



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Report

AGENDA ITEM 6

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Title Rights of Way Improvement Plan
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Summary

1. In order that the Forum could initially consider issues highlighted by the need to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, a very basic initial framework has been put together as a basis for discussion.

Recommendation

That the Forum comments on the attached draft framework.

Recommended action, and the reasons for this

2. This report and attachment is intended as a very basic initial outline of the new requirement under The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 for Buckinghamshire County Council as Highway Authority to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan within the next 5 years. It gives a brief evaluation of the consultation, research and assessment required to produce the plan.

Legislative Framework

3. The requirements are set out as follows:
 - Within 5 years carry out an assessment of the local network; how it meets the present and future needs of the public with regards to, Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Cycleways; how it provides opportunities for exercise and

other forms of open-air recreation; at the same time having special regard to the accessibility of the network for people with mobility problems.

- Produce and publish a plan containing the above assessment and a statement of the action for the management of the network and for securing the proposed improvements.
 - Set up a means to monitor progress, and carry out an assessment and report of progress every 10 years, issuing a new plan if required.
4. For the first time, this legislation places a requirement on all highway authorities to critically assess the worth of its rights of way network, considering where paths or local networks can be improved, relocated or even where they might be unnecessary, rather than simply where they have evolved over the years.

Assessing the needs of users (consultation)

5. The County Council must involve the Local Access Forum before preparing the assessment. It is the role of the Local Access Forum to comment on opportunities for access, assist the authority in setting priorities for implementing plans and comment on the published draft plan.
6. It will be necessary to carry out market research, consulting with users to assess how the local network meets present and future needs. It is envisaged that the consultation will be through national bodies and also through public contact, i.e. Citizen and web site surveys and possibly questionnaires. The public will be made aware that the assessment is taking place. It will also use existing user studies, perhaps for example, the British Horse Society assessment of horse density numbers.
7. It is important that the interests of land managers including those engaged in agriculture and forestry be taken into account.
8. The County Council will be required to consult with other local authorities and also neighbouring authorities.
9. The County Council will consult partner groups both externally and internally where there may be links with The Improvement Plan, for example Transportation, (Local Transport Plan) Education (Safer Routes to School), District Councils (Local Plans), Tourism Board (Local Visitor Plans), etc.

The assessment

10. Information from the consultation exercise should be scrutinised as part of the assessment. In addition the assessment will take into consideration such things as network fragmentation (i.e. cul-de-sac paths). It should look at routes that provide links which enable people to avoid using roads, assess convenient and safe crossing of roads/railways, investigate opportunities for providing routes from centres of population that could link to transportation routes or provide paths to school, shops etc and paths that provide an amenity for exercise, dog walking, cycling and riding.
11. To assess the current and future shortfall or otherwise of the network it will be necessary to:
- Make a study of the Definitive Map, and the applications made to modify the Map,

- Gather together data on requests for improvements to the network, and
- Assess