and associated priority actions for inclusion within the plan.

Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan

- 2.6 This is a 3-year plan outlining how Devon County Council will effectively manage the highway asset infrastructure in Devon.
- 2.7 A definition used by the Institute of Asset Management sets out that “*Asset management is the combined activity of an organisation to realise value from its assets.*” The UK Roads Liaison Group has produced national guidance for highway infrastructure asset management and define asset management as: “*A systematic approach to meeting the strategic need for the management and maintenance of highway infrastructure assets through long term planning and optimal allocation of resources in order to manage risk and meet the performance requirements of the authority in the most efficient and sustainable manner.*”
- 2.8 Public Rights of Way form an integral part of this document, with the network providing
- approximately 5,000 km of public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways, and byways open to all traffic;
 - more than 200 km of off-road shared use trails;
 - more than 500km of ‘unsurfaced’ unclassified county roads (uUCRs/Maintenance Category 12);
 - Devon sections of 2 National Trails (South West Coast Path and the new England Coast Path).
- 2.9 At a service level, key functions for Devon County Council involve responsibilities relating to:
- The legal status
 - Definitive Map and Statement
 - Path diversions, creations, and extinguishments
 - Temporary closures (e.g., for works, public safety, and events)

- Path management and maintenance
 - Path inspections, surveys, maintenance works and capital improvements
 - Liaison with landowners, local residents, interest groups, statutory undertakers, contractors, businesses, and other stakeholders and path users
- Partnership working, including
 - Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Scheme
 - National Park Authorities – agency agreements
 - Devon Countryside Access Forum
 - National Trails - South West Coast Path/England Coast Path

2.10 Challenges, and priorities include

- Inventory – identifying, recording, and mapping the network and associated infrastructure such as signage, bridges, boardwalks, and gates.
- Condition/Ease of Use – carrying out inspections, data recording and analysis to ensure provision of a network that is fit for purpose, and safe and enjoyable to use.
- Levels of Service/Resources – defining and delivering appropriate quality standards, understanding and managing public expectations, and prioritising and programming maintenance and improvement works.

2.11 The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) forms part of a suite of documents that describe the Council's highway asset management approach:

- Highway infrastructure asset management policy. This is a concise document describing what the Council's approach is and how it links with the Council's overarching objectives.
- Highway infrastructure asset management strategy - the overall approach to delivering highway asset management.
- Highway infrastructure asset management plan and annexes – more detailed, outlining how the Council uses asset management tools to develop effective processes to plan, operate, monitor and review the highway network assets.

2.12 Emerging drafts of the revised Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy were considered by the Standing Overview Group of the Council's Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee 3rd March 2022. The plan is due to be considered later this year.

2.13 Public Rights of Way forms one of several annexes. Drafting is being carried out in consultation with the DCAF and Parish and Town Councils, alongside review of the RoWIP. This includes consideration of stakeholder priorities for day-to-day management and maintenance of their local network, and associated actions needed to help make this happen.

3. Options

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

4. Consultations

- 4.1 The reviews are 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.

5. Financial Considerations

- 5.1 Updating the plans is cost neutral, being led by existing PROW staff. Both documents will be of benefit in optimising allocation of resources, with potential to support external funding bids.

6. Legal Considerations

- 6.1 There are no specific legal considerations.

7. Equality, Environmental Impacts (including Climate Change) and Public Health Considerations

- 7.1 The RoWIP and HIAMP will be subject to appropriate assessments as part of the review process. Impacts are likely to be positive.

8. Risk Management Considerations

- 8.1 No risks have been identified.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 As has been the case for the current versions of the RoWIP and PROW Annexe to the HIAMP, these documents will be used to inform and guide work carried out to manage, maintain and enhance the network.

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Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Ref.
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