

Buckinghamshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020 - 2030



Final
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Foreword



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Chapple OBE

Cabinet Member for
Planning and
Environment

Welcome to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Buckinghamshire. The plan sets out our priorities and how the council will improve public rights of way for residents and visitors over the next 10 years. The plan is based on detailed research and analysis. We asked Buckinghamshire residents and users of rights of way for their views before we drafted this plan, as well as many organisations.

Buckinghamshire has outstanding countryside and beautiful landscapes, which residents and visitors alike enjoy through using just over 2,000 miles of rights of way. Our research for this plan has shown us that Buckinghamshire's residents highly value their rights of way network. Rights of way and the wide range of activities that people can take part in helps to make Buckinghamshire a great place to live and work.

More people now access the countryside and natural spaces for leisure, health and exercise. Rights of way are the most important resource to support them in doing this. Rights of way are free and they stretch across the county, meaning everyone can use them. They are also a critical part of Buckinghamshire's visitor economy and help to encourage more people to walk or cycle for short journeys.

Buckinghamshire as a county is growing and changing – both in terms of population and in demand for accessing the countryside. The need for public rights of way is greater than ever to support a healthy population and a vibrant economy. However, the rights of way budget has, historically, not kept pace with this increase in demand. I am committed to continue with the capital programme of improvement and repair over the coming years.

The five councils of Buckinghamshire will disappear on the 31 March 2020, to be replaced by a new unitary council. This will bring improvements across the whole council and should not detrimentally affect the resources committed to the Rights of Way Service.

The new council has a strong commitment to work closer to all its communities. The active support of volunteers and partners is a great strength of the Rights of Way Service. We will work hard to maintain and support these valuable relationships and support communities in becoming involved in their rights of way.

Whilst this ROWIP is realistic about the challenges faced, it is also ambitious and optimistic. Delivery of the plan will contribute significantly to making Buckinghamshire a healthy, prosperous and enjoyable place in which to live.

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Introduction

About this Plan

This Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) replaces Buckinghamshire's first ROWIP. Since the first ROWIP was published in 2008 there have been significant changes in the county, nationally and in how the council delivers its services. The new ROWIP needs to respond to these changes.

Challenges lie ahead for Buckinghamshire as a county and as a local authority. There have been, and will continue to be, fewer resources to deliver the Rights of Way Service. The evidence that access to nature supports health and wellbeing, quality life and the economy, is clear. New priorities and ways of working need to be adopted to make sure the Rights of Way Service meets the needs of the public. This ROWIP sets out how this challenge will be met over the next ten years.

What is a ROWIP?

Every local highway authority is required by law to produce a ROWIP.¹ It is the council's strategic document setting out its goals and priorities for public rights of way and access. ROWIPs must be reviewed every ten years.

The law and government sets out that the ROWIP must go further than basic legal duties. It must fully consider the needs of the wider public and not just those who already use public rights of way. It must assess how public rights of way meet those needs, now and in the future. It must also assess how rights of way can support exercise and recreation and those who are blind or partially sighted or have mobility problems.



Hugh Mothersole

Chiltern bluebells

¹ Under s.60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

About this Plan

The ROWIP is in three parts. This report is the main ROWIP document and contains a summary of the main findings and the statement of action. The document is supported by an extensive evidence base, contained in two supporting documents.² A delivery plan will be produced which will contain shorter term actions. This will be updated when necessary.

This report is set out in six themes, each covering an aspect of rights of way:

Theme 1: Mapping the Network
 Theme 2: Looking after the Network
 Theme 3: An Evolving Network
 Theme 4: Knowing Where to Go
 Theme 5: Access for Everyone
 Theme 6: Effective Delivery



Hugh Mothersole

Sunken lane – Pulpit Hill

The views of many people were sought to produce this ROWIP. This was carried out through:

- **Online public survey** – this was carried out in early 2019, receiving 1,489 responses. This gave a high degree of statistical significance to the results and provided good understanding of the views of users.
- **Parish and town council survey** – all were invited to complete a survey early in 2019. Just over half responded.
- **Landowner survey** – the Country Land and Business Association circulated a landowner survey to its members.
- **Engagement with stakeholders** – over 50 stakeholder organisations were asked to comment. These included neighbouring highway authorities, district authorities within Buckinghamshire, user and interest groups and community organisations. Meetings or telephone calls were held with many of these. This included groups who represent people with physical or mobility impairments. The ROWIP was discussed at each of the three meetings of the Local Access Forum between March 2018 and July 2019. An additional special meeting which only discussed the ROWIP was held on 21st May 2019.
- **Understanding the network and needs** – an assessment was carried out to fully understand the present and future needs of the public.
- **Literature review** – strategy and policy documents were reviewed, along with a wide range of research.

² Supporting Document 1 - Public, Parish and Town Council and Landowner Surveys and Stakeholder Responses and Supporting Document 2 - Network and Public Needs Analysis.

Policy

National Policy - 25 Year Environment Plan 2018

The 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) sets out the government's intention to help the natural world regain and retain good health. Chapter 3, 'Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing', sets out to connect people with the natural environment and increase access. Public rights of way support many of the aims:

- Helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces;
- Improving mental health services and promoting health and wellbeing through the natural environment;
- Encouraging children to be close to nature, in and out of school;
- Greening towns and cities - through creating more accessible green infrastructure, especially where this is lacking.

Local Strategy and Policy

The ROWIP links to and supports the delivery of several strategies, see Figure 1. It also shares the objectives of these strategies to address the needs of Buckinghamshire, see Table 1, next page.

Figure 1

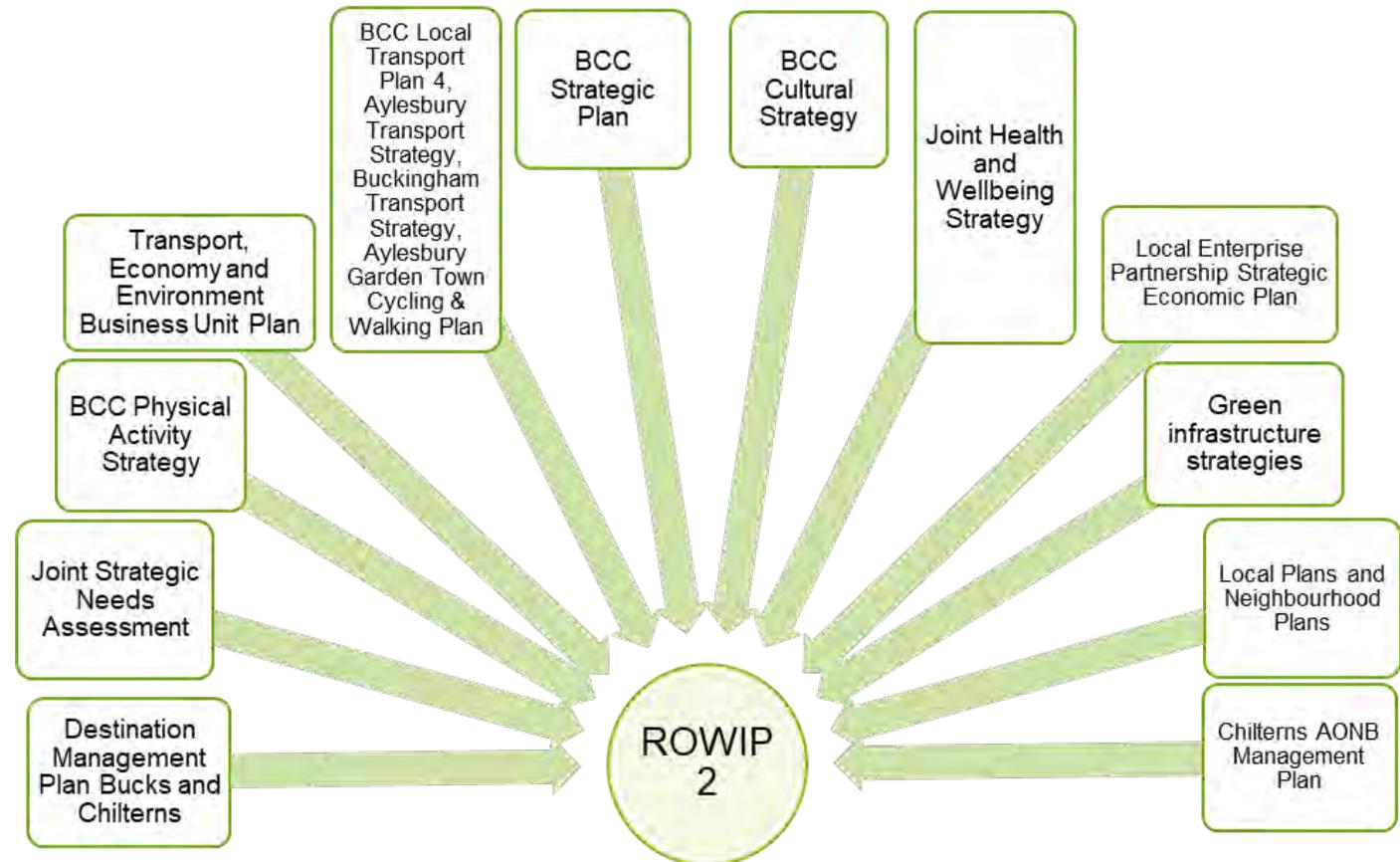


Table 1: Shared Objectives – ROWIP and Local Strategies

	Adapting to a growing and changing population and delivering their needs	Tackling health inequalities, improving health and increasing levels of physical activity	Delivering effective and efficient public services, delivering best value and maximising income	Supporting sustainable economic growth which doesn't damage Buckinghamshire's unique natural environment	Managing the impact of new development and major infrastructure	Strengthened, new and innovative partnerships for delivery, empowering local communities
BCC Strategic Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LTP 4 and transport strategies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and JSNA	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
BCC Physical Activity Strategy	✓	✓	✓			✓
BCC Cultural Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local and Neighbourhood Plans	✓			✓	✓	
Chilterns AONB Management Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bucks and Chilterns Destination Management Plan			✓	✓		✓
Green infrastructure plans and policies	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

The Public Rights of Way and Access Network

A public right of way (PROW) is a path that anyone can legally use and enjoy on foot and sometimes using other means of travel. In law, a public right of way is part of, and connects with, the wider highway network. Although they are mainly in the countryside, there are public rights of way in towns and villages too. There are four types of public right of way:

- Public footpaths – can only be used by walkers;
- Public bridleways – can be used by walkers, horse riders and cyclists;
- Restricted byways – can be used by walkers, horse riders, horse drawn carriage drivers and cyclists;
- Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) – can be used by everyone, including motor vehicle drivers.

There are 2084 miles (3353 km) of public rights of way in Buckinghamshire, see Table 2, next page. Most of these (81%) are public footpaths. Around 18% are bridleways and 1% are restricted byways and BOATs. All the public rights of way together are called ‘the public rights of way network’. There are also some paths which are allowed by landowners but are not public rights of way. These are known as permissive paths.

The public rights of way network is an outstanding resource for everyone to access the natural environment. There are thousands of miles of paths which are free for everyone to use and which are always open.

