

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

23rd February 2011

The Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum is the statutory advisory body on all matters relating to Access to the Countryside

Response to consultation on the Local Transport Plan

Herewith a response to consultation on the Buckinghamshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) 3 on behalf of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum. Our remit is to advise on all aspects of access to the countryside in Buckinghamshire, and we confine our comments to this subject. The Rights of Way network is central to public access in the county, and whilst we welcome the references to walking and cycling in the consultation document, we must express our concern that there is no direct reference to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) anywhere in the consultation booklet. The RoWIP was integrated into the previous LTP, and we believe that it is essential that Rights Of Way remain an integral part of transport planning in the county.

The consultation booklet is usefully divided into five themes, and we believe that the Rights of Way network fits into the philosophy and helps to deliver the aims of each of them.

- 1 “A Thriving Economy”** – the economic case for investment in Rights of Way has been made several times and it is now widely accepted that Tourist and Visitor based businesses and those selling specialist equipment benefit greatly from the users of the Rights of Way network. This was pointed up in the last Foot and Mouth epidemic, when the closure of the network resulted in serious business losses. Buckinghamshire benefits greatly because of its highly developed and well maintained Rights of Way network, and this vital income stream can only be sustained and increased if the network itself is maintained and improved.
- 2 “Sustainable Development”** – The consultation document already refers to the need to increase the levels of walking and cycling, and we would stress that this is not solely an urban issue, but should involve the wider Rights of Way network. Whilst utility walking may be limited to, for example, taking a short cut to the station, cycling is viable over greater distances. The opportunity to use off-road routes on suitably improved surfaces could attract many more people to the cycling option for their utility journeys.
- 3 “Safe Communities”** – This section raises the issue of safety on the roads. Certainly walking, horseriding or cycling on Buckinghamshire country roads can be unnerving, and the safety of these users could be greatly improved if the many overgrown and rutted grass verges were made usable. We urge that a programme to achieve this be

implemented. Many Rights of Way involve crossing main roads which can be extremely dangerous, especially where there is no central refuge. We recommend that the most dangerous crossings be identified, and refuges installed wherever possible.

- 4 **“Health and well being”** – The health benefits of the network are well known to all forms of user and to the public. It provides useful exercise for the healthy and, in the case of walking, supplements medical treatment for many illnesses including heart, vascular and lung ailments. The consultation document already acknowledges this to some extent, but we wish to stress that implementing the policy should involve the wider network. More publicity is beginning to be given to the mental and emotional benefits of using the network for deeper access to the countryside, with a consequent improvement in the well being of users.
- 5 **“Cohesive and strong communities”** - The consultation document proposes to improve local walking routes for their value in making connections between communities, and we applaud this. However we urge that ‘local’ should not be limited to urban areas, but again should include the wider network.

Public Transport: There are many people who are not drivers and who wish to access the countryside by public transport. The rail system radiates from London, and cross county journeys rely entirely on bus services, which can be sketchy, particularly at weekends. If the acknowledgement on page 02 of the booklet that “good transport is essential” is to be honoured, cuts to these services should be avoided.

In summary, **we recommend that:**

- ❖ **The Rights of Way Improvement Plan should remain an integral part of the LTP, and a commitment to implementation be made.**
- ❖ **The LTP should acknowledge the value of the whole Rights of Way network in achieving its aims.**
- ❖ **A programme to improve verges on country roads should be implemented to enable off-carriageway use by walkers, cyclists and horseriders.**
- ❖ **Central refuges should be installed where Rights of Way cross single carriageway main roads.**
- ❖ **New well-surfaced off road routes for utility journeys on foot, or by cycle between centres of population be made a priority.**
- ❖ **That the LTP recognises the extra health benefits and the improvement in the well being of users that the wider Rights of Way network provides.**
- ❖ **That public transport services be protected.**

To conclude, we welcome the several references to the improvement of the walking and cycling environment, and the commitment to maintenance of Rights of Way, and the opportunity to comment provided by this consultation exercise.

John Elfes, Chairman,

Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum

143, White Hill, Chesham, BUCKS HP5 1AT.