



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Wokingham Borough Council

Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020

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

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Introduction and Executive Summary

The Public Rights of Way (PROW) network makes up 16% of the total highway network within Wokingham Borough Council, and is used by thousands of people, to get to school, to get to work, and to relax and enjoy the countryside. At its core it consists of the public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways, but it forms a crucial part of a wider network which includes Greenways, public parks, SANGs, permitted routes, cycle routes and the wider highway network. The public rights of way network is free to all users regardless of age, race or gender and provides physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits to all.

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, and to review this plan 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

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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.

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 30th May 2019 to go forward for the statutory 12-week consultation. The public consultation ran from 4th July 2019 to 26th September 2019, and 90 responses were received to the consultation from WBC Councillors, Parish Councils, interested user groups, residents and the general public.

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 response to the consultation was mixed. There was general support for the plan however many of the respondents felt that the plan could do more and suggested changes accordingly. Where the plan has not addressed these issues changes have been made. In addition to the comments regarding the plan itself there are a significant number of proposed new routes that have been suggested. These have been added to the map and list of proposed new routes in order that they can be considered for implementation during the life of the plan.

The comments fell into 10 categories, which have been examined in detail below:

1. Accessibility
2. Existing network changes
3. Greenways
4. Information / Promotion
5. Motor vehicle use
6. New links and proposed new paths
7. Operation and implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan
8. Surfacing / Maintenance of the network
9. General comments
10. Other / Out of scope comments

The changes made to the plan in response to the comments and representations are summarised as follows:

Section	Description of changes made
General ROWIP sections	Updated to include National Planning Policy Framework and figures updated as to the existing byway network. Monitoring column in Statement of Action removed to avoid confusion and duplication; all actions will be monitored via a ROWIP annual report unless otherwise stated. Equality Impact Assessment undertaken and referenced within the plan.
Statement of Action 1: Improving information	New actions to develop a communications programme to promote rights of way and to develop path numbering for permitted paths. Expansion of actions to provide printed maps where appropriate and develop and provide information about surfaces to cyclists and motor vehicle users as well as for those with restricted mobility,
Statement of Action 2: Creating new links	Additional actions to create links in the network using highway verges where appropriate and to engage with local motor vehicle groups to identify potential improvements to the network to cater for their use. Expansion of actions to

	include the consideration of motor cycle and motor vehicle use. Change of actions to reference multi-use tracks instead of cycle tracks in response to need to consider potential equestrian and other use.
Statement of Action 3: Encourage use of the public rights of way network	New action to provide segregation of motor vehicle traffic and other users where appropriate. Updated resource sections of the table where there were blank spaces and updated partnership groups to include Mid and West Berks Local Access Forum and Loddon Valley Ramblers where appropriate.
Statement of Action 4: Access for all	Expanded action for provide firmer commitment for stile replacement projects with volunteer organisations. Updated resource sections of the table where there were blank spaces
Statement of Action 5: Looking after the network	New actions to work with vehicle user groups to improve byways, and to provide passing places on byways to reduce potential conflict between users. Expanded action to ensure height clearance is appropriate for the type of way being cleared, in particular to cater for horse riding.
Proposed New Paths (Appendix 4)	57 proposed upgrades of existing routes added 42 proposed new routes added 9 proposed new greenway routes added 1 proposed new promoted circular route added 2 proposed downgrade of existing routes added 1 proposed map adjustment to existing route 4 proposed adoption of permitted paths added 1 new assisted crossing point added Re-phrasing of existing proposal to downgrade byways in Swallowfield in favour of seeking seasonal rather than complete closure if necessary.

Consultation and publicity undertaken

A twelve week public consultation was undertaken from 4th July 2019 until 26th September 2019. Public notices were published in the Bracknell News and Reading Chronicle to advertise the consultation, this was supplemented by a press release announcing the consultation and announcements through the Council's Social Media presence.

All known consultees and stakeholders were invited directly to comment, 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 was encouraged through an online consultation, emails and social media and attendance at community forums and drop in sessions. The draft plan was also deposited in the Shute End offices and local libraries for inspection by the public.

Community Forums, Drop-in-sessions and meetings

ROWIP Information Sessions	Date/Timings	Location	Area
Emmbrook Community Day	29 th August 2019 11am – 2pm	Woosehill Meadows	Woosehill
Drop-in Session 1	3 rd September 2019 11am – 2pm	Shute End Offices	Wokingham
Drop-in Session 2	17 th September 2019 11am – 2pm	Shute End Offices	Wokingham
Mid and West Berks Local Access Forum	25 th September 2019 12pm – 5pm	Dinton Pastures	Wokingham

In total 90 responses were received to the consultation, making a total of 270 representations with regard to different aspects of the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020.

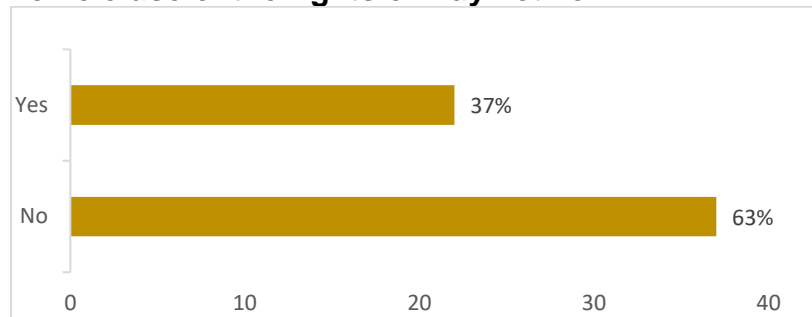
68% of the responses were via the online consultation, with the remaining 32% responding directly. The responses are summarised below. A more detailed summary and the full texts of the comments received are included in Appendix B to this report.

The comments have been categorised into various themes as detailed below. An analysis of the feedback received, and any subsequent changes to the final plan are detailed under each heading.

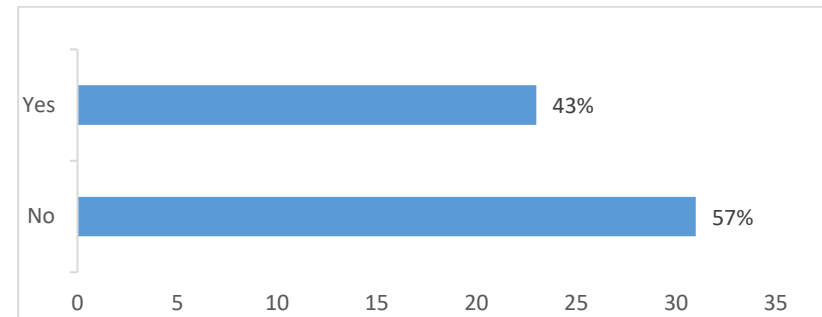
Results from the online consultation

The online consultation asked 4 specific questions relating to the plan, giving space for respondents to provide more detailed comments after each question. A summary of the answers received is detailed below.

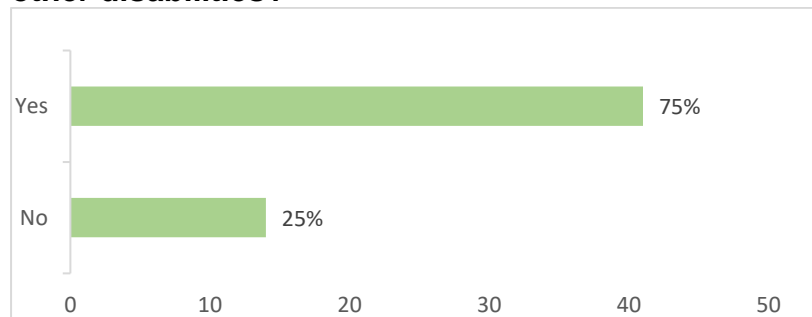
Question 1: Does the plan adequately identify and address the future needs of the public with regard to walking, cycling, horse riding, carriage driving and motor vehicle use of the rights of way network?



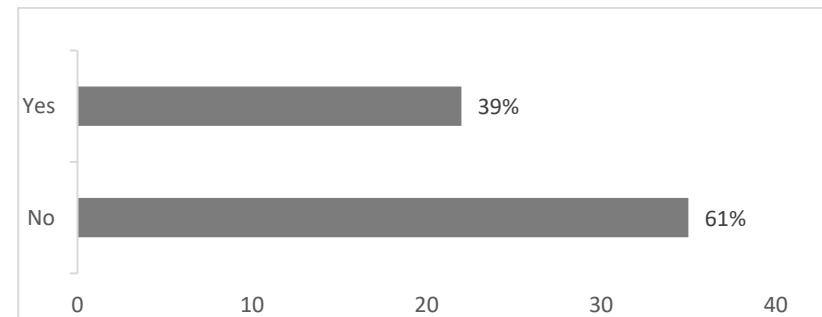
Question 3: Does the fragmentation analysis (Appendix 3) adequately identify areas of potential improvement for walking, horse riding and cycling?