Buckinghamshire's Public Rights of Way Network

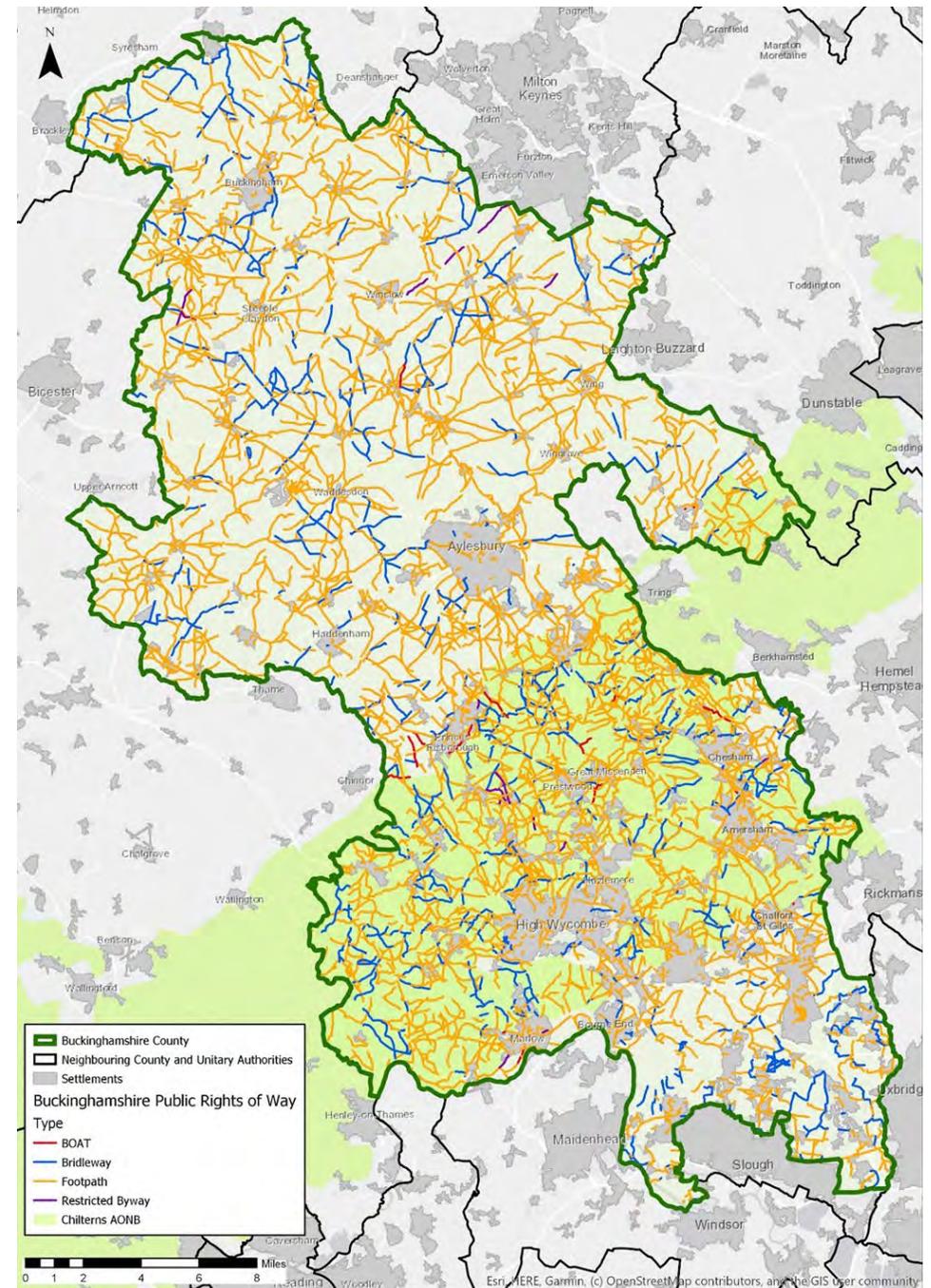


Table 2: Buckinghamshire's Public Rights of Way Network

	Km	Miles	%	% - National Network
Length all PROW (km)	3353	2084	100%	
Footpath	2719	1690	81%	78%
Bridleway	600	373	18%	17%
Restricted Byway	17	11	1%	2%
BOAT	17	11	1%	3%
All higher status	634	394	19%	22%

Assessing the Public Rights of Way Network

The public rights of way network was looked at closely to understand how well it meets the needs of the public. This was done by splitting the county into three areas. This showed that:

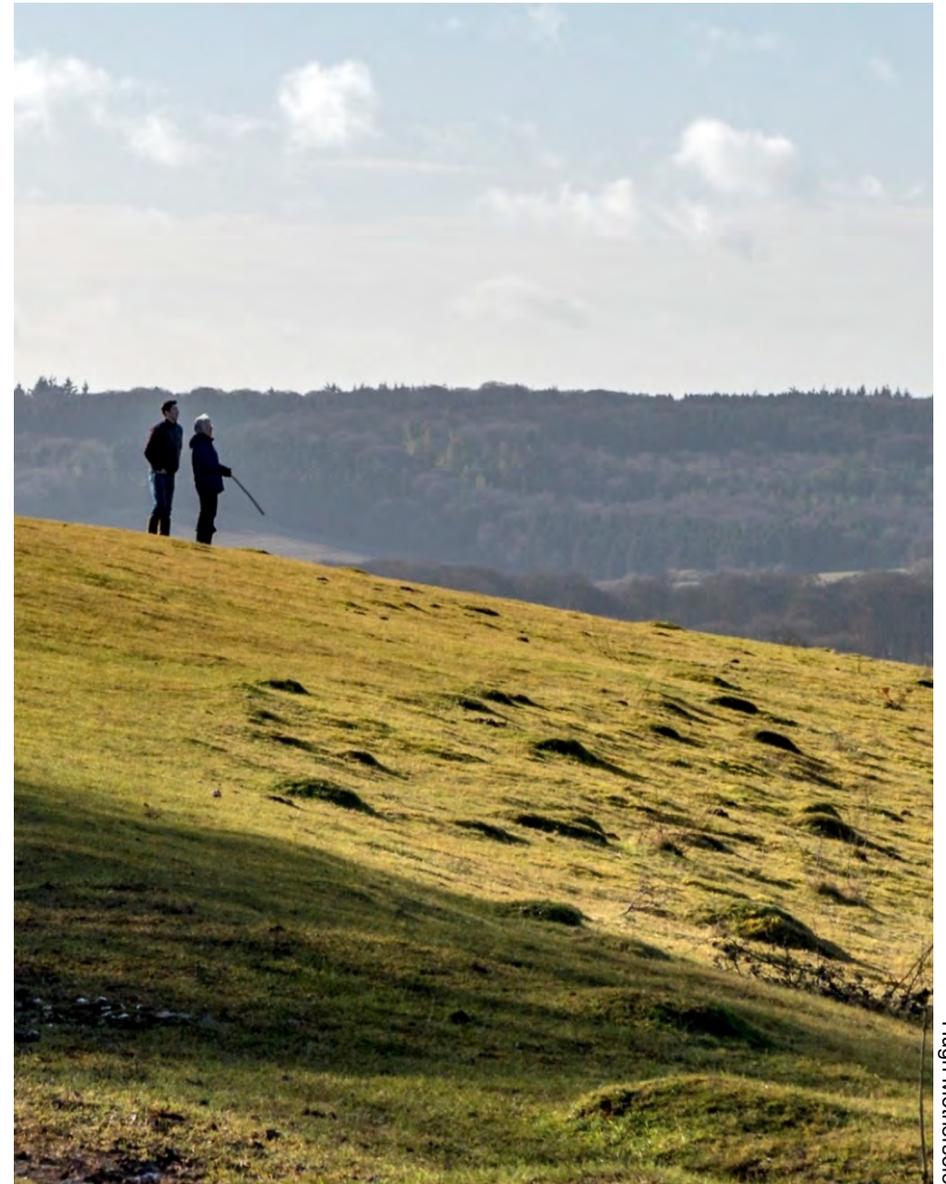
- The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) has the highest density of rights of way. Each person living in the AONB has the longest length of PROW per person;³
- People living in south Buckinghamshire (south of the AONB) have the shortest length of PROW per person. This is because there are more people living in a smaller area;⁴
- In north Buckinghamshire each person has a slightly greater length of path than the average for the county;⁵
- There is a slightly higher percentage of bridleways, restricted byways and BOATs in the AONB and south of the AONB.⁶ In northern Buckinghamshire there is a slightly lower percentage of these types of paths.

³ 36% of the PROW network but only 27% of the area; 16.5 m of PROW vs. 6.3 m per person for Buckinghamshire county.

⁴ 1.7 m per person.

⁵ 8.5 m per person.

⁶ At 21% of the network vs. 19% for the county, 17% for northern Buckinghamshire.



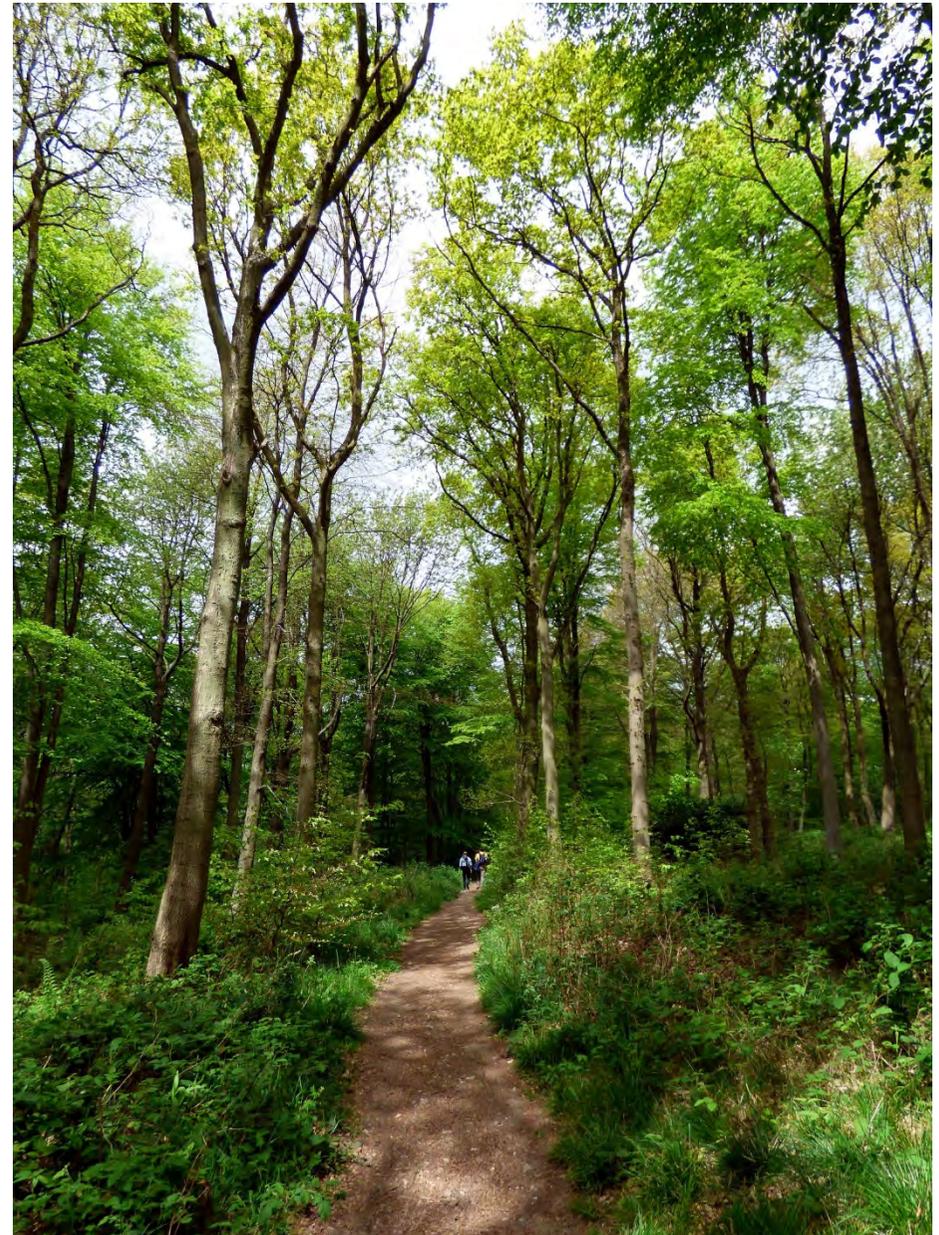
National Trust open access land at Coombe Hill, Ellesborough

Horse riders, cyclists, carriage drivers and motorised vehicle drivers can only use some types of public rights of way. There are some areas where these types of routes don't join up well. This means that these users have to use or cross roads. These roads can sometimes be busy. The paths for these users is better connected in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and less connected in north and south Buckinghamshire. In south Buckinghamshire the major road network also creates barriers for these users. Connections from north to south throughout the county are also poor.

