

TITLE	Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan consultation
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 30 May 2019
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Locality and Customer Services - Sarah Hollamby
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Environment and Leisure – Parry Batth

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To seek Executive approval to publish the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020 - 2030 (ROWIP) and undertake a full public consultation.

The key benefit to residents of the Borough of this decision is an opportunity to contribute to the development of the improvement plan and the actions the Council intends to take to meet the future public needs of the rights of way network.

The ROWIP links with the Core Strategy, Managing Development Delivery 2014-2026, Local Transport Plan 2011-2026, Active Travel Plan 2011-2026, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Joint Health and Well Being Strategy 2018-2021, the Sustainable Environment Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approve the undertaking of full public consultation on the Draft Revised Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020/2030.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What the report is about

This report seeks approval to publish the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030 and undertake a full public consultation.

ROWIP Process

Wokingham Borough Council has a duty under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and update a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) every 10 years. The previous ROWIP was published in 2010 and expires next year. The Council must publish a draft plan and undertake a full public consultation on the draft plan for a minimum of 12 weeks.

The new draft plan includes a revised suite of 76 actions based on 6 broad headings:

- 1) Improving information
- 2) Creating new links
- 3) Encouraging use of the network
- 4) Access for all
- 5) Look after the network

6) Planning for the future

Key Issues

Decision is to undertake the statutory 12-week consultation. This does not bind the Council to adopting any of the proposals. Any actions within the final plan will only be undertaken when the opportunity, funds and resources become available.

The draft plan contains details about potential proposed routes across private land, which have not yet been discussed with the land owners. These routes are proposed routes only and are subject to discussion and negotiation with landowners in the future.

The main costs for this decision are minimal and relate to newspaper advertisements and printing costs.

Timescales for next steps

The next steps will be to undertake a 12-week consultation from 4th July 2019 to 26th September 2019 as detailed below. Following this consultation the feedback will be fed into a revised draft which will be submitted for approval as the final Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030 in January 2020.

Planned consultation

The draft plan will be published and advertised in 2 local newspapers covering the area, as well as on the Councils website. In addition to this it will be announced via a press release and through social media.

Electronic mail will be sent to all known consultees including all Ward Members, Parish & Town Councils, Mid and West Berks Local Access Forum, known user groups and neighbouring local authorities

Engagement with the wider public will be encouraged through an online consultation, emails and social media, attendance at community forums, drop in sessions at the Council offices at Shute End and in other community locations. The draft plan will also be deposited in the Shute End offices and local libraries for inspection by the public.

BACKGROUND

Legislative Background

Wokingham Borough Council has a duty under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and update a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) every 10 years. As part of the process for reviewing a ROWIP, the Council must publish a draft plan and undertake a full public consultation on the draft plan for a minimum of 12 weeks.

Background and content of the draft ROWIP 2020 - 2030

The previous ROWIP was published in 2010 and expires next year. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan for 2020-2030 builds on this work and takes it further, verifying and clarifying the needs of the public and proposing a revised suite of 76 actions to meet these needs, based on 6 broad headings:

1) Improving information

Deliver and maintain an up to date legal record of PROW, expand and improve the information available to the public online and assist others to do the same and promote more routes

2) Creating new links

Create more routes between towns and villages, fill gaps in the network for walking, cycling and horse riding & create more circular routes

3) Encouraging use of the network

Encourage use of the network for sustainable transport and fitness, increase confidence for people using PROWs and reduce conflict between users

4) Access for all

Develop more accessible paths and improve structures to cater for users with restricted mobility

5) Look after the network

Improve the surfacing of paths and reduce river side damage, manage vegetation and enforcement issues, seek improvements such as street lighting in certain areas and work in partnership with other organisations.

6) Planning for the future

Make sure that the network is considered as part of the planning process, funds for improvement and enhancing the network are secured where required and ensure future developments do not cause problems for the network.