Question 2: Does the plan adequately identify and address improvements to be made to the network for those with mobility restrictions, visual impairments and other disabilities?

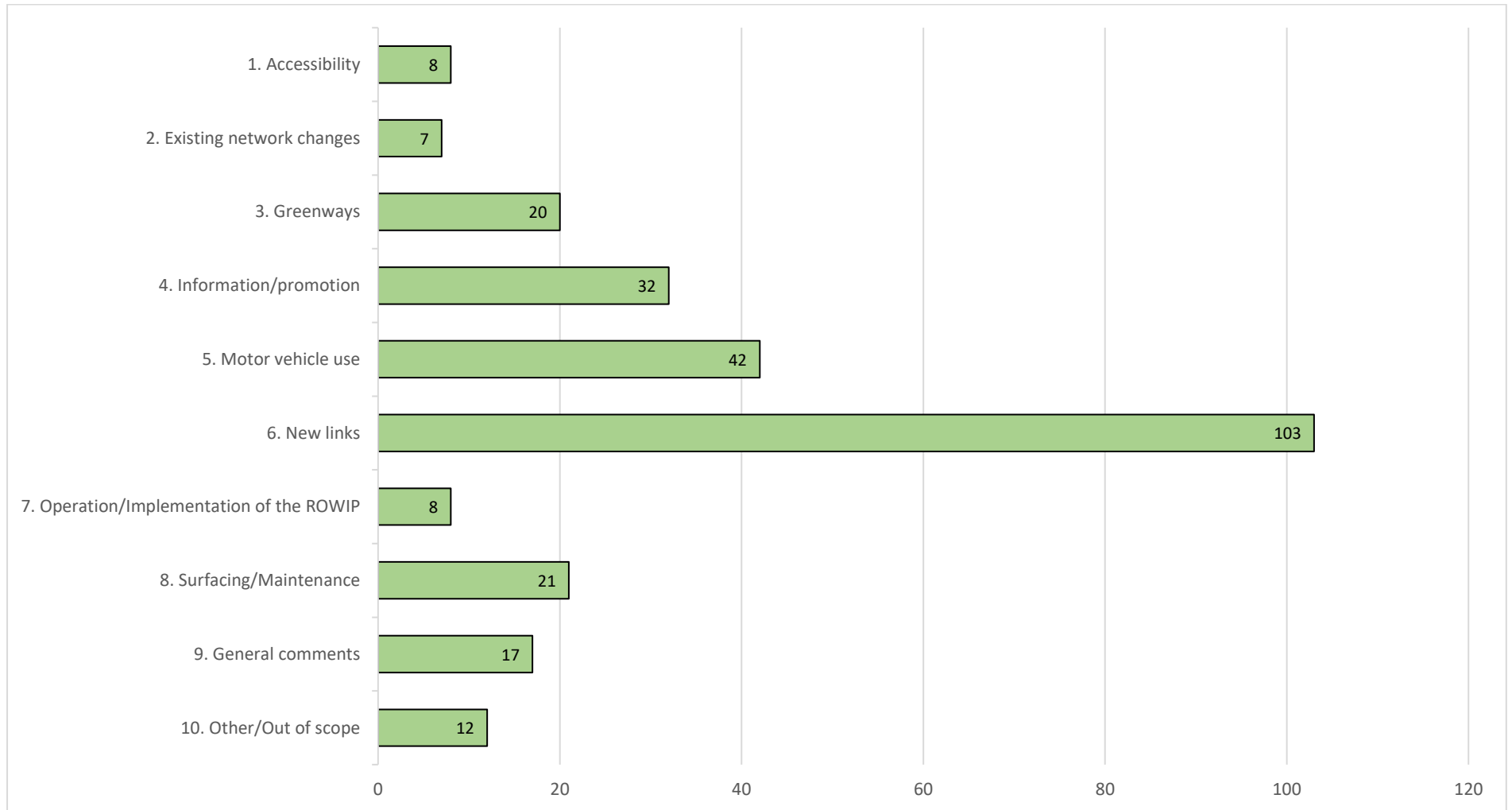


Question 4: Do the proposed new routes (Appendix 4) adequately identify the routes needed to improve the network and meet the needs of the public?



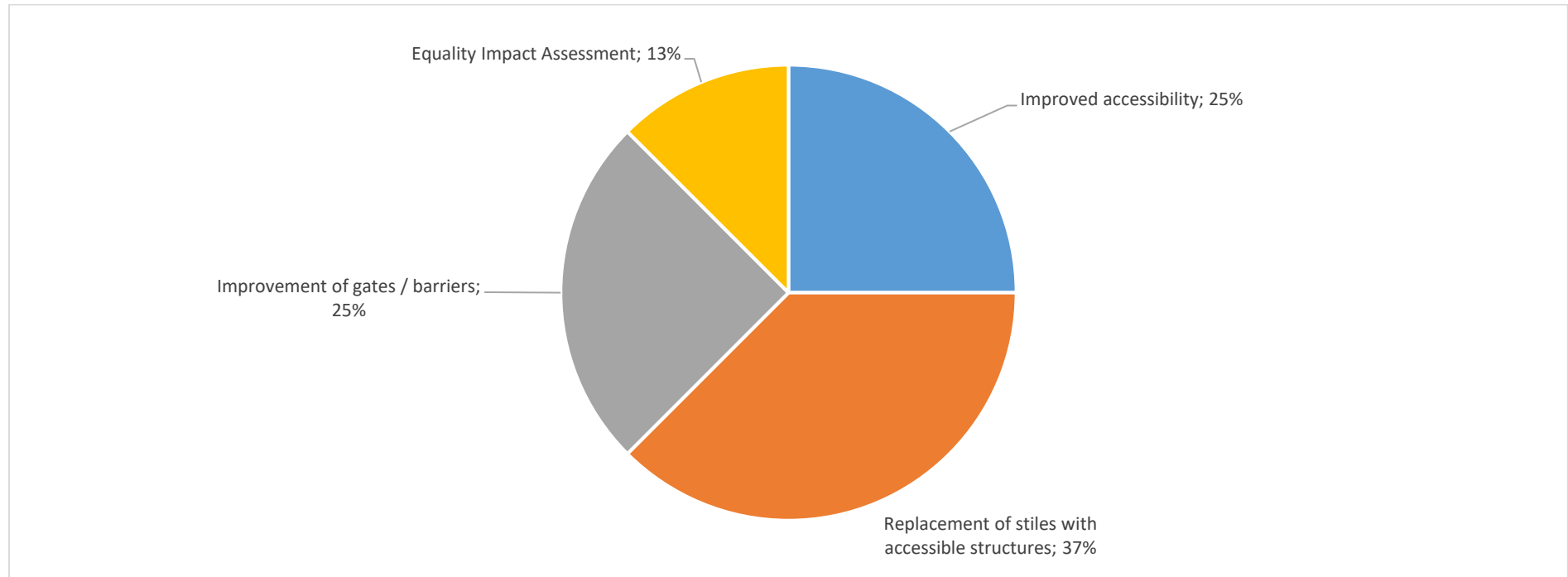
Key Themes from the comments and representations received

The comments and representations fell into 10 broad categories:



Key Theme 1: Accessibility

Feedback received from the consultation had 8 separate representations made with regard to accessibility of the network. These comments fell into the following categories:



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Improved accessibility

The feedback received indicated a need to improve accessibility for wheelchair users and push chairs, and that the paths need to be accessible and wide and smooth enough for those with wheels.

Improvement of gates / barriers

The feedback received was that a practical way to encourage use of public rights of way is to install gates which are friendly to all users, and that the Council considers replacement of the gates implemented on the California Country Park Greenway (Route I)

Equality Impact Assessment

One respondent has mentioned that an Equality Impact Assessment needs to be completed for the plan.

Replacement of stiles with accessible structures

The feedback received has highlighted that the replacement of stiles should be a high priority. In particular representations were made supporting the installation of user friendly structures to replace stiles and where possible installation of wheelchair friendly access. Specific comments were made regarding the financing of the replacement of stiles should also offer a commitment to providing those resources whenever possible.

Response to representations

The Statement of Action 4: Access for all contains an action to improve the surfacing on high-use paths (SOA 4.2), to engage with local user groups to identify improvements to priority areas (SOA 4.1a) to upgrade bridges (SOA 4.3) and replace non-accessible structures on the network with more accessible options (SOA 4.4).