There are other places where people can access nature, such as country parks and woodlands. There are more of these types of places in the Chilterns AONB. In this area there are many woodlands, National Trust and Forestry Commission land which people can visit as well as CROW Act access land.⁷ These places in the AONB are also important for people living close to, but outside, the AONB. There is less accessible woodland in north Buckinghamshire and there are no country parks. Aylesbury lacks larger accessible greenspace. In south Buckinghamshire there is a fair supply of woodland and accessible natural places, including Buckinghamshire's three country parks. However, these sites must provide access for a large, and growing, population.

There are also several cycle routes across the county, including sections of Sustrans' National and Regional Cycle networks. There are also other cycle routes in urban and rural areas. Although some parts of cycle routes may be public rights of way, most of these routes are not.

⁷ Land to which the public have access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) as 'open country' (heath and down) or registered common land.



Wendover Woods

Meeting Buckinghamshire's Needs

Public rights of way are important in helping to meet the needs of people living in Buckinghamshire. They support better health and wellbeing through providing places for people to exercise. They are free for everyone to use and there are paths across the whole county. This means that everyone can use them, no matter where they live, their level of income or whether they have access to transport.

Rights of way also support tourism, helping people to enjoy Buckinghamshire's outstanding countryside and landscape. Businesses and people are attracted to Buckinghamshire due to opportunities for outdoor adventure and recreation. Rights of way are part of what makes Buckinghamshire a great place to live and work.

Choosing to walk or cycle for everyday journeys⁸ helps to reduce harmful effects such as air pollution from traffic, as well as improving health. Public rights of way in urban areas link with roadside pavements and cycle routes.⁹ There are many rights of way which lead from towns to the countryside, providing ways for people to leave the town and explore the countryside.

The research carried out for this plan revealed several needs Buckinghamshire and the ROWIP need to tackle.

Needs of Residents and Visitors

Walking is the most popular outdoor recreation activity in the country. People walk for many reasons - to get to work or school, to exercise and to enjoy the countryside. Health and exercise is the most common reason and this has increased over time.¹⁰ Walking is also important for the visitor economy. 'Good walking country' is the second highest reason for visiting the Chilterns.¹¹ Many people enjoy walking in Buckinghamshire's countryside with their dogs and are the largest and most frequent class of user.



Hugh Mothersole

Aston Rowant

⁸ Known as 'active travel'.

⁹ Which are not usually public rights of way.

¹⁰ Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (2018).

¹¹ After scenery and landscape. Tourism South East (2008), Chilterns AONB Visitor Survey 2007.

A wide range of people use horses to explore the countryside. Horse riding and horse carriage driving make a valuable contribution to rural life and the rural and visitor economy. However, the length of paths which can be used by horse riders is low when compared with walkers and is extremely low for carriage drivers. These paths are often not well connected or end at busy roads. This means that horse riders and carriage drivers must use roads, which are becoming busier with traffic. Motorised vehicles have even fewer paths and can only use 11 miles of paths (on 'BOATs').

Cyclists have a range of interests, including family cycling, mountain biking and road cycling. Each of these types of cyclists have different needs. Mountain bikers may want exciting off-road paths, for example. The leisure and family cycling market also supports the visitor economy. These cyclists prefer traffic-free routes with good surfaces and promotion. Bridleways, restricted byways and BOATs can be used by cyclists and these routes complement other types of cycle routes.

Research by the government¹² shows that 18% of people with a disability never visit the natural environment. This compares with 8% of the non-disabled population. Most of the reasons given for not visiting the countryside are because of their condition. People with physical or visual impairments will often have additional needs. They need better information on where to go and what they will come across on the route, for example stiles and steps. Steps, stiles, bridges and other structures on the path need to be in good condition.

There is a higher ethnic minority population in some parts of Buckinghamshire and surrounding areas across the county border.¹³ People in these communities tend to visit the countryside less than other groups of people.

Responding to Needs – Residents and Visitors

Support more people in walking – Walking has been described as “*the nearest activity to perfect exercise*”, being the easiest, lowest cost and enjoyable way for most people to increase their physical activity and to enjoy the outdoors.

Address the issues of equestrians – including more routes, better connected routes, tackling fly tipping, overgrown routes, busy and dangerous roads, better crossing points or paths on verges and better gates and surfacing.

Improved information for all users – In the public survey all types of users asked for more information. People with physical and visual impairments want enough information for them to choose routes. Information tailored to ethnic minority communities may also encourage use. Working with partners will be needed.

More ‘higher status’ routes – more bridleways, byways and restricted byways and better-connected routes will help horse riders, cyclists, carriage drivers and motorised vehicle drivers (byways only). New routes coming from housing development should allow as many types of users as possible.

Improved accessibility – Paths should be as easy to use as possible for people with physical and visual impairments and the ageing population. Stiles, steps and uneven ground, for example, can be difficult for these people. A ‘least restrictive access’ approach means continuing to replace stiles with gaps or gates and making sure the paths are easy to use for as many people as possible. More can be learned about the needs of people with additional needs from working with partners.

¹² Natural England’s Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment.

¹³ Aylesbury and High Wycombe and some areas of Chesham and Amersham, as well as in immediately adjacent areas of Slough, Milton Keynes and the London Borough of Hillingdon.

Housing Growth

High levels of development are planned across Buckinghamshire. The main areas are around Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Princes Risborough, Haddenham and Buckingham. Local plans set out a total of around 52,800 new homes in the county by 2030. Over 30,000 of these will be in Aylesbury Vale. Growth pressures are also being felt immediately outside the county in Slough and around the north Buckinghamshire boundary with Milton Keynes and Northamptonshire. This rise in population will have a range of effects including more traffic and more people wanting to access the countryside. In the public survey, making sure development didn't harm the rights of way network and brought benefits was the highest priority.

Major Infrastructure

Several major infrastructure projects are being developed which affect Buckinghamshire. These include High Speed 2, a third runway as part of the Heathrow Airport expansion, Western Rail Link to Heathrow, Crossrail, East West Rail and associated infrastructure accompanying the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Arc including East West Rail and the proposed Expressway.

Responding to Needs – Major Infrastructure

Mitigation – these projects will cut across many public rights of way. While there will be changes, it is important that the effects are minimised and that access is still available for people who live nearby. Disruption during construction must also be minimised.

Improve existing network – improvements to the existing network are needed and should be sought for all major infrastructure projects. In southern Buckinghamshire, where some major projects are planned, there is already high demand and the network is poorly connected in places.

Responding to Needs – Housing Growth

Protect and improve existing paths – existing paths need to be protected, with no net loss of access because of development. Improvements will be needed. Disruption during construction also needs to be minimised. Some parts of the network, especially in southern Buckinghamshire, are already under pressure. This is because of poorly connected paths, major infrastructure projects and a lower length of public rights of way per person. Around Aylesbury there are few large greenspace sites. This means that public rights of way are an even more important way for people to access nature.

Linking towns to countryside – public rights of way which link urban areas to the countryside and their quality are important. This is true for paths leading from new housing development as well as from existing towns and villages.

Promoted routes – better quality paths and information are needed. Some information tailored to new residents would support new communities to explore.

Links to the Chilterns – the Chilterns are an important green lung for larger towns nearby which will be growing, including Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Princes Risborough. Partners want these towns to be better connected to the Chilterns.

Supporting active travel – routes which can be used by many types of users should be provided through new development, with improved surfaces to reflect their urban setting, but which is appropriate for a wide range of users.

Working with partners – this will be needed to deliver larger projects and make sure the needs and impacts arising from new development are fully understood and addressed.

Economy and Growth

Economically, Buckinghamshire is a strong county with low unemployment. The South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (covering Aylesbury Vale), Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Bucks Business First (growth hub) recognise the value of the county's attractive natural environment, heritage and culture, and that these are part of what makes Buckinghamshire attractive for businesses. The opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding and other outdoor interests create an excellent quality of life and support the visitor economy.

Walking is the most important single reason for visiting the Chilterns AONB
Chilterns AONB Visitor Survey 2007

A well-maintained rights of way network is an important part of the tourism sector. Long-distance paths such as The Ridgeway and the Thames Path National Trails are attractions in themselves. The 'packaging' of rights of way into promoted routes and itineraries also raises the profile of Buckinghamshire to visitors from outside the county, particularly London.



Hugh Mothersole

The Ridgeway National Trail towards Ivinghoe Beacon

Responding to Needs – Economy and Growth

Support growth in the visitor economy – There are several ways to help the visitor economy to grow. These include encouraging people to take longer visits and developing new routes or new promoted routes. New markets can be developed, especially higher spending markets, the London market and adventure sports sectors. Promotion needs to support a strong brand for Buckinghamshire and the Chilterns. Promoted routes need to be of a high standard so that Buckinghamshire has a high-quality reputation.

Good visitor management – work with partners to help ensure visitor pressure on sensitive and popular sites is well-managed.

Improve information – make information easy to find and attractive to use, for both visitors and residents. Make sure promotion supports rural businesses.

Increase active travel – increase walking and cycling to help ease congestion and reduce negative effects from vehicles such as noise and air pollution.

Support National Trails – there is potential to attract more non-local visitors to the National Trails, working with the two National Trail Partnerships.

Work with partners – to ensure the contribution of public rights of way to quality of life and economic growth is recognised and to support visitor economy ambitions.

Health and Wellbeing

On average, people living in Buckinghamshire are as healthy, or healthier, than most people living in England. However, there are also smaller areas where people are in poorer health or where there is deprivation.¹⁴ Areas with poorer health include parts of Aylesbury, High Wycombe, some parts of south Buckinghamshire and Chesham and Amersham.

Physical inactivity represents 10% of total societal costs when compared against other public health concerns including smoking, obesity and drug and alcohol misuse. The use of green space is a determining factor in reducing levels of physical inactivity.

UK Active (2014) Turning the Tide of Inactivity

Being physically active can lead to better health and wellbeing. Access to greenspace and public rights of way can increase how active people are in both urban and rural areas. Being more active can improve at least 20 different chronic health conditions. These include coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, type 2 diabetes and mental health problems. Although over 60% of adults in Buckinghamshire take the recommended amount of physical exercise there are large numbers who don't do enough to benefit their health. Around 20% of people are inactive. Levels of activity are lowest among the over 65s.

The benefits of green exercise happen almost immediately. Only 5 minute of exposure improves self-esteem and mood, irrespective of gender, age and health status.

All-Party Parliamentary Commission on Physical Activity (2014)

Responding to Needs – Health and Wellbeing

Help more people become more active - promote routes and make routes more accessible to help those with physical impairments. Work with partners on health improvement schemes such as Simply Walk (Buckinghamshire's health walking scheme).

Improvements in areas of poorer health - support walking and cycling to schools particularly in areas with high levels of childhood obesity. Help to increase walking and cycling for short journeys. Encourage active recreation. Provide information to increase active travel and recreation.

Help to address health inequalities - improve access to the natural environment particularly in areas where there is less greenspace and where health is poorer. Use rights of way as additional ways to access nature. Support walking and cycling to reduce air pollution from traffic.

Help to create better places which support health and wellbeing – help make the places where people live green, attractive and with lots of places to be active outdoors. Make sure plans, strategies and new developments recognise the crucial role of public rights of way. Work with planning officers to make sure walking and cycling are a priority in new development.

¹⁴ 'Deprivation' is a measure used by the government. It means that there is a 'lack of' things people need in an area when compared with the rest of the country, meaning their needs may not be met, for example related to health or income.

Demographic Changes

The population of Buckinghamshire has changed since the first ROWIP and will continue to change in the future. The population is expected to grow by 7.5% between 2016 and 2026, reaching around 573,000 people. This growth is above both the national and regional rate. Most of this growth, 68%, will be in Aylesbury Vale. The number of older people will rise the most, whilst the number of working age people will fall. The rise in older people will also have an impact on health needs.

The trend towards a more diverse population is predicted to continue. The number of people of ethnicity other than white rose by 82% between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. There is a clear rural-urban divide, with Aylesbury and High Wycombe, some parts of the Colne Valley and neighbouring areas in Slough, Milton Keynes and Hillingdon with a higher population of ethnic minority people. In contrast, the rural areas have a higher white population than the South East average.