The plan assesses the extent to which the public rights of way network meets the needs of the public now, and in the future in providing opportunities for exercise, leisure and open air recreation, delivers safe and active travel options and contributes to sustainable development and to a healthier, inclusive community

These actions are informed by research, spatial analysis of the network and consultation with stakeholders to define where we should be heading. It identifies the gaps in the network for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, providing a framework for assessing priorities and directing efforts to achieve the maximum benefit for the public.

It addresses the current deficiencies in the network and ways to encourage increased use of the network for sustainable travel, leisure and health. It links and feeds into existing Council strategies and policies, and identifies where there is synergy and common goals.

As well as being strategic in nature, specific details have been captured as part of the process of creating the plan. These have been recorded and mapped so that they can form part of the overall solutions to be implemented over the course of the plan and be shared across the Council to maximise opportunities for improvement.

The process of reviewing and creating this revised plan is as follows:

Stage 1 – Review and undertake a new assessment of need

A review of the existing assessment of need was conducted in March – May 2019, with a consultation with all WBC Councillors, Parish Councils, user groups, local residents, tourist organisations, neighbouring local authorities and other stakeholders in April 2019.

A review of all current strategic plans was also conducted to ensure that the revised plan feeds into the wider Council objectives.

Stage 2 – Review and update the statement of action

The results of the review and assessment of need fed into the review and update of the existing statement of action, forming the Wokingham Borough Council Draft Revised Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020/2030

Stage 3 – Publish a draft revised Rights of Way Improvement Plan

The draft plan must now be published and open for consultation for a minimum of 12-weeks. The results of this consultation will be analysed and fed into the final Wokingham Borough Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020/2030

Stage 4 – Adopt and publish a new Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030

It is intended that the final plan will be adopted and published in 2020

Planned consultation

The draft plan will be published and advertised in 2 local newspapers covering the area, as well as on the Councils website, through a press release and through social media.

Electronic mails will be sent to all known consultees including all Ward Members, Parish & Town Councils, the Mid and West Berks Local Access Forum and neighbouring local authorities. The following user groups will be approached directly for their comments:

- Loddon Valley Ramblers
- Disabled Ramblers
- Local disability groups
- Local visually impaired user groups
- British Horse Society
- Cyclists Touring Club
- Cycling GB
- Open Spaces Society
- Byways and Bridleways Trust
- Chiltern Society
- British Driving Society

- Auto Cycle Union
- Trail Riders Fellowship
- Land Access and Recreation Association
- Green Lane Association (GLASS)
- Hants and Berks 4x4 Club
- All wheel drive club
- National Farmers Union
- Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

Engagement with the wider public will be encouraged through an online consultation, emails and social media, attendance at community forums, drop in sessions at the Council offices at Shute End and in other community locations. The draft plan will also be deposited in the Shute End offices and local libraries for inspection by the public.

BUSINESS CASE

Wokingham Borough Council has a duty under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and update a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) every 10 years.

The next steps will be to undertake a 12-week consultation from July to September 2019, including newspaper advertisements, a press release, online surveys, direct email contact, social media and through public drop in sessions in various locations.

Following this consultation the feedback will be fed into a revised draft which will be submitted for approval as the final Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030 in January 2020.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£3000	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	N/A	N/A

Other Financial Information

Implementation of the ROWIP proposals (which are not binding) will be accommodated within existing funding sources/budgets, or will only be undertaken when additional funds and resources become available.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

If approved the public consultation will commence on 4th July 2019 and run until 26th September 2019.

List of Background Papers

Draft ROWIP 2020 Equality Impact Assessment
Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030
Draft ROWIP 2020 Appendix 1: WBC overarching policy and strategy context
Draft ROWIP 2020 Appendix 2: Assessment of Need Consultation Report
Draft ROWIP 2020 Appendix 3: Network Fragmentation analysis
Draft ROWIP 2020 Appendix 4: ROWIP 2020 Proposed New Routes
Draft ROWIP 2020 Appendix 5: Greenways Strategy

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