The public rights of way network is a mix of both countryside paths and more urban routes. When undertaking any surface improvements the Council is careful to ensure that the impact of the works respect the character of the way and the adjacent land; it would not be practical or desirable to resurface all public rights of way. The approach has been taken to concentrate surfacing and access improvements on those paths which are in higher demand by those with wheelchairs and pushchairs.

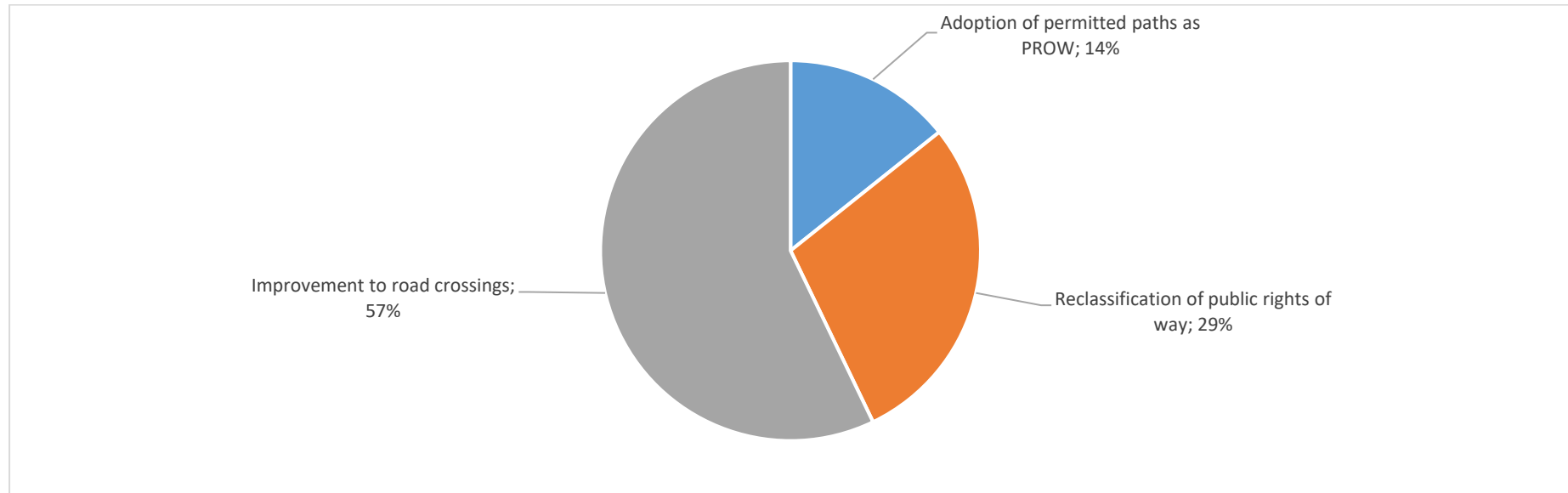
The ROWIP 2020 (SOA 4.4a) contains an action to “Develop a Stiles and Gates policy for all new structures on public rights of way, in line with BS5709:2018”. This will provide for all new structures to be accessible for the lawful use of the public rights of way. It is not appropriate to include specific gates into a strategic plan, however the reported issues with the gates at California Country Park have been noted and these will be inspected as to their accessibility.

The ROWIP 2020 (SOA 4.4(b)) contains an action to “Continue and develop existing programme in partnership with user groups and volunteer groups to replace stiles and inaccessible gates with more accessible structures”. In response to the comments above this action has been strengthened adding an in principle commitment to providing resources for this work.

An initial equality impact assessment has been carried out and has not identified any negative impacts to the proposals contained within the plan.

Key Theme 2: Existing Network Changes

Feedback received from the consultation had 9 separate comments made with regard to existing network changes. These comments fell into the following categories:



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Improvement to road crossings

The feedback received indicated that greater attention is needed towards improving road crossings. Particular areas of concern highlighted were in the north Wokingham Without area where there are a lot of equestrian businesses and the South Wokingham Distributor Road is planned to be built, and at Church Lane and Mole Road, Arborfield. Other comments were that very rarely is a safe crossing provided and in particular that safe connecting links are required where paths cross busy traffic routes. It is suggested that greater use of the verges of adopted highways can help to address some of these issues.

Reclassification of public rights of way

A number of comments were received suggesting a reclassification of existing public rights of way, where there is an inconsistent designation, or to downgrade rights along some byways.

Adoption of permitted paths as public rights of way

Representations were received suggesting that the network of permitted paths developing across SANGs that link settlements within Shinfield are formally adopted as public footpaths.

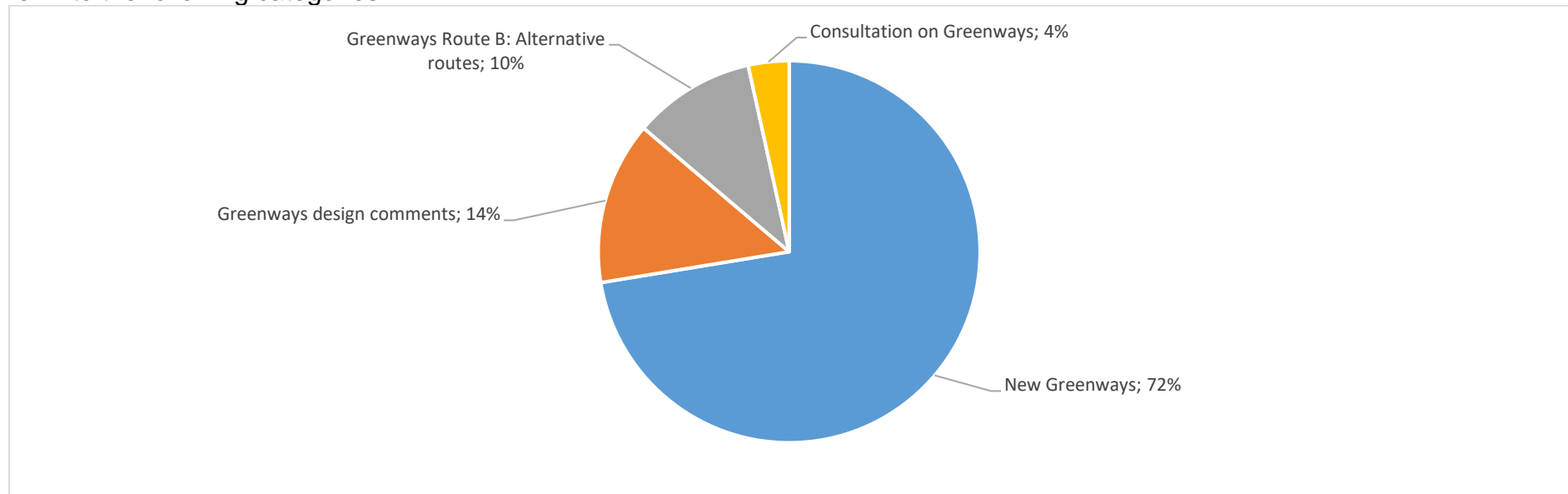
Response to representations

The Statement of Action 3: Encourage use of the public rights of way network contains an action to identify key locations and where possible seek to improve road crossings where paths cross busy roads (SOA 3.2(d)). It is considered that this would be sufficient to address the concerns about road crossings. A new action has been added within the plan (SOA 2.2(f) to “Develop new links between existing public rights of way by utilising the verges within the wider highway network where feasible”.

The change of status of a public right of way, either to increase rights or to downgrade/extinguish rights is a legal process that will require agreement with the landowner and public consultation. Similarly, the change of status from a permitted path to a public right of way will in most cases require a formal dedication by the landowner. The suggestions received have been added to the list of proposed new routes in order for them to be considered and acted upon with regard to the strategic priorities identified.

Key Theme 3: Greenways

Feedback received from the consultation had 29 separate comments made with regard to the Greenways project. These comments fell into the following categories:



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New Greenways

The feedback received from the consultation has suggested a number of new routes for Greenways in addition to those planned linking the Strategic Development Locations (SDLs), and new links into the existing Greenways. A number of representations were also received suggesting new Greenway links from rail stations. These routes are too numerous to list here, but have been added to the list of proposed new routes. A further representation has been received suggesting that the Greenways project be extended to include links between existing areas, as well as the SDLs. One representation has suggested that a new Greenway is created next to A329 from Reading to Bracknell, with dedicated cycleways (not painted lines) along all major roads.