Responding to Needs – Demographic Changes

Improved accessibility – an older population is likely to have more health and mobility needs. Paths should be made as easy to use as possible. Programmes such as Simply Walk will be important to help people access the countryside for health.

Better information – a diverse population has differing needs and interests. It will be important to recognise this in promotional material and in new projects. The planned growth will also bring new residents to the county who will want to explore their new surroundings.



Anthea Osborn-Jones representing 'A Foot in the Chilterns Nordic Walkers', celebrates a stipe being replaced through the Chiltern Society's Donate-a-Gate Scheme.

Theme 1: Mapping the Network

The Definitive Map and Statement is the legal record of public rights of way. The map shows all types of recorded public rights of way. The statement gives further details of the routes, which might include widths or limitations to the rights of the public. The map and statement must be available for the public to view.

The council has many duties around how public rights of way are recorded. Many areas of law set out how this must be carried out. The map and statement must be continuously reviewed so that they are up-to-date. Routes can be created, diverted or extinguished in the interests of landowners or to allow development to take place. There are also powers to create rights of way, cycle tracks and multi-user routes.¹⁵

To make sure that the map and statement are as up-to-date as possible the council produces a 'consolidated' version of both on a regular basis. This is a new map and statement which includes all the changes that have been made since the last updated map and statement. The last update was in 2007.

Making Changes

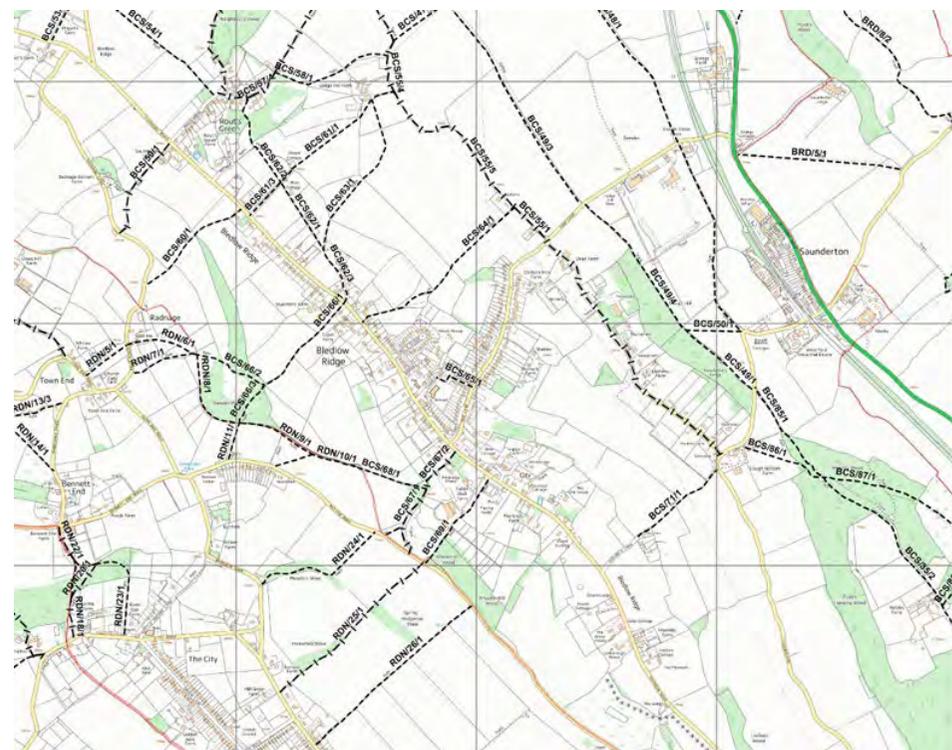
Changes can be made to the map and statement. Although the map shows all legally recorded routes, there are sometimes public rights which are not recorded on the map. Sometimes routes which are already on the map have additional rights which are not recorded. Members of the public can bring these anomalies to the attention of the council. The evidence is then looked at, following procedures set out in law.¹⁶ If this shows that rights exist, a Definitive Map Modification Order

¹⁵ Multi-user routes can be used by a range of people. This could include walkers, cyclists, equestrians and those with mobility impairments.

¹⁶ Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

(DMMO) can be made. A DMMO might add new rights of way, record additional rights (e.g. turning a footpath into a bridleway), remove rights, delete a right of way or change some of the details of the route.

Any unrecorded historical rights that existed before 1949 but which were not recorded on the definitive map at that time (or subsequently) will be extinguished on 1st January 2026.¹⁷ Through Buckinghamshire's Local Access Forum a 'Lost Ways' project trained volunteers to carry out the extensive research needed to discover and claim these routes.



Copy of Definitive Map – not a legal record

Under the council Licence 100021529 (2011)

¹⁷ Under the CROW Act 2000 s.53.

Public Path Orders (PPOs) are also used to make changes to public rights of way. These can divert, extinguish or create rights of way. Landowners or the public can ask for a change to a public right of way. The council assesses these applications to make sure that the convenience to the public is not reduced. If the council thinks the change would not inconvenience the public, it consults with organisations and the public to decide whether to go ahead. The process of carrying out these changes can be lengthy and there is a charge for this service. For paths which are created or diverted, the council will expect British Standard BS5709: 2018¹⁸ to be applied at boundaries. The council will also expect new routes to have a minimum width of 2m for footpaths and 4m for bridleways. A further 1m should be added for paths with fences on both sides or where hedge growth is likely to restrict users. These standards will ensure paths are as convenient and accessible as possible for all users.

The Deregulation Act 2015 will affect the delivery of services in these areas. Future changes, when the law has been enacted, will include more streamlined procedures for unrecorded rights and simplified procedures for the DMMO process.

Common Land, Town and Village Greens and Open Access Land

Common Land and Town and Village Greens also provide places for people to visit the countryside. The council is the Registration Authority for Common Land and Town and Village Greens. There are 1,175 hectares of Common Land and 173 hectares of Town and Village Greens. Every year the council responds to around 1,500 searches related to these areas.

New Town and Village Greens can be registered 'as of right' due to being used for 20 years by inhabitants of the area. The Growth and

Infrastructure Act 2013 made several major changes to the law on registering new Town and Village Greens.

The rights of way network is complimented by open access land designated as part of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. However, these areas are limited to a small number of chalk downland in the Chilterns, a single parcel of heathland at Black Park Country Park and some open access land dedicated by the National Trust and Forestry Commission, mainly in or fringing the Chilterns.

Permissive Paths

The council has a strong preference that any new access is formally dedicated or created as part of the definitive public rights of way network. If this is not possible the council may enter into permissive path agreements. Some permissive paths are recorded on the digital interactive map of routes for information.



Naphill Common

¹⁸ Or updates to BS5709: 2018.

Theme 1 Actions: Mapping the Network

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
MN1	To uphold our duties to provide an up-to-date Definitive Map and Statement.	MN1.1	Consolidate the Definitive Map and Statement by 2025.
		MN1.2	Reduce the number of map anomalies.
		MN1.3	Improve our online, publicly viewable, registers for DMMOs, PPOs and Landowner Deposits.
		MN1.4	Consider all applications for Public Path Orders, Definitive Map Modification Orders and Cycle Track Orders and determine these in line with any statutory timescales.
MN2	Keep an up-to-date register for Common Land and Town and Village Greens.	MN2.1	Consider all applications for Common Land and Village Green registrations in line with any statutory timescales.

Theme 2: Looking after the Network

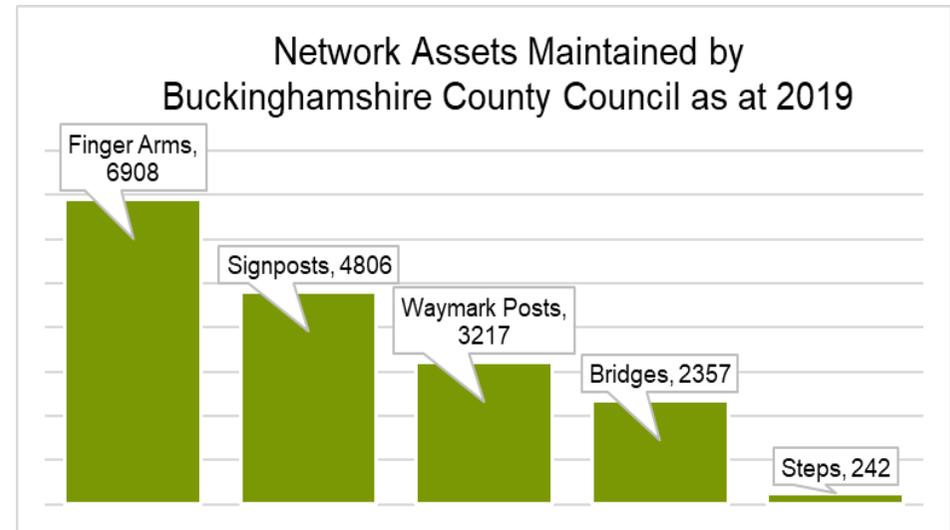
Buckinghamshire's public rights of way network are highly used and in high demand. Most resources are therefore used to maintain the network to as high a standard as possible and to ensure public safety. Resources for maintenance have reduced since the first ROWIP and volunteers and parish councils now have a greater role in maintaining the network.

Maintenance of the Network

Some maintenance is the responsibility of the council and some is the responsibility of landowners. A summary is shown below, but this is not exhaustive. Problems on public rights of way can be reported on the Bedfordshire Council website.

Council responsibilities	Landowner responsibilities
Keep the surface fit for public use.	Reinstating and clearing paths crossing arable land.
Clearing surface vegetation.	Cutting back trees or hedges overhanging the path.
Make sure obstructions are removed.	Keeping the route clear of obstructions.
Maintain steps and some bridges.	Not ploughing or cropping field edge paths.
Contribute to landowner costs for replacing gates and stiles for controlling livestock.	Installing and maintaining gates and stiles for controlling livestock.
Signs where a public right of way leaves the road and waymarking along the route where needed.	Provide bridges if the need arises from the action of a landowner, e.g. widening a ditch.

Figure 1



Overgrown Vegetation

Overgrown vegetation is the highest concern of the public and parish and town councils. Overgrown paths reduce the pleasure of using public rights of way and may stop some users, especially people who are less mobile or have visual impairments.

Keeping paths clear is a challenge faced every growing season. This is carried out through delivering an annual clearance schedule for paths.

Many parish and town councils have some responsibility for clearing vegetation under devolved arrangements.¹⁹ This can lead to confusion for the customer and a variation in standards. To ensure the council delivers the best service the clearance schedule will be kept up to date and information published on devolved arrangements.

Stiles and Gates

Stiles are allowed where they are needed to control livestock. However, they often create difficulties for less mobile people or, if poorly constructed, the able bodied. The public survey showed that removing stiles is a high priority for a wide range of people, not just those with a disability.

Since the first ROWIP, 1,864 stiles have been removed. This has made the rights of way network much easier to use for many people. The scheme has been supported by private funding through the Chiltern Society's 'Donate-a-Gate' Project. There is a similar scheme run by the Ramblers' Association in north Buckinghamshire (see Theme 5). The council will negotiate with landowners to remove stiles where they are no longer needed. Where possible, the council will provide landowners with gates to replace stiles and support them to improve the standard of those which remain. Structures installed to control livestock through Public Path Orders will need to meet British Standard BS5709: 2018. Removal of stiles and other structures around the urban fringe will also be prioritised.

Gates can also create difficulties and hazards for both horse and rider, such as those in poor repair or not meeting recommended standards. Where funding allows, the council will make sure any existing equestrian gates conform to BS5709: 2018.



National Land Access Centre Demonstration Aston Rowant

¹⁹ Where parish and town councils take on some of the responsibilities of the council. Future working arrangements with parish councils and communities may be reviewed as part of the change to a unitary authority.

