

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Wednesday 22 April 2020
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Plan and Growth - Sarah Hollamby
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Environment and Leisure - Parry Batth

**PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

To seek Executive approval and adoption of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030.

The key benefits to residents of the Borough of this decision is the adoption of a revised strategic plan to improve the public rights of way network for the next 10 years. The approved strategic plan will guide the approach towards improvement of the public rights of way network, including the creation of new routes for both utilitarian use, sustainable transport and leisure. The plan will form the strategic basis of the creation of new routes, either through opportunities arising from future development, or through direct actions such as path creation agreements and path creation orders.

The ROWIP links with the Core Strategy, the upcoming Local Plan Update, Managing Development Delivery 2014-2026, Local Transport Plan 2011-2026, The Climate Emergency Action Plan, 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 and adopt the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report seeks Executive approval and adoption of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030.

The plan has been developed following public consultation on the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan between July and September 2019 in accordance with the statutory guidance.

Feedback from the consultation led to a number of changes to the draft plan, which is now submitted to the Executive for approval.

The Council has a duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and update a Rights of Way Improvement Plan every 10 years. The implementation of the ROWIP proposals are not binding. Any actions within the plan will only be undertaken when the opportunity, funds and resources become available.

The next steps following this decision will be to publish the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030.

## **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. In drawing up the plan, the Council is required to:

- assess the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- the opportunities provided by local rights of way (and in particular by footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways and restricted byways) for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of their area;
- the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and those with mobility problems

### **Background and content of the draft ROWIP 2020 - 2030**

The Wokingham Borough Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan was published in 2010 and the Council commenced a review of the plan in March 2019 in accordance with the latest Statutory Guidance on Rights of Way Improvement Plans published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in November 2002.

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.

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 Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020/2030. The draft plan was approved by WBC Executive on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019 to go forward for the statutory 12-week consultation. The public consultation ran from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019 to 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019, and 90 responses were received to the consultation from WBC Councillors, Parish Councils, interested user groups, residents and the general public.

A consultation report is included in the background papers. This report summarises the results of the consultation and the comments and representations received. It provides a response to the comments and details where changes have consequently been made to the final plan. A list of all changes made to the final plan is included in Appendix A to this report, and full details of the comments received are included in Appendix B (available on request).

The final Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030 is included in the background papers. Due to the size it has not been included in the agenda documents but is available on the Council's website or upon request to Democratic Services.

### **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.

Following a review, a draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan was published for public consultation from 4<sup>th</sup> July to 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019. Following this consultation the feedback has been analysed and fed into a revised plan.

This revised plan is now being submitted for approval as the final Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030.

## 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.***

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

A consultation on the draft plan has already been carried out in accordance with the statutory guidance and changes made accordingly. No further consultation is required under the legislation.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

An initial equality impact assessment has been carried out and has not identified any negative impact to the proposal.

### **Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030**

The plan contains a number of proposals to enhance existing routes and create new off-road routes to encourage sustainable transport and reduce the reliance on motor vehicles. The proposals include:

- Creating new routes to link major development areas through the creation of the Greenways network and the Loddon Long Distance Path, and to develop other multi-use paths to link towns and villages.
- Developing new routes and enhancing existing routes to join up gaps in the network for walking and cycling both within the Borough and to increase cross-border connectivity with neighbouring local authority networks
- Developing a network of new and improved paths for utilitarian and leisure use suitable for people of restricted mobility, visually impaired and other vulnerable groups

- Improving the links and interaction between the rights of way network and the wider highways network and provide an easily accessible network of off-road routes for the public
- Improving information, signage and promotion of rights of way to encourage use of the network as an option for sustainable transport
- Integrating the existing network into wider national databases (National Street Gazetteer) so that it can be used within navigation systems and other applications

**List of Background Papers**

Report on the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan Consultation undertaken from 4th July to 26th September 2019

Wokingham Borough Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030

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