Greenways design comments

There was clear support for the Greenways concept, the Loddon and Blackwater paths, and the already implemented Wokingham Way. Other feedback received stated that a communication programme should be implemented to make residents and users of the Greenways and public rights of way aware that the paths are a shared space. Other comments received recommended that the width of the Greenways should be 5 metres where possible.

A number of representations were received regarding the proposals to construct Greenway routes along byways, with strong opposition to the closure of the byways to motor cycles or motor vehicles; additionally some comments have suggested that segregation between vehicles and other users would be a preferred approach. Similarly a number of representations were received that all the Greenway routes should be accessible for horse riding. Some concerns were raised during the consultation that the surface of the Greenways would not be suitable for use by road bikes, and that the Greenways would be detrimental to existing parks.

Greenways Route B: Suggested alternative routes

The feedback generated a number of comments regarding the planned route of the Greenway between Arborfield Cross and Woosehill (Route B). In particular there was concern about the planned route of the Greenway through the Foxhill area and along Bearwood Road, with a variety of alternative routes suggested. A number of representations were received expressing concern about the number of trees to be felled should a route be constructed within the Foxhill area, suggesting that 200 trees would need to be removed.

Further representations were received regarding the route at the Morrisons supermarket and Brookside at Woose Hill, with suggestions that an alternative route alongside the A329 should be used instead.

Greenways Route I: Implementation comments

A number of representations were received regarding the Greenway at California Country Park (California Way), advising that the route is not yet complete.

Consultation on Greenways

The consultation responses included feedback regarding Route D crossing the railway line at Wokingham, advising that the bridge has poor accessibility.

Further representations were received commenting that the resolution of the maps used in the consultation made it difficult to follow the details of the proposed Greenways routes, and stating that consultation on the Greenways should also be undertaken separately.

Response to representations

The suggestions for new Greenways that have been submitted as part of the consultation will be added to the list of proposed new routes however the priority for the Greenways project will be to implement the strategic routes that have been approved as part of

the Council's Core Strategy and identified in the plan. Placing the suggestions within the list of proposed new routes will allow the Council to take advantage of opportunities to implement the routes outside of the core Greenways project, for example as part of a development or by using alternative funding sources. Some of the new Greenway routes suggested will already be provided by the existing strategic routes; in these cases the routes have not been added separately.

With regard to the comments regarding encouraging a shared use space, the Greenway signage include guidelines to all users advising that the Greenways are a shared space used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.

With regard to widths, the Greenways design standard aim for a 3 metre path with a metre verge either side, which would create a 5 metre wide space for users. Where possible this will be implemented however in some situations land restrictions may mean that this will not be possible. The Council notes the suggestions for a 5 metre wide surfaced path but consider that this would be too wide and unnecessary; the Greenways routes are intended to be constructed as off-road routes and be sympathetic to the surrounding countryside. Where possible the routes are designed to be generally traffic-free multi user routes to create a safe environment for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Surfacing to a 5 metre width would create a track close to a single carriageway road width and would create a more urban look and feel to the Greenway, to the detriment of the surrounding land and potentially encouraging use of the route by motor vehicles; defeating one of the main aims of the project.

With regard to motor vehicle use, the comments and strength of opinion regarding the closure of byway routes will be taken on board during the implementation of the Greenways. A new section will be added to Appendix 5: Greenways Implementation Plan to recognise that where the Greenways are constructed along existing byways provision should be made to enable the existing use to continue where possible by creating separate provision for the Greenways and separating the routes to ensure the Greenways section will be traffic free. Where there is not sufficient width for segregation the Council will need to look at alternative options where appropriate, for example by seeking to widen routes or by using the Council's powers to regulate and restrict traffic. Any such measures would not be undertaken without consultation with stakeholders.

The surfacing of the Greenways is designed to be a permeable hard surface. It is suitable for use on foot, on both road and off-road cycles and on horseback. The comments regarding allowing horse riding along the routes is noted and will be accommodated where possible, and where there is demand for horse riding use; the Greenways Implementation Plan states that "Where possible, additional and separate provisions will be made for equestrians alongside the hard surfaced routes, or equestrians will share the hard surfaced path with others"

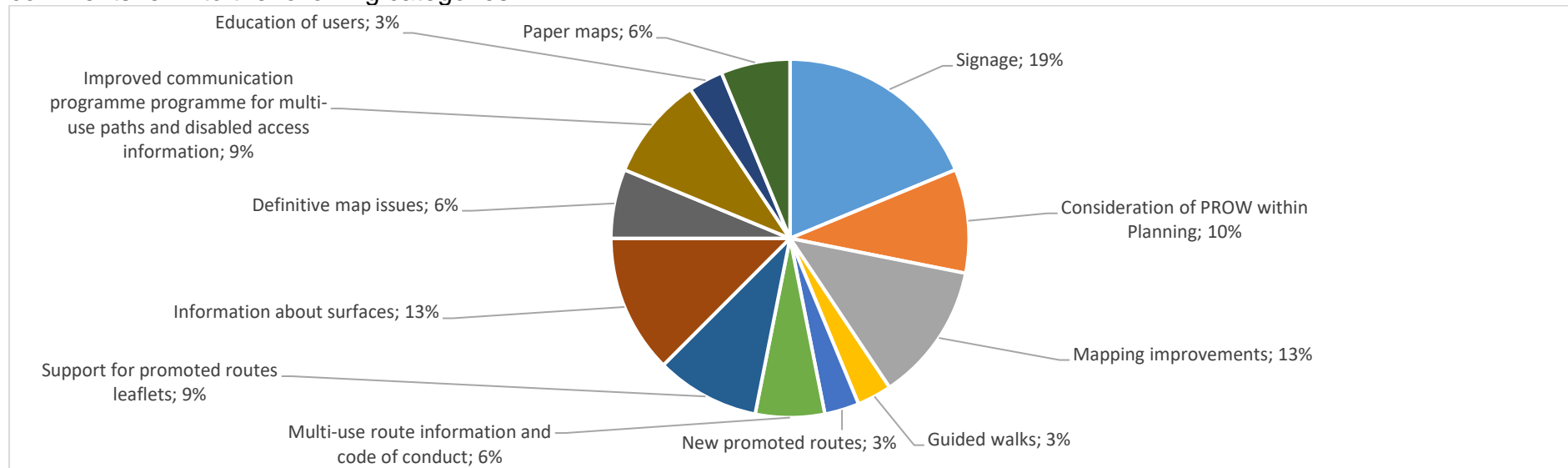
The Greenways routes that form part of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020 are indicative routes, and are subject to discussions with landowners and other stakeholders prior to any implementation, following feasibility and detailed designs. The final route can change in response to these discussions, and specific public consultations for the individual Greenway routes will be

undertaken as part of the route confirmation and design process. This will allow for more detailed plans to be examined and considered by the public.

The alternative routes suggested for Foxhill along Route B, and the railway bridge at Route D will be considered as part of the route confirmation and design for these sections. As stated above the aim of the Greenways project is to create an off-road route where possible; it is not considered appropriate to create a Greenway route alongside the A329, such a scheme would be more suited to be undertaken as an urban cycling improvement.

Key Theme 4: Information / Promotion

Feedback received from the consultation had 32 separate comments made with regard to information and promotion. These comments fell into the following categories:



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Signage

Representations were received as part of the consultation stating that the existing signage along public rights of way need to be improved to help the public identify a public right of way and to improve the 'way marking' along a route, in order to prevent people becoming lost and to encourage greater use of the network. Feedback was received requesting destination signage on specific routes. Other comments regarding signage was that signs are needed to encourage pedestrians and cyclists to co-exist happily on bridleways and shared routes and to tell motorists to slow down for horses and cyclists. Suggestions have been received for the Council to work with vehicle user organisations to improve signage, and install "voluntary restraint signage" where appropriate to deter off-road vehicles using a route in wet weather. A comment regarding the need to sign on-road cycle paths to deter parking was also received.

Consideration of public rights of way within Planning

A number of comments were received that Public Rights of Way should be considered as an integral part of the planning process at all stages, and should have the same level of consideration / importance in large planning applications as the broader highway network. Feedback received stated that opportunities for enhancement or extension of the public rights of

way network should be recognised as early as possible, preferably before a planning application has been submitted. Other comments received stated that accessibility of gates should be considered as part of the planning process, that the health benefits of outdoor activity should be taken into account by the planning process, and that the neighbourhood plans being produced by parish councils should be incorporated into planning policy making.

Mapping improvements

The comments received were in support of the actions identified in the plan to update the Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way, and a number of comments were received stressing the importance to keep these records up to date. Feedback was received stating that the maps are more readily available online.