Ploughing and Cropping

Many public rights of way cross arable land. Paths crossing fields should not be ploughed but, if this cannot be avoided, the landowner must make sure the path is levelled and clearly marked within two weeks. The right of way must also be kept clear through the crop. Rights of way following the edge of a field (headland) must not be ploughed under any circumstances.

The council will work in co-operation with landowners to make sure they are aware of their responsibilities. However, enforcement action might be needed in some cases if duties are not carried out.

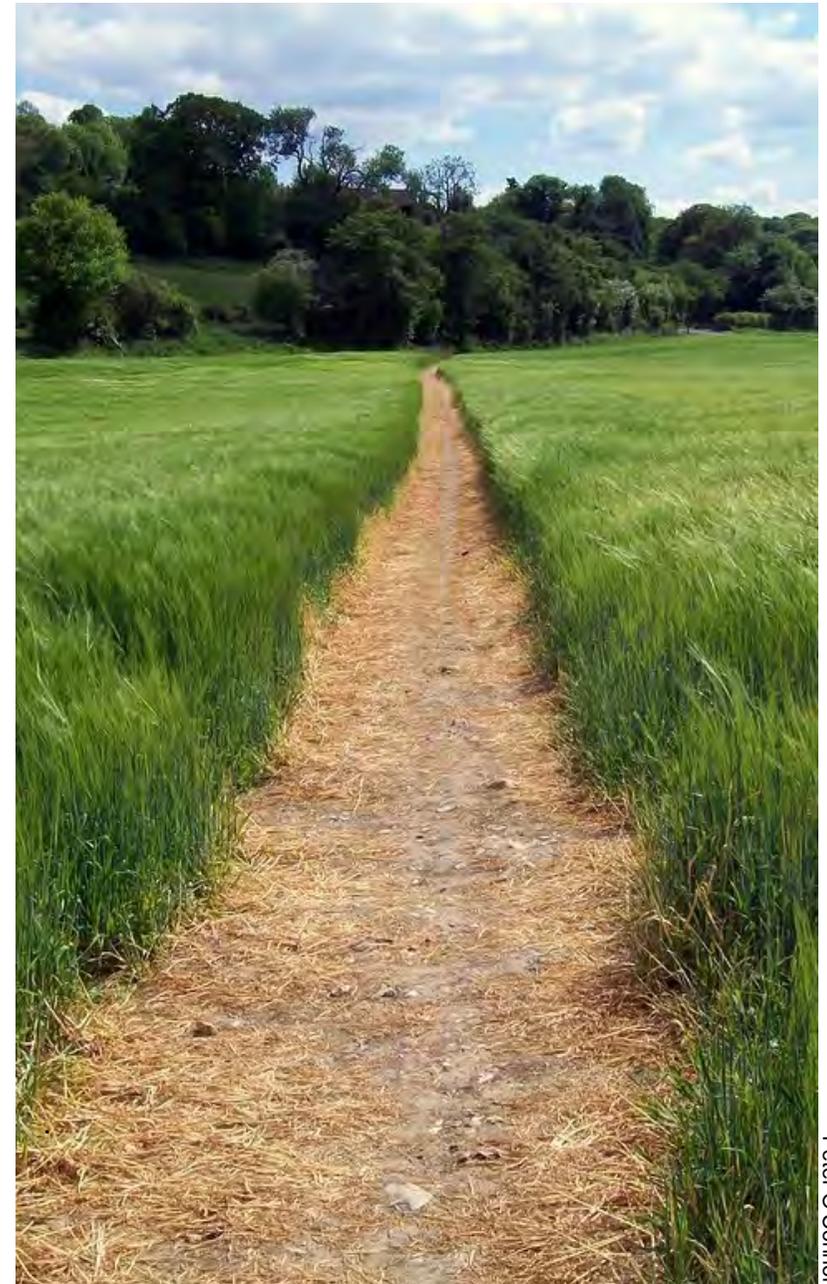
Path Widths

The council receives many approaches from landowners and farmers wishing to separate the public from agricultural stock or horses, or simply to avoid walkers straying off the path. This often creates a less pleasant experience for users. They may feel hemmed-in and not be able to skirt around muddy or wet surfaces. Paths may often become overgrown due to hedges alongside the paths. To lessen these negative impacts, and where no width is recorded in the definitive statement, the council will insist on a clear 2m width along footpaths and 4m along bridleways. This will increase by a further 1m where hedge growth is likely to restrict users even further.

Barbed wire alongside a right of way can be a hazard to users. The council would strongly prefer it was not used but, if it is essential, it must not be placed so that it can injure people or animals using the path. It must never be fixed to fence posts on the path side of the fence; it must always be on the field side.

Path Surfaces

Most paths are unsurfaced and, usually, this is suitable for users. Surfacing is more often needed for routes used for walking or cycling to work or school, where 2m wide bitumen is most appropriate for walking and 3m for shared walking, cycling and horse riding. Surfacing is largely beneficial provided the material used is not detrimental to other users. Horse riders prefer more forgiving surfaces than hard bitumen (which can be slippery for horses). Flexi Pave or bound rubber-crumb surfaces will be considered if new routes are to be used by horses, or the provision of grass verges.



Clearly marked path across arable land

Bridges

There are 2,357 bridges on the rights of way network. All bridges are inspected for safety on a rolling programme and any defects scheduled for repair. Wherever possible, when replacing old bridges, widths on footpath bridges will be increased to a minimum 1.2m for footbridges and ramps installed to replace steps to improve inclusive access.

Use by Vehicles

Motorised vehicles can use BOATs but may not use other types of public rights of way. To do so is an offence. In the interests of safety, some rights of way may need to be managed through Traffic Regulation Orders to prohibit use for a set period of time. The council will continue to work with organisations representing motorised vehicle users to limit conflicts between users and help keep routes in good condition.

Enforcement

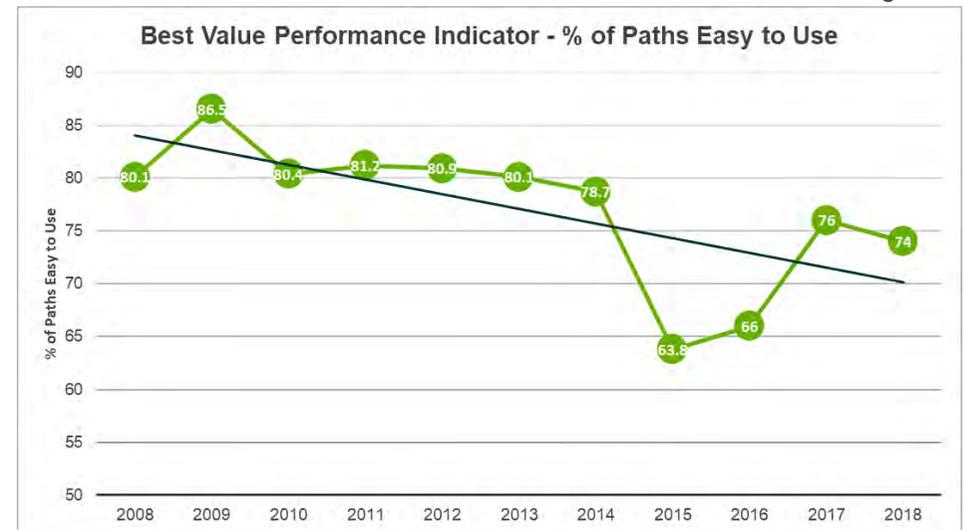
Negotiation is the preferred option to resolve issues. However, sometimes enforcement is needed to protect the rights of the public. Enforcement action will be prioritised using the management matrix (see page 22) which will be applied consistently using the council's adopted enforcement policy. A 'Scheme of Delegation' provides Rights of Way Officers with the authority to take direct enforcement action through enforcement Notices. The police will be alerted to illegal activities where necessary or asked to attend site to protect officers when carrying out enforcement action. Where appropriate the council will work with waste enforcement and planning enforcement teams.

Network Condition and Asset Management

An annual survey of a 5% of the network will be carried out²⁰ to assess whether the network is in good condition and is 'easy to use'. These paths will be chosen at random. The percentage of the network which is 'easy to use' has fallen since the first ROWIP and is on a downward trend, see Figure 3, right. This is partly due to reduced resources to carry out works on the network such as vegetation clearance and bridge and surface repairs.

There are many structures on public rights of way, including bridges and steps. The value of these have not been accurately calculated but is estimated to be upwards of £12 million. This does not include high value bridges and surfaces. The council will seek to improve its knowledge about assets on the rights of way network and their condition. The aim will be to work towards an asset management system to understand what is needed to keep the network in good condition.

Figure 3



²⁰ Split between two surveys of 2.5%. 2.5% of the network was surveyed in 2017 and 2018 due to resource limitations. This reduced sample size will need to be continued for future surveys.

Working with Landowners

Landowners and managers are vital partners in the maintenance of public rights of way. There is a farming representative on the Local Access Forum and a place will always be available. To help landowners with their duties the Rights of Way Service provides free advice on their rights and responsibilities. Waymarking signs are provided. Where possible materials are also provided for the removal of structures on paths. The Rights of Way Service will regularly update landowners on seasonal requirements, for example hedge cutting, ploughing and cropping and responsibilities around highway ditches.

Our Environmental Responsibilities

The environmental impact of maintenance activities will be minimised. Major vegetation clearance during the bird nesting season will be avoided. Before carrying out major work, checks will be made for the presence of protected or vulnerable species, for example, at protected Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Checks will also be made with council teams to protect buried archaeology, for example, at Scheduled Monument sites.

Sustainable materials with a longer lifespan will be sourced where possible. Contractors working on the council's behalf will also be expected to minimise environmental impacts.

When carrying out bridge work, checks will be made with the Flood Team to ensure compliance with the Land Drainage Act 1991 and to support the council's overarching aim to improve the county's flood resilience.

Some of Buckinghamshire's sites receive high numbers of visitors. The Rights of Way Service will work with partners to help address and manage issues which may result from high levels of use at sensitive sites.



Route through Buckinghamshire farmland

Management Matrix

A problem management matrix was developed for the first ROWIP to prioritise reported rights of way issues. This provides the public with an estimate of the time in which the issue they have reported will be resolved. It also helps the council to monitor performance.

The matrix ranks problems by severity, using four categories, see Figure 1. Problems which pose a danger are graded the highest. It also ranks path types by their importance, using three categories, see Figure 2. Combining these produces a matrix that sets target times for addressing problems. The matrix which has been used since the first ROWIP is shown in Figures 4 and 5. Performance against the matrix is monitored and, on average, around 70% - 75% of issues are resolved within the target time.

The matrix has proved to be useful for both the Rights of Way Service and members of the public and a matrix approach will continue to be used. However, the review of Buckinghamshire’s priority needs and the resources available have made it clear that the matrix needs to be updated. This will make sure that the Rights of Way Service continues to address those issues which are the highest priority first and that enough resources are allocated to meet the highest priorities.

Figure 4

Categories of Severity	A – High Severity – Problem is an immediate or potential danger or nuisance to the public requiring priority action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hung up tree or branch • Potentially dangerous structure • Fallen tree completely blocking path or partially blocking bridleway • Dangerous animal • Aggressive landowner / intimidation • Shooting near to or across the path
	B – Medium Severity - Ploughing/cropping and maintenance items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Path obstructed due to undergrowth or overgrowth • Missing signpost / replacement signpost / waymarking at roadside • Routine structure repair / replacement • Disturbance of surface of a path • Path obstructed due to growing crop
	C – Medium Severity – Other maintenance and enforcement items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete obstruction of path • New or recent erection of fence across path • New or recent encroachment • New or recent unauthorised structure on path • Electric fence / barbed wire adjacent to path uninsulated / not signed
	D – Low Severity – Issues that have a minor impact on access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Path being used by public not on definitive line • Horses on footpaths not causing damage • Cycling on footpaths not causing damage • Surface out of repair (non-specific danger) • Requests for dog access • Fallen tree on path where public are deviating around • Path diversions, except where formal applications submitted

Figure 5

Problem Severity	Path Status		
	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
A – High	Within 5 working days	Within 10 working days	Within 15 working days
B – Medium Priority enforcement	Within 3 months	Within 4 months	Within 6 months
C – Medium Other enforcement	Within 3 months	Within 5 months	Within 6 months
D – Low	Within 3 months	Within 6 months	Within 12 months

Categories of Path	Category 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails • 37 County Council promoted routes • Canal towpaths • Paths known to have high-volume usage
	Category 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Walks routes and promoted parish routes • Routes within 0.5km of a settlement boundary • Other routes within the Chilterns AONB
	Category 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The remainder of the network

The changes to the matrix to be explored include:

- Reducing the number of promoted routes in category 1 to the most popular routes. This will mean that maintenance and enforcement response times for this category are more realistic. It will also ensure these routes are kept in good condition (see also Theme 4);
- Expanding the catchment area from 0.5km to 1km for paths close to the urban boundary. These paths are important to many users;
- Simply Walk (Buckinghamshire's health walking scheme), has been far more successful than was envisaged when the matrix was created. The walks now use many paths, of which there is no record. Maintenance of paths to support Simply Walk will remain a priority, but how this is achieved will be reviewed.