Guided walks

Feedback was received in the consultation in support of Guided walks. Particular comments were made regarding guided walks in Shinfield, and that the Loddon Valley Ramblers offer guided walks.

New promoted routes

A representation was received suggesting that a new promoted route be developed within Wokingham Without, utilising existing public rights of way, with the addition of two new routes.

Multi-use route information and code of conduct

Representations were received advising that greater information is needed for users of multi-use routes, including a code of conduct to manage potential conflicts between users on the network.

Support for promoted routes leaflets

A representation was received encouraging the Council to support the creation of new promoted routes leaflets by third parties.

Information about surfaces

Comments were received suggesting that more information is made available to the public regarding the surface of public rights of way, in particular for byways and also for cyclists using public rights of way and Greenways.

Definitive map issues

Representations were received regarding issues with some paths and statuses shown on the Wokingham Borough Council Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way. Comments were also received recommending that formal and informal paths, in particular those through new Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace areas (SANGs) should be numbered and mapped by the Council as permitted paths.

Improved communication programme for multi-use paths and disabled access information

Comments were received recommending that a communications programme is established to promote public rights of way, in particular to highlight multi-use paths and information for those with mobility restrictions to encourage greater use of the network.

Education of users

Representations were received from the consultation advising that education of users remains an important improvement, particularly to encourage responsible use of the countryside, including the Country Code.

Paper maps

Feedback was received from the consultation advising that paper maps and leaflets remain to be important to users, and should not be abandoned in favour of electronic alternatives.

Response to representations

The Statement of Act 3: Encourage use of the PROW network contains an action under 3.2 to improve way marking on popular routes (SOA 3.2(a)) and to review the existing signage and look to install more detailed signage information for example destination signage where appropriate (SOA 3.2(b)). In addition to these actions the Statement of Action 1: Improving information contains an action to produce destination signage in strategic areas to facilitate use of the network for travelling to work / school / shops etc. (SOA 1.7).

As nearly a third of the entire public right of way network is multi-use and capable of use by pedestrians and cyclists, it is not considered appropriate to install signage along every route with multiple use rights as this would create a cluttering of signs within the countryside, and it is noted that the vast majority of users co-exist with no issues. Where there are site specific issues for signage this can be investigated on a case-by-case basis and an action is included within the plan to reduce conflicts between users by ensuring that signage is clear and that new paths are wide enough to accommodate all users (SOA 3.3(a)).

The new Greenways routes will continue to have advisory signs advising of multiple use at key starting locations which is aimed at addressing potential conflicts between users.

The suggestion that the Council work with user groups towards improving signage specifically along byways and to be involved with the “voluntary restraint” scheme operated by the Green Lane Association (GLASS) has been included in the plan as a new action: SOA 5.6(c) - Work with vehicle user groups to improve signage along byways. The action to investigate feasibility of seasonal restrictions on sensitive byways will be updated to include measures to undertake this either as part of a voluntary restraint scheme or by a Traffic Regulation Order. The comments regarding on-road cycle paths are outside of the scope of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

The Council ensures that the public rights of way service is consulted on all pre-planning advice and planning applications where an application is near to or will affect a public right of way, or if an application relates to land where identified strategic routes from the Rights of Way Improvement Plan or identified Greenway routes. Statement of Action 6: Planning for the Future contains actions to seek funding from developers and grant bodies for the improvement of countryside access, and to ensure that developments do not sever public rights of way or adversely affect public rights of way. Statement of Action 4.1(c) states that the Council will ensure, as far as possible, that all new routes are constructed to be suitable for use by mobility restricted and visually impaired users which will include accessibility of gates.

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With regard to the comments regarding the health benefits of outdoor activity, health is a material planning consideration which the Council already takes into account in the consideration of planning applications. Neighbourhood Plans are also a material planning consideration and are also taken into account in the determination of planning applications.

With regard to the feedback regarding the Definitive Map and Statement, Statement of Action 1.1(a) contains an action to consolidate and republish the map every 5 years, and keep the web-based interactive map up to date on an ongoing basis. The plan contains an action to develop guided walks (SOA 3.2(c)) and to develop and promote circular routes (SOA 1.3(b)). The specific route at Wokingham Without will be added to the list of proposed new routes as a suggested new circular walk, to enable this to be recorded and the extra links needed to be identified.

The plan contains an action to assist other groups in promoting the network and developing PROW information (SOA 1.8) which will include support for new promoted route leaflets.

In response to the comments regarding information about surfaces, the plan already contains an action to survey and record path furniture, structures and surfaces on the network, and produce online information for users about surfaces (SOA 1.4(a) and (b)).

With regard to the information regarding the status of paths on the Definitive Map and Statement, any change to paths shown on the map would need to be undertaken through negotiation with the landowner, or in response to strong evidence that they are shown incorrectly on the map. The suggestions or upgrades of routes (particularly with regard to byways) will be added to the list of proposed new routes.

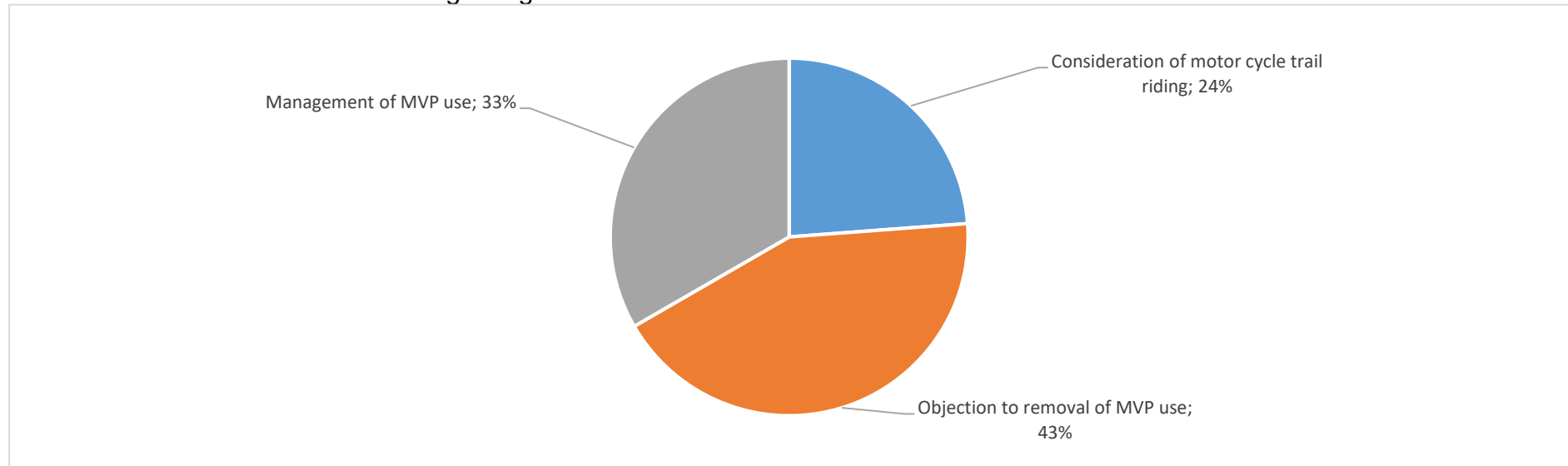
The path numbering of permitted paths in SANGs is currently being investigated as part of an ongoing project with Shinfield Parish Council and a new action has been included within the plan to develop a path numbering system for permitted paths and ensure that they are included as part of the available path maps for users (SOA 1.3(d)).

The comments regarding a communications programme to promote public rights of way, and to undertake education on responsible use of the countryside have been addressed in the plan by the addition of a new action to develop a communications programme to promote public rights of way, and to educate users on responsible use of the Countryside (SOA 1.3(e))

With regard to the representations regarding paper maps, it is considered that the demand for paper copies of maps over the next 10 years will continue to decline however it is recognised that some users still do wish to have hard copy maps and leaflets for example when using particular promoted routes. The plan contains an action to provide information in formats that allow easy printing at home for people to take with them (SOA 1.3(c)); this has been expanded to include an action to provide printed maps and leaflets where appropriate.

Key Theme 5: Motor Vehicle Use

Feedback received from the consultation had 42 separate representations made with regard to motor vehicle use on the network. These comments fell into the following categories:



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Objection to removal of Mechanically Propelled Vehicle / Motor Vehicle (MVP) use

A large number of objections were received as part of the consultation to the proposal to remove Mechanically Propelled Vehicle (MPV) use along certain byways, either as part of ongoing management of byways that deteriorate due to such use (in particular in Swallowfield), or as part of converting a route to be suitable for use as a Greenway. Many of the objections have stated that improved maintenance and drainage could solve the problems and that the removal of rights of motor vehicle users is unnecessary.

Management of Mechanically Propelled Vehicle / Motor Vehicle (MVP) use

The management of Mechanically Propelled Vehicles was a particular concern in the consultation. The majority of feedback was from members of the public who access the byways using motor cycles or motor vehicles. There were also comments received advocating a restriction to motor vehicle access, particularly where the use has caused historical damage to a byway or due to safety concerns about the mixed traffic. A representation was also received advocating a similar approach to byways undertaken in West Berkshire, where seasonal restrictions are imposed during winter months to protect byways, but they are reopened for full use during the summer months.

Consideration of motor cycle trail riding

Representations were received during the consultation that the needs of motor cycle trail riding were not included within the plan, and advocated that as the needs of motor cycle trail riders were different to those using routes using four wheeled vehicles they should be considered as a separate user group in the plan.

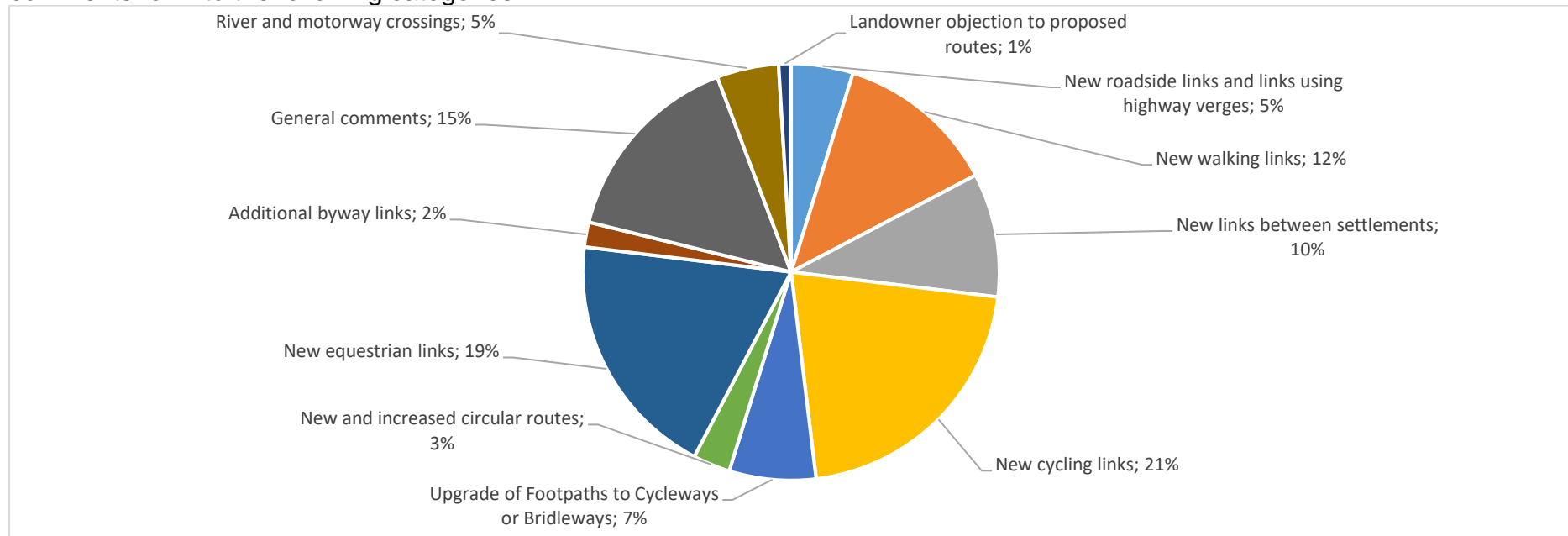
Response to representations

The strength of opinion expressed through the ROWIP consultation regarding the proposed restrictions to motor vehicle use of byways is acknowledged, as well as the helpful suggestions towards alternative options for managing the use to the benefit of all. The plan contains actions to improve the management of byways and motor vehicle use upgrading surfaces where the predominate use is by motor vehicle (SOA 5.6(a)), work with user groups to improve the surfaces along byways (SOA 5.6(b)), and to investigate feasibility of using seasonal restrictions on sensitive byways (SOA 5.6(c)).

In light of the comments received the plan has been updated to ensure that motor cycle and motor vehicle users are expressly included as two separate classes of user, and measures have been put in place to cater for their needs. This includes actions to work with local user groups and assess the fragmentation of network for motor cycle and motor vehicle use and identify potential improvements and priority areas (SOA 2.2(g)), develop new routes and circular routes (SOA 2.2(b) and SOA 2.3), and improve information available regarding surfaces (SOA 1.4). Actions have also been added to work with vehicle groups to improve signage (SOA 5.6(c)) and to look at using voluntary restraint schemes as an alternative to Traffic Regulation Orders (SOA 5.6(d)). The existing proposals to downgrade the byways in Swallowfield (suggested as part of the Assessment of Need consultation) has been rephrased to improve surfacing and drainage along the routes, and seek seasonal restrictions along the routes where necessary.

Key Theme 6: New links and proposed new paths

Feedback received from the consultation highlighted 103 separate comments made with regard to new suggested links. These comments fell into the following categories:



44

Proposed new routes

The majority of the representations received under this theme suggest new specific routes, including new walking links, equestrian links, cycling links and motor cycle/motor vehicles links. These suggestions were to fill gaps in the network available for different users, or to provide off-road links between settlements places of interest.

General comments

In addition to the specific routes suggested above there were a number of general comments received. These included support for more multi-use paths and off-road links for non-motorised vehicles, and increased provision for motor cycling use. Representations were also received highlighting the need for increased connectivity in general, the improvement of access to the public rights of way network from urban areas, and that the Council should ensure that any routes implemented are where people need to go. There were also specific concerns raised regarding the proposal included within the plan to close Mill Lane to motorised traffic.

Response to representations

The proposed route suggestions have been added to the map and list of proposed new routes. With regard to the general comments the plan contains a number of actions to improve connectivity; including actions to develop more cycle paths to link towns and villages (SOA 2.1(c)), create new routes to join up the gaps in the network for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, motor cycles and motor vehicles (SOA 2.2(b)), create new routes to join up the gaps in the network near to schools, amenities, green spaces and public transport (SOA 2.2(c)), and develop new links between existing public rights of way by utilising the verges within the wider highway network (SOA 2.2(f)). The new actions added as a result of the motor vehicle access representations above reflect the need to assess and improve the provision for motor cycle and motor vehicle use. The plan also contains actions to develop additional circular routes (SOA 2.3).

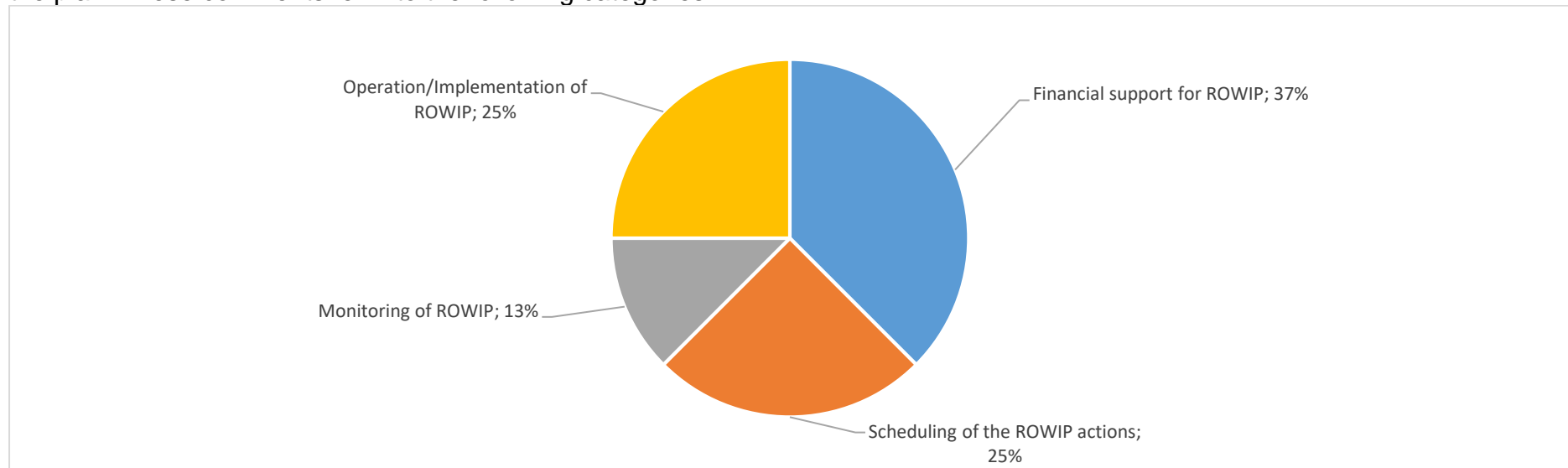
The proposed new routes provide extensive detail as to where people will wish to go, however as any particular proposal progresses there will be consultation with stakeholders as to the viability and design of any particular route.