The review of the matrix will be transparent and will involve the Local Access Forum. The revised matrix will be made available on the council's website.



Sharon Bayne

Simply Walk – Holmer Green

Theme 2 Actions: Looking after the Network

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
LN1	To protect the network and maintain it in the best condition possible, prioritising safety and areas of greatest need and seeking improvements where possible.	LN1.1	Review the management matrix so that it aligns more closely with Buckinghamshire's priorities, helps target resources more effectively and provides the public with realistic timescales to resolve issues.
		LN1.2	Adhere to and monitor performance against the timescales set out in the management matrix, reviewing outstanding issues on an annual basis. Periodically publish performance figures to the Local Access Forum.
		LN1.3	Publish the council Enforcement Policy, take enforcement action against illegal actions, work with enforcement partners and recover costs.
		LN1.4	Ensure effective and efficient working through delegating powers to officers to deliver functions, including serving enforcement notices.
		LN1.5	Support landowners through providing advice and information, waymarking materials and assistance for materials for removing structures.
		LN1.6	Work with National Trail Partnerships to ensure high quality maintenance.
		LN1.7	Ensure high standards of environmental protection in carrying out maintenance work.
LN2	To improve understanding of the network, its assets and its condition.	LN2.1	Carry out an annual survey of the condition of 5% the public rights of way network.
		LN2.2	Improve understanding of the condition and value of the assets on the network, update the record of assets in the CAMS database and work towards implementing an asset management system to forward plan budget requirements.
		LN2.3	Work with partners and volunteers to survey the condition of promoted routes.

Theme 3: An Evolving Network

Although the public rights of way network is made up of legally defined routes it can, and does, continually evolve and adapt. The process of doing this may present challenges, but it is important that the council strives to develop a network which meets both current and future needs.

These needs include an increasing population, more older people with potentially greater health needs and a more diverse population. It means ensuring that the changes which result from housing growth bring benefits and that both new and existing residents can access the countryside around them. It means ensuring developers of new housing see rights of way as assets rather than restrictions.

Planning Strategically

The public rights of way network is an important part of green infrastructure (see right for definition). The need for green infrastructure is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2019. Planning access as a part of green infrastructure should take place both at a strategic and at a local, development site, scale. The Rights of Way Service will work with planning officers and the council's Environment Team to ensure that public rights of way and access are properly and fully considered in local plans and green infrastructure strategies. It is also important that local communities developing neighbourhood plans consider access provision.

The council plan strategic improvements to access to meet the needs of communities. Projects to support urban-countryside links, active travel, health and wellbeing, the visitor economy and the specific needs of users will be prioritised. It is also important to work alongside the council's strategic transport teams and external partners to realise aspirations for new routes and to secure funding. These include the Colne Valley Regional Park, Chiltern Society, Sustrans and the Chilterns Conservation Board amongst others.



Peter O'Connor

Grand Union Canal – rights of way are wildlife corridors as well as access routes and part of green infrastructure

What is Green Infrastructure?

Green infrastructure is a planned network of green spaces. All local planning authorities must set out their approach to creating a strategic network. This should be designed and managed to deliver a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities, including biodiversity, recreation and health and wellbeing. Green infrastructure includes, amongst other types of greenspace, parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands and allotments as well as rights of way, commons and open access land. Rights of way have a particularly valuable role as green corridors, both for people and nature.

Responding to Housing Growth

The high levels of planned housing growth will lead to changes which affect public rights of way. Major development areas will create a new urban-countryside edge.

Development also provides the chance to improve access, both within the development and beyond the development boundary. Access improvements should be carefully planned at the design stage. The council will expect access which is high quality and is suitable for a wide range of users to be set out in development applications. Proposals should also address the needs identified in this ROWIP. This is important to support health and wellbeing and active travel and to create a high quality of life for residents. The council has developed a planning policy note setting out standards for public rights of way and access in new development.

There will be direct impacts on some public rights of way which are within the development area. The council will expect developers to minimise disruption to access during construction through limiting closures and providing alternative routes where possible.

The links from residential areas into the countryside are a priority. These are heavily used paths which provide people with their day-to-day opportunity to access the countryside. When assessing development applications, the council will evaluate how well access proposals link to the existing public rights of way network, accessible green space and other routes such as footways and cycleways. The council will work with the planning officers and seek developer contributions for on- and off-site access improvements.



Rights of way can be utilised for everyday travel and recreation, as well as forming attractive features in new developments, such as this route at Buckingham Park, Aylesbury.

Connecting the Network

In some places better connections are needed between paths. Sometimes new routes are needed or it would be beneficial to upgrade a route, for example a footpath to a bridleway. The council will seek new routes in areas of high demand and where these will help to address the needs set out in this ROWIP. These routes may also help deliver the aims of other strategies, such as the Local Transport Plan, local plans and green infrastructure strategies. Priorities for new connections include urban-countryside paths, multi-user routes,²¹ routes to support the visitor economy and health and wellbeing and routes to work, school or local services.

There are also some dead-end routes or paths which end at busy roads. Some paths end at the county boundary or change status, for example a bridleway becomes a footpath. There are also long-standing anomalies in the mapping of some routes. Bridleways, restricted byways and BOATs are already less well-connected than the footpath network and therefore the priority will be to improve the connections of these paths. Requests from parish councils, community groups or the public will be assessed and taken forward as appropriate through our processes for making changes to the rights of way network (see Theme 1).

In many cases additional funding will be needed for new routes. The council will secure funding through working with partners and seeking contributions from developers.

The council has a strong preference that new access is formally dedicated to form part of the definitive public rights of way network. However, in some situations 'permissive' routes provide valuable access. Such routes might be preferred by landowners, rather than creating permanent public rights. In some situations, these agreements may be sought.

The council has powers to make changes to the network where these can be shown to be a priority for the community. Routes will be agreed through negotiation, although the council may use compulsory creation powers where there is a demand and other options are not successful.

²¹ Multi-user routes can be used by a range of people. The council will seek routes which can be used by the widest range of people as possible. This could include walkers, cyclists, equestrians (horse riders and carriage drivers) and those with mobility impairments. The range of users which a route can provide access for will depend on each individual scheme.

Theme 3 Actions: An Evolving Network

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
EN1	To ensure that access improvements are strategically planned to meet Buckinghamshire's needs.	EN1.1	Work with partners to ensure that local and neighbourhood plans and green infrastructure strategies include a comprehensive assessment of access needs and contain robust policies to improve access for all users, ensuring that development has no detrimental impact and that access provision is improved.
		EN1.2	Progress strategic projects with partners where these address Buckinghamshire's needs.
EN2	To ensure that housing growth brings access improvements to communities.	EN2.1	Work with partners to ensure that high-quality, multi-user access improvements are sought and included in new development proposals.
		EN2.2	Develop and adopt access standards and specifications for routes in and arising from new developments through pre-application comments, requesting amended drawings, planning conditions and developer contributions through s.106. Officers will work alongside highways colleagues to secure on and off site works through s.38 and s278 Highways Act 1980.
EN3	To ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs and that connectivity is improved.	EN3.1	Develop projects with partners to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve links from urban areas to the countryside; • Provide new and improved routes from urban areas to the countryside; • Connect missing links in the public rights of way network, reduce fragmentation and address areas where there is low provision and high need; • Create the highest status routes possible to provide resources for the widest range of users.
		EN3.2	Seek to resolve 'dead-end' and cross-boundary issues as opportunities arise.
		EN3.3	Improve and increase the network available to equestrians, carriage-drivers and motorised vehicle users, addressing fragmentation and improving safety.
		EN3.4	Support projects to increase walking and cycling for short journeys to reduce congestion, support health and wellbeing, reduce air pollution and support economic growth.
EN4	To ensure that negative impacts from major infrastructure are fully mitigated.	EN4.1	Work with partners and delivery agencies to ensure the effects of major infrastructure are fully mitigated, disruption to access is minimised and improvements secured.

Theme 4: Knowing Where to Go

Information on where to go is one of the most important ways to increase use of public rights of way. Good quality and well-targeted promotion can encourage those who rarely or never use rights of way, can support the visitor economy and help everyone find more places to explore.

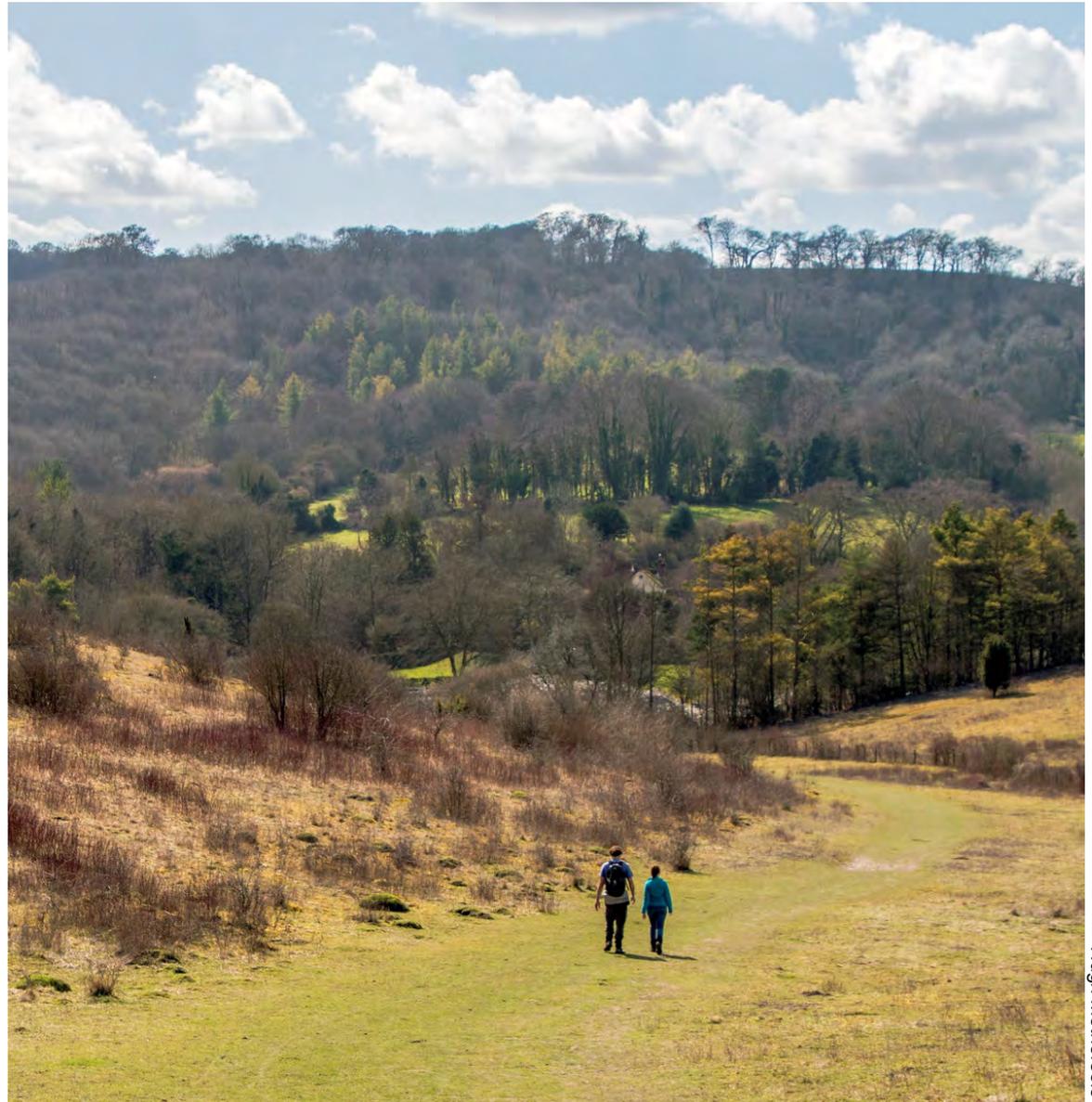
The Resource of Promoted Routes

National Trails

Two national trails cross Buckinghamshire – The Ridgeway National Trail and the Thames Path National Trail. The council works with the National Trail Partnerships to make sure the routes are well-maintained and help to deliver projects. National trails are listed as the highest priority in the rights of way maintenance matrix due to their importance as strategic routes both for local people and visitors.