The actions to create off-road cycle paths will be changed to state “multi-use” paths to reflect the need to consider more options including increased equestrian access.

The consultation also received a detailed objection from a landowner regarding proposed routes across their land, which had initially been included as part of the 2010 Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The objection to the proposed route is noted and no further action will be taken towards the implementation of these routes at the current time. As the suggested new paths have been highlighted both in the 2010 ROWIP and in the 2019 assessment of need as a strategic improvement to the network, it is considered appropriate to continue to show them within the map of proposed paths. Should the landowner’s position change over life of the plan this would allow the proposals to be considered in any potential future plans.

Key Theme 7: Operation/Implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Feedback received from the consultation highlighted 8 separate comments made with regard to operation and implementation of the plan. These comments fell into the following categories:



46

Operation/Implementation and Monitoring of the ROWIP

Comments were received stating that the plan identifies but doesn't necessarily address issues, and that the plan does not state what will be done and how it will be monitored. Other representations have stated that there are a lot of gaps in monitoring.

Financial support of the ROWIP

The consultation responses contained comments supporting the aims of the plan, but expressing concern that little detail is included about the resources to implement the actions. Other responses received suggested that specific budgeting and planning should be applied.

Scheduling of the ROWIP actions

Comments received during the consultation expressed concern that the delivery plan for the ROWIP is unduly vague, subject to changing availability of funds and lacks commitment to action.

Response to representations

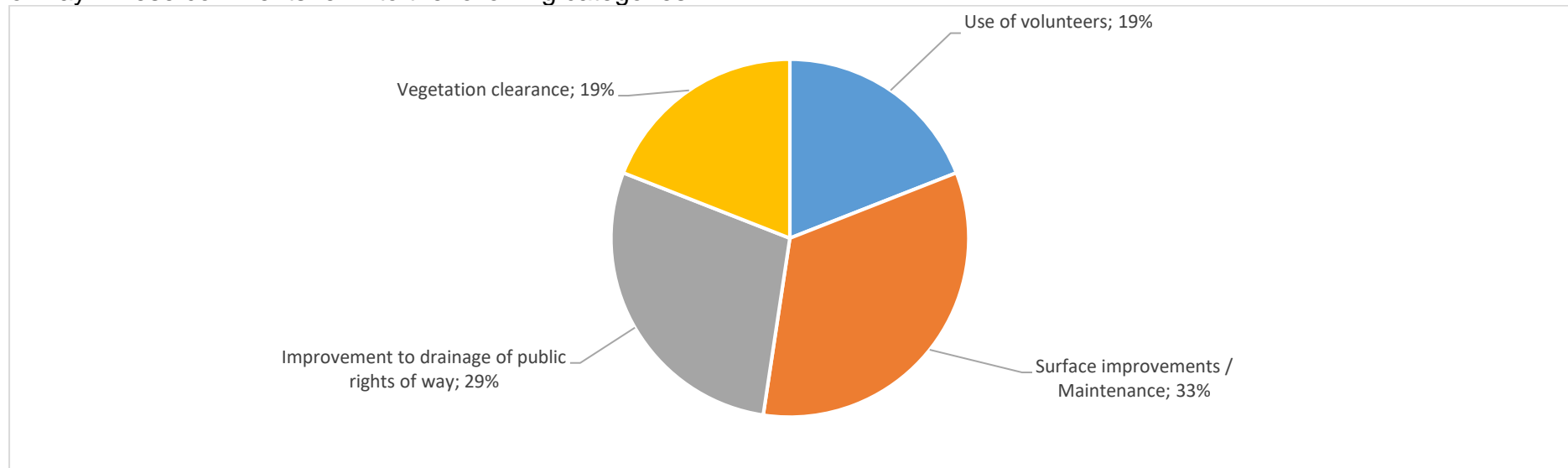
The plan states that the implementation of the plan will be reported on an annual basis via a Rights of Way Improvement Plan Progress Report, which will detail progress against all the targets and will also include the proposed new path suggestions. The statement of action tables included additional monitoring sections where there were specific additional measures included for a particular action, however it is noted that this approach has led to confusion, and gives the impression that the majority of the actions were not being monitored. In response to this the table has been simplified to remove this section. All actions will be monitored via the annual report process and where specific other monitoring activity will be conducted this has been clarified in the action description.

With regard to the issues in the plan it is considered that all the issues and needs that have been identified by the assessment of need and the subsequent public consultation have been addressed within the plan and the consultation report.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is intended to be a 10-year strategic plan, detailing what the needs are for the public over the next 10 years and detailing how these needs will be met. As a high-level strategic plan the actions included within it contain short, medium and long term goals, many of which require engagement with land owners and other stakeholders before details can be finalised. This level of detailed planning and implementation will be done following adoption of the plan and during the implementation of each of the actions but detailed budgeting and planning is not possible prior to this stage. The plan details the strategic aspirations for the network but as with all plans must be subject to the availability of funds and any financial constraints throughout its lifespan.

Key Theme 8: Surfacing / Maintenance of the network

Feedback received from the consultation highlighted 17 comments made with regard to surfacing and maintenance of public rights of way. These comments fell into the following categories:



48

Surface improvements / maintenance

Paths that deteriorate considerably during the wet seasons and winter months were highlighted as needing increased spending and surface improvements, with comments noting that the condition of the paths preclude users from using the network for cycling/ walking to work and/or school. Other comments received were that the paths need to be wide and smooth enough for use by wheelchair and pushchair users. Another comment received requested that reflective surfacing be used on paths going through natural areas.

Drainage

Representations were received regarding drainage improvements needed along the network, particularly with regard to byways, and also noting water damage caused to paths due to inadequate drainage.

Vegetation clearance

Comments were received requesting a firm strategy that bridleways and greenways need to be cut back to a height that enables clear access for horse riders, and noting that overgrown paths or those with significant debris mean that the

effective capacity of the path is reduced. Suggestions include maintaining a 1 metre space between the highway and any hedge/vegetation where possible. The comments also suggested that the Statement of Action 5 should be reviewed as the present management of vegetation overgrowth is not considered adequate in view of frequent complaints by users.

Use of volunteers

A number of groups who responded to the consultation have noted that they currently do, or are offering additional support to the Council to provide volunteer groups for undertake cutting back and surface improvement projects.

Response to representations

Statement of Action 5.1 of the plan details a number of actions to improve the surfaces of the network, including identifying and addressing problems with surfacing and drainage, improving and upgrading surfaces in response to changes in demand or where paths provide links to schools, amenities and public transport. It also contains actions to work in partnership with volunteer groups to improve paths. With regard to use of the paths for wheelchairs and with pushchairs, the plan contains actions under 4.1 and 4.2 to develop a network of paths for people with disabilities or mobility restrictions, including identifying improvements to the existing network, ensuring all new paths are fully accessible and improving surfacing on high-use paths. It is considered that these actions are sufficient to address the representations regarding surface improvements, maintenance and drainage.

With regard to the comments regarding reflective surfacing, this relates to options to use surface materials that store sunlight and glow to provide a form of passive lighting along a path. The use of such surfacing will need to be chosen to be sympathetic the use of the path and its setting; where reflective surfacing could potentially be an option this will need to be investigated further as there may be unintended side effects to its use, both in terms of the public use and sense of security, maintenance and effectiveness and its potential ecological impact in sensitive areas.

Statement of Action 5.2 contains actions to manage vegetation issues effectively and contains an action to review the service standards, policy and procedures for vegetation and debris clearance (SOA 5.2(c)). This action has been expanded in light of the comments above to ensure that the height clearance reflects the status and use of a public right of way.

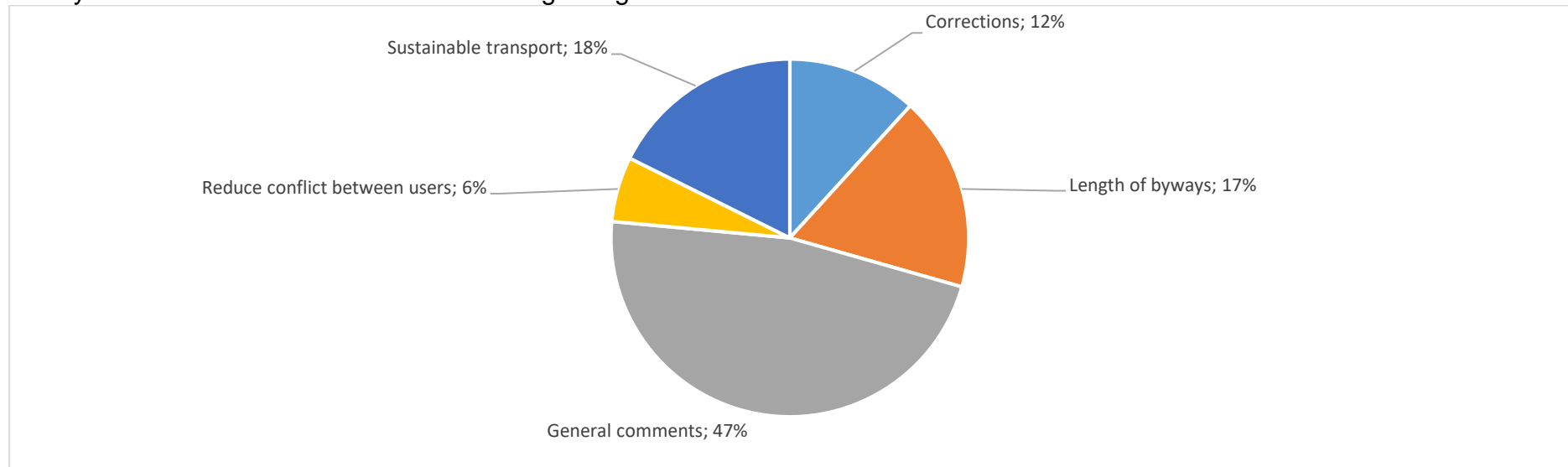
In terms of widths, the clearance of a public right of way should be to the full width of a path where possible and appropriate. The Council would not be able to clear vegetation to an extent wider than the width of the highway; this would interfere with privately owned land and would be beyond the Council's powers to keep the highway clear and open.

The plan contains actions to foster closer links with user groups and work in partnership to improve the network (SOA 5.7(b)), work with volunteer groups to improve paths (SOA 5.1(e)), undertake vegetation clearance (SOA 5.2(d)), and to work with vehicle user

groups to improve the surfacing and signage along byways (SOA 5.6(b) and (c)). Through these actions the Council will engage with and works in partnership with local users groups and volunteer groups to achieve improvements to the network.

Key Theme 9: General Comments

Feedback received from the consultation highlighted 17 comments made with regard to surfacing and maintenance of public rights of way. These comments fell into the following categories:



50

Reduce conflict between users

Comments received advised that there is a need to educate users of shared routes to avoid conflict between users, and that the key to maintaining good relationships between all users is that no users significantly impact any others. A particular suggestion for byways is to increase the number of passing places along narrow tracks. Other comments received noted that if it is necessary for the wider good to restrict the use of certain routes then the restriction should be nuanced to minimise the number of classes of user affected. Another comment stated that the plan does not allocate enough proportionality to the different needs of each group and that each one has different space/speed/time/access requirements.

Sustainable transport

Comments were received stating that the rights of way network can assist with a key part of improving sustainable travel if it is joined up with other suitable networks, and that the plan is not as clear on encouraging use for sustainable transport,

particularly to encourage commuting by cycle in the southern areas of the Borough. Other comments stated that that sustainable travel has not been considered at an early stage, with motor vehicles taking the priority in decision making.

Length of byways

A number of comments were received stating that there has been a 40% reduction in the number of byways since the 2010 plan to 22.52km, down from 38.5km.

Corrections

A number of comments were received with corrections made to the published draft plan with regard to the attribution of new path proposal suggestions and a number of grammatical errors.

Other general comments

Other comments received highlighted concerns that the proposed new route maps were difficult to read, and that many of the actions within the plan seems to be duplicated. A more consumable summary of the plan is suggested for future public engagement. Other representations stated that the plan was too broad and lacked any commitment to action, that the future needs seem to be assumed with no justification, and that the plan does not identify the impact on other users and change should not be at the expense of the existing users.

Response to representations

The suggestions regarding reducing conflicts along narrow byways is noted, and a new action has been included in the plan to provide additional passing places along narrow byways to reduce conflict between users (SOA 5.6(e)). As part of the statutory process for making Traffic Regulation Orders to restrict traffic along a lane all the different classes of use along a lane must be taken into account and the extent of the order must seek to minimise the extent of any disruption, affecting only the type of use that is causing an issue. As this is part of the statutory procedure it would not be necessary to include this as a separate action within the plan. The plan contains many separate actions to provide for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, motor cycle and motor vehicles but does not define what type of provision this may be as this would depend on a case by case basis based on the aims of a project and the type of works being undertaken. It is not considered necessary to define within the plan different space/speed/time/access requirements for each type of use as this will be considered during any detailed design stage of a project.

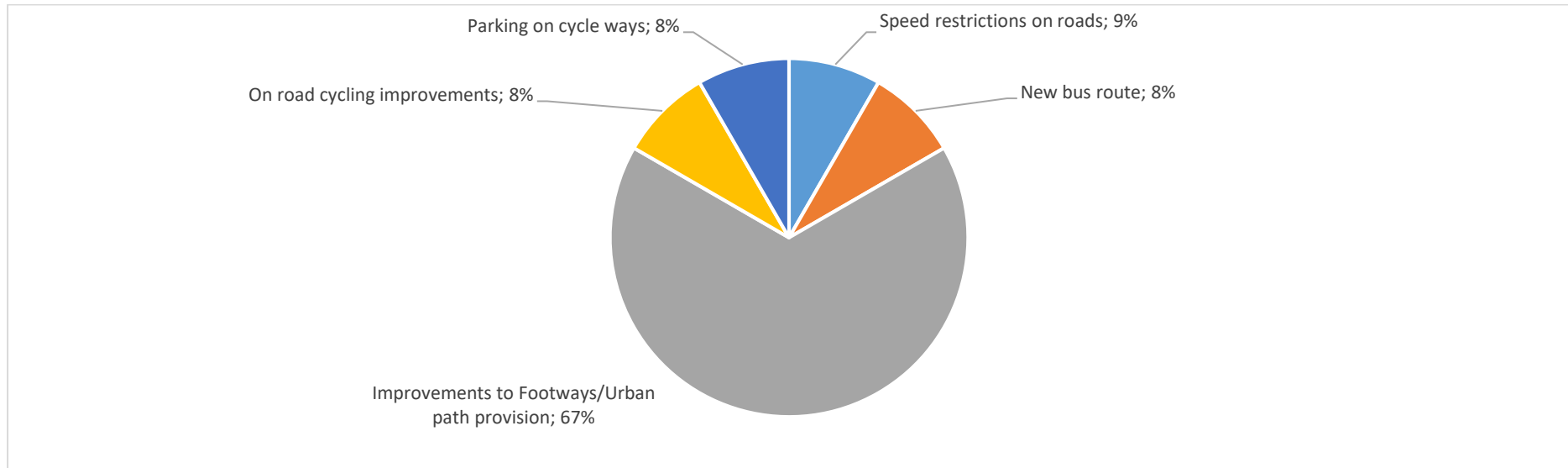
The plan contains a number of actions to encourage use of sustainable transport to work and school, including increased information and encouragement for the use of the network as a means of transport, creating new paths or upgrading paths near to schools, amenities and public transport, increased vegetation clearance and designation signage (SOA 3.1).

With regard to the comments regarding byways, unfortunately the information included in the consultation draft was incorrect. The true figure of the number of byways within the Borough is 39.6km. This error, and the corrections highlighted during the consultation has now been corrected.

With regard to the actions within the plan, the plan does have a broad outlook; this is part of its remit to consider all the uses of the network and the needs of the public over the next 10 years. The actions listed within the plan are detailed and will be monitored throughout the life of the plan via an annual report. In terms of the future needs the plan is informed by the assessment of need consultation conducted in March 2019, along with feedback from the public and stakeholders during the public consultation in July 2019. The comments regarding changes to the network are noted and the plan does seek to minimise any negative effect on particular users. It is not possible to categorically rule out any negative effects completely however in seeking improvements to the network the Council must balance the sometimes conflicting needs of the public.

Key Theme 10: Other / Out of Scope

There were a 12 other comments and representations received during the consultation that are considered to be out of the scope of the rights of way improvement plan. These comments fell into the following categories:



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