The Ridgeway National Trail Partnership has aspirations to connect the trail to nearby settlements using rights of way. Plans include an off-road route to Aylesbury, as well as improving access for cyclists and horse riders through a 'Ridgeway Riding Route' from Goring to Ivinghoe Beacon. There are also plans to improve links between the trail and other promoted routes and visitor sites.

Both the Thames Path and Ridgeway have a great deal of use by local communities, long distance walkers, tourists and participants in organised fundraising events. The trails support the urban and rural economy of Buckinghamshire and businesses along their length.



The Ridgeway National Trail at Grangelands

Promoted Routes

There are many longer distance regional or local routes which pass through Buckinghamshire: The Chiltern Way, the Cross Bucks Way, the Swans Way, and the Icknield Way, North Bucks Way, South Bucks Way, Seven Shire's Way and the Phoenix Trail.

The council has produced 37 promoted routes which are downloadable from the council's website via an interactive map. There are both linear routes and circular routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Information on routes is also available from other places, including the Chiltern Society, the Chilterns Conservation Board, National Trust and Visit Buckinghamshire.



Icknield Way

Hugh Mothersole

Promotion and Marketing Priorities

Promoted routes and providing information on where to go are important to support health and wellbeing, the visitor economy and people with mobility or other disabilities. Good information provision can attract new users and help urban residents to explore the countryside near to them. Promoted routes, and particularly National Trails, provide a good quality introduction to exploring the countryside.

The public survey showed that users wanted more information about where to go. Nearly half of those surveyed thought more information would help to encourage more use of public rights of way. All types of users wanted more information to support their activities.

The survey also revealed that awareness and use of the existing promoted routes on the council's website was low. Less than half of those surveyed were aware of them. The longer linear routes were most well-known and used. The top five most-used routes in the public survey were The Ridgeway National Trail, The Chiltern Way, the Grand Union Canal, the Icknield Way and Aylesbury's Circular routes.

The resources to improve, update or provide additional promotional material are limited. Efforts must therefore be directed to where actions will make the greatest impact and directly meet identified needs. There are also other organisations and outlets for promotion. Working with partners to seek funding and co-ordinate promotion will maximise impact.

The 37 routes the council promotes are the highest priority in the maintenance matrix. It is important these are well-maintained. It may be necessary to explore reducing the number of promoted routes in category 1 to ensure resources are targeted most effectively.

Promotion can help to address Buckinghamshire's needs in the following ways.

Visitor economy – good quality information is essential to support the visitor economy. Packaging routes with other attractions encourages people to stay longer and promotes greater spend. Information must be easy to find. The Chilterns Conservation Board and Visit Buckinghamshire are working to expand the visitor economy. The landscape and recreation are essential parts of the branding of the county as a place to escape, unwind and explore, see right.

People with disabilities – These users need enough information to decide if they can access a particular route. Information must be in accessible formats. Good information is the very first step in encouraging people. If this is not available, they may not visit at all. The new online mapping system provides some information on the location of structures, such as steps and stiles, but this can be improved.

Linking town with country – The rights of way around towns and villages are the most convenient for people to access the countryside close to home. Routes which link urban areas to the countryside will help people to explore without the need to travel. These can be used regularly for exercise without incurring a cost. Information on where to go locally is important both for existing and new residents. The circular routes around Aylesbury are some of the most popular in the county, demonstrating demand for such routes.

Existing users – walkers, equestrians, cyclists and motor vehicle users all wanted more information on where they can go.

Ethnic minority population – people in these communities are likely to be less aware of opportunities and less responsive to information.

Extract from Buckinghamshire's 'Shared Story' A Brand for Buckinghamshire

"Here there is space and freedom ...to breathe the fresh air, to stretch the mind and the body, to see the world differently. Visitors escaping to the county choose to do a lot - or next to nothing – in this lovely setting.

Miles of easy paths and ancient trackways criss-cross the Chilterns and Buckinghamshire. People explore on foot, by cycle, on horseback or on a wheelchair walk, discovering chalk streams, hearing the call of the red kite. They potter in a boat on the Thames, saunter along the canals and find a tranquil green spot for a picnic. They climb the high ropes or mountain bike in Wendover Woods and see the cherry blossom and bluebells."

All promotion needs to be easy to find. An easily accessible web page, giving information on routes, distances, suitability and downloadable resources is needed. The public highlighted that this is an area which needs improving.

Information is also important to support responsible use of the countryside. Access rights come with responsibilities and promotional material will actively encourage responsible use of the countryside. The Countryside Code will be included on the council's website.

Theme 4 Actions: Knowing Where to Go

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
KG1	Support the objectives of the National Trails Partnerships	KG1.2	Continue to support the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails partnership boards and working groups. Provide pro-rata financial support alongside other neighbouring authorities towards the Trails' core funding and promotion. Work in partnership with the Trails teams to meet national guidance objectives on Trail standards.
KG2	To provide promotional material that is easy to access.	KG2.1	Identify those existing promoted routes which meet the priorities identified and update the promotional material.
		KG2.2	Improve how the public can access promotional material – improve the online platform for downloadable information and work with partners to improve the reach and co-ordination of promotion.
KG3	To provide new promotional resources which support the identified needs for the county.	KG3.1	Work with partners and representative organisations to understand more fully the needs of those with mobility and visual impairments and develop promotional material which gives enough information for these users to explore public rights of way, including different formats such as audio resources.
		KG3.2	Develop new promotional material close to urban areas which links the town with the countryside, including areas of housing growth, working with partners and seeking funding as necessary.
		KG3.3	Provide information and promotional material to support equestrians, cyclists and motor vehicle users.
		KG3.4	Work with partners and representative organisations to understand more fully the needs of minority ethnic communities and develop promotional material to support greater use of the countryside.
KG4	To support the visitor economy through promotion.	KG4.1	Work with partners and support measures which limit or mitigate negative impacts from visitors on sensitive sites.
		KG4.2	Work with partners to fully capitalise on Buckinghamshire's public rights of way asset to support the visitor economy – targeting new markets, attracting spend to rural business, increasing lengths of stay and strengthening Buckinghamshire's brand.

Theme 5: Access for Everyone

The public rights of way network is the most extensive resource available to people to access the natural environment. Everyone should be able to be able to use and benefit from public rights of way irrespective of ability.

It is important to provide information tailored to particular users and our actions around this are covered in Theme 4. Theme 5 covers other actions to ensure that everyone can benefit from public rights of way.

People with Mobility or Visual Impairments

There is great diversity amongst people with a disability, taking different forms and having an impact on people's lives in many ways. The term covers a wide range of conditions. These include mobility difficulties, blind or partial sightedness, learning difficulties and mental health problems. Some disabilities are permanent; some only affect people intermittently or temporarily. While some people have lived with their disability from birth, most people develop impairments in the course of their life or simply as they get older.



Gavin Caspersz (left), the Local Access Forum member for the Disabled Ramblers, with Arthur Knight at the top of Ivinghoe Beacon.

The 2011 Census recorded that 67,928 Buckinghamshire residents had a long term limiting illness; around 13.4% of the population. As age is a key factor in the prevalence of disability, the number of people with a limiting illness will increase as the proportion of older people in Buckinghamshire's population increases.

There are a range of factors which deter or prevent disabled people from exploring the countryside and rights of way:

- Physical barriers, such as steps, steep gradients, stiles and gates;
- Lack of accessible information;
- Lack of accessible toilets;
- Lack of confidence, low expectations, not feeling welcome, fear over safety or of getting lost;
- Lack of convenient and accessible public transport;
- Lack of seating and opportunities to rest or take shelter;
- Cost of transport, parking fees and refreshments;
- Poorly maintained environment.²²

Improving the physical condition of paths is important to enable greater use. It is clearly not possible to ensure all routes and paths, even at the most visited sites, are fully accessible to all people. However, adopting the principle of 'least restrictive access' is important. For example, accessible pedestrian gates and kissing gates should be installed instead of stiles or narrow kissing gates. The least restrictive option, as outlined in BS 5709:2018, ideally recommends a gap. Surfacing is also important. Attention also needs to be given to other structures such as ramps, widths of bridges, gradients and steps. Poor quality structures and overgrown paths also create hazards. Maintenance must therefore also be a high priority.

In the public survey and engagement carried out for this ROWIP, users with a disability were clear that they wanted more routes that were accessible to them, stiles replaced with gates or kissing gates and more information on where to go.

Since the first ROWIP accessibility has been greatly improved through removing stiles (see box below). The Chiltern Society's 'Donate a Gate' scheme has been responsible for significant improvements in the accessibility of the public rights of way network. A total of 569 gates have been donated over 12 years, equating to over £100,000 worth of investment. Similarly, the community group 'rRipple' in north Buckinghamshire has also organised the replacement of over 190 stiles with gates since early 2016, with private donations totalling £13,500. Funding donated by local people and community groups between July 2016 and Sept 2019 totalled £13,500. The free labour these volunteers provide is also of great value to the public and the council.

Stiles replaced with gates from 2008 to 2018

1,864 stiles removed

27% of stiles that were on the network in 2008 have been removed

Stile to gap – 266

Stile to gate – 624

Stile to kissing gate - 974

²² Countryside Agency (2005), By all Reasonable Means – Inclusive Access to the Outdoors for Disabled People.

The council will continue to negotiate with landowners to remove stiles where they are no longer needed and will explore options to seek the removal of stiles where livestock is no longer present. The council will also prioritise removal of structures both across the county and particularly around the urban fringe. Structures installed for livestock control through Public Path Orders will need to comply with British Standard BS5709: 2018. The council will also seek to improve the accessibility of existing structures, for example, ramped approach to bridges, replacing steps, or increasing widths. Sometimes the use of an entire path can be hindered through problem affecting only a short length.

Under-represented Users

Research shows that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, those living in deprived communities and older people visit the countryside less than the general population.²³

The proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in the population of Buckinghamshire has been increasing.

Barriers to minority ethnic people visiting the countryside can include lack of appropriate information, lack of awareness, lack of confidence, negative perceptions of countryside, financial costs and lack of time.²⁴ The council will seek ways to raise awareness and increase use of public rights of way by people in these groups through working with partners.

²³ E.g. Natural England's Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE).

²⁴ Nina Morris (2003), *Black and Minority Ethnic Groups and Public Open Space Literature Review*, OPENspace; See also Phil Ware (2015), 'Black People don't drink tea...' *The experience of Rural Black and Minority Ethnic Community Groups in England*, Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 130. Defra (2005), "What About Us?" Diversity Review evidence.



Members of North Bucks rRIPPLE stand satisfied behind one of three gates installed in Westcott on 20th March 2019. L-R Derek Holland, Jose Fontoura, Andrew Hearsey, Keith Wheeler Cherry, Jerry Michell and Peter Smith.

Bill Piers, North Bucks rRIPPLE Coordinator

Areas of deprivation are mainly in urban areas in Buckinghamshire. There are also deprived areas immediately adjacent to Buckinghamshire across the boundary. Although people living in these areas visit the natural environment less, visits have been increasing. Evidence shows that transport and the associated costs are a barrier. Actions to improve links between town and country will be important for these people.

Older people tend to visit less due to health reasons. Therefore, it is important to address health and disability issues as set out previously, through improving accessibility and supporting people in using public rights of way.

Public Rights of Way for Health and Wellbeing

Having access to the natural environment helps people increase their physical activity. How active a person is can vary due to their distance from a greenspace, whether there are good connecting routes and the attractiveness of the environment. However, the availability and quality greenspace is not evenly distributed. People in deprived urban areas often have less access to greenspaces.²⁵ Health and wellbeing has, in the past, not been considered properly in designing towns. This has led to places being created which do not support people in exercising or which contribute to poor health, for example through road traffic pollution.²⁶

Health and exercise is one of the main motivators for spending time in the natural environment. On the other hand, poor health is becoming a more common reason for not visiting the outdoors.²⁷

Rights of way can improve health and wellbeing in many ways:

- Providing access in areas of poor health and areas where other green space is lacking;
- Increasing 'active travel' through safe walking and cycling routes for short journeys;
- Enabling access beyond urban areas;
- Providing routes for activities which improve health, such as walking for health, cycling and equestrian activities;
- Providing free-at-the-point-of-use opportunities for exercise.

²⁵ Jarrett, J. *et al* (2012). Effect of increasing active travel in urban England and Wales on costs to the National Health Service. *The Lancet*.

²⁶ Building Health Foundation. (2009). *Building health: creating and enhancing places for healthy, active lives (summary report)*. National Heart Forum, Living Streets and CABI.

²⁷ Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (2018).

Simply Walk

The Simply Walk programme is Buckinghamshire's health walk scheme. It started in 2007 and has been hugely successful - and it continues to grow. Simply Walk offers group walks to help people become more active, in a supportive and sociable environment. It offers graded walks that anyone can attend, no matter their level of fitness. Regular organised walks use many miles of the public rights of way network. In 2018 there were 83 different walk locations, which equates to around 3,520 walks taking place every year. The scheme employs a co-ordinator, but walks are volunteer-led providing a service worth around £320,087 per year.

Comments from Simply Walkers

"I really look forward to the Wednesday walks with a great group of friends and without them I would probably not bother to walk on my own."

"Meeting up with a group encourages me to make the effort and do some exercise."

"Thank you for organising the walks they really have helped me to get my mojo back."

Theme 5 Actions: Access for Everyone

Further relevant aims and objectives are listed in Theme 4: Knowing Where to Go.

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
AE1	To support more people with disabilities in using the public rights of way network.	AE1.1	Seek to create routes with high levels of accessibility, working with partners to deliver and seek funding, and provide promotional material.
		AE1.2	Adhere where possible to BS5709: 2018 standards for new infrastructure and develop path maintenance schedules through the management matrix (see Theme 2) to ensure least restrictive access. Apply BS5709: 2018 to new or diverted routes.
		AE1.3	Continue to remove stiles and replace with gaps, gates or kissing gates and support communities and user groups to achieve this aim. Explore ways to seek removal of structures where livestock is no longer present.
			Actions AE2.1 and AE2.2 also help to deliver the objective AE1.
AE2	To support improved health and wellbeing.	AE2.1	Work with the council's Public Health Team to support Simply Walk, providing easily accessible routes and prioritising maintenance requests relating to health walk routes.
		AE2.2	Remove barriers and restrictive infrastructure, including retro-fitting existing structures to ensure maximum accessibility, for example widening bridges to 1.2m and ramping steps. Prioritise these improvements along busy routes and those close to urban areas.
			Actions AE1.1 to AE1.3 also help to deliver the objective AE2.
AE3	To support more people from under-represented groups to use public rights of way and visit the countryside.	AE3.1	Support partners working with minority ethnic groups to understand barriers to accessing public rights of way and develop projects to increase use.
			All other actions in this section will also help to deliver objective AE3.

Theme 6: Effective Delivery

It is clear that public rights of way can help Buckinghamshire meet its priorities. It is also true that resources to achieve this have reduced since the first ROWIP. Public rights of way are an asset which should be capitalised upon for the benefit of Buckinghamshire's residents. To deliver this plan in full will not be possible with existing resources and additional funding will be needed. There is also a need to work efficiently and effectively, focusing on priorities.

Better Partnerships

Developing Wider Partnerships

The profile of public rights of way needs to be raised. The Service also needs to widen the range of partners with whom it works. Better joint working will help to ensure that public rights of way are properly included in policy and strategy. It will help to make sure that projects are developed and funding sought which align with the priorities of this ROWIP. New partners have been approached in the course of producing this plan, which has been useful. These include community organisations and groups which represent sectors of the population who currently use rights of way less. More can be learned in the future to improve how the Rights of Way Service supports these groups.

The council will seek to develop existing and form new partnerships to progress projects and funding opportunities in the areas shown to the see right.

Green Infrastructure – Public rights of way are a crucial component of green infrastructure. They should feature strongly in green infrastructure plans and policies and this should translate into projects. The council will engage with local planning authorities, Aylesbury Garden Town and other stakeholders, for example the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership and the Colne Valley Regional Park. The council will aim to ensure that public rights of way priorities are fully reflected and incorporated into partner strategies.

Health and Wellbeing – A better understanding is needed of those with mobility and visual impairments and projects need to be developed to improve disabled access provision. Work is also needed with new and existing health partners to understand further how public rights of way can contribute to health and wellbeing targets. Simply Walk will continue to be supported. Volunteering on public rights of way can also improve health.

Active Travel – The council will seek to increase its role in delivering both strategic routes and routes for short walking and cycling journeys. New multi-user routes in new developments will be pursued.

Visitor Economy – The council will work with partners to develop tourism, including Visit Buckinghamshire, the Chilterns Conservation Board and Chiltern Society.

Economy – Public rights of way are part of what supports Buckinghamshire's high quality of life, making it a desirable place to work and live. The council will link more closely with the economic sector, including Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership and South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership, to raise awareness of the role of public rights of way in realising Buckinghamshire's ambitions.

Volunteers and Community

Community groups, volunteers and parish and town councils provide maintenance support worth thousands of pounds every year. There are active volunteers surveying and maintaining the network every week of the year. The council recognises and values highly the work these groups and individuals carry out.

This work should be carried out in partnership. The council will listen to the needs of these groups and individuals to support their continued good work. There is potential to increase the role of volunteers, for example in helping to process reported problems. There is a need for greater information sharing between the council and volunteers and co-ordination between the volunteers themselves. This will help to make sure donated time is used efficiently, for example, avoiding double-reporting of issues and several individuals surveying the same routes. Greater volunteer involvement can also help with the 5% annual condition survey.²⁸

Parish and town councils take an active interest in their public rights of way. Around half are committed to devolved responsibilities in 2019. This means some are responsible for cutting vegetation on public rights of way. The ROWIP 2 consultation survey demonstrated that some of these parishes require additional funding to provide the rights of way clearance service they and their residents expect. The council will review how it can work with parish and town councils, including those with devolved responsibilities. It is important that communities who take on a greater role also get the support they need to deliver a high quality rights of way service.

Landowners are also important partners. This is covered in Theme 2: Looking after the Network.

²⁸ Two surveys are carried out each year of 2.5% of the network, totalling 5% of the network being surveyed each year.



Savannah Fradley

Chiltern Society volunteers install a gate along Footpath HUG/29 at Lower North Dean, Hughenden: L-R Richard Jones, David Hanson, Malcolm Weir and Gerry Paine.

Local Access Forum

The Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum (LAF) is a statutory independent group which provides advice to the council and other organisations, such as Natural England. It has the aim of improving public access in Buckinghamshire and its duties are set out in law. Members are volunteers and represent user groups, parish councils, elected councillors and land managers. This wide range of members help to improve public access while making sure the needs and interests of land managers and nature conservation are met. They provide advice, challenge and support to the council's Rights of Way Service.

The LAF have been involved at every stage of developing this ROWIP and will be closely involved with its delivery. The council will provide regular progress reports to the LAF throughout the lifetime of this ROWIP. It will also continue to seek their advice on strategy and policy.

Customer Focus

Customers mainly come into contact with the Rights of Way Service through reporting problems. Every year around 2,200 problems on public rights of way are reported to the council.

The public can report problems online on the council website. In March 2019 the council upgraded to a new online rights of way reporting system, called the Countryside Access Management System (CAMS). The new software is much better for both the council and the public. It is now easier for the public to report issues, more accurately, on a digital map. They can add photos and even report problems using a mobile device. It also lets people track progress and update their own reports. This software update has resolved many of the areas that the public were dissatisfied with around reporting problems. The council will work with partners and user groups to further improve this system. More information, such as gate types, will be added on the web-based map over time.

Devolving responsibilities to parish and town councils can add confusion for the public if information is not provided. As communities may take greater responsibility for services in the future this is an area which needs to be improved. An annual list of parishes which carry out clearance on the council's behalf will be published. Other ways to improve this aspect of customer service will be investigated.

Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) is an alliance between the county council as highway authority and the private company Ringway Jacobs. TfB manages the county's vehicle highways, footways and bitumen-surfaced cycleways and rights of way. TfB operate their own online maintenance reporting system (Fix My Street). Some complaints are directed to the wrong department. While the Rights of Way Service is within the council, the delivery of rights of way maintenance works on the ground is through TfB.

All other areas of the Rights of Way Service are located within the council. This ensures the service is as efficient, flexible and effective as possible. It also improves day-to-day working with other council departments, volunteers and other organisations.

Income

Additional funding will be required to deliver this ROWIP. While some may be available from the council, other sources will also need to be secured.

There are grant sources available which could better support public rights of way. New sources of funding will be sought through working with a wider range of partners. Contributions from developers and from major infrastructure projects will also be secured to ensure rights of way are improved and communities not disadvantaged.

Some of our services are chargeable, including Public Path Orders, Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders and searches relating to Common Land and Town and Village Greens. The council does not charge for pre-application planning advice in order to encourage developers to consider rights of way issues and possible improvements at an early stage. The charging and fee structure will be periodically reviewed to ensure that the council fully recovers the costs of delivering the service.



Right of way at Hughenden

Theme 6 Actions: Effective Delivery

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
ED1	Develop better partnerships with new and existing partners to improve service delivery.	ED1.1	Work with new partners to deliver shared priorities in green infrastructure, health and wellbeing, the economy and visitor economy and active travel.
		ED1.2	Work with partners to ensure the priorities of this ROWIP are included in strategies, policies and funding bids.
		ED1.3	Increase the numbers of volunteers and expand their roles and provide more information on volunteering on the council's website.
		ED1.4	Work in partnership with volunteers and community organisations who deliver rights of way services, to support them, develop new ways of working and new volunteering roles, improve communication and co-ordination and deliver training.
		ED1.5	Work with parish and town councils to understand their concerns and support those with devolved responsibilities as necessary.
		ED1.6	Influence and shape future devolvement agreements to ensure that public rights of way clearance is included and undertaken by all participating parishes.
		ED1.7	Support the Local Access Forum and ensure membership continues to be from a wide range of organisations.
ED2	Maximise the efficiency of the service.	ED2.1	Work with partners to secure grant funding for projects which improve access.
		ED2.2	Work with developers and local planning authorities to seek contributions to deliver the access needs arising from new development (see also Theme 3: An Evolving Network, objective EN2)
		ED2.3	Develop/review a schedule of fees and charges and publicise on the council's website.
ED3	Deliver a customer focused service.	ED3.1	Provide an online and accessible rights of way reporting system, ensuring the customer receives feedback and monitoring our responses.
		ED3.2	Publish a list of devolved parishes annually so that members of the public can more clearly understand responsibilities for clearing paths.
		ED3.3	Raise the profile of the public rights of way service, promoting successful projects and 'good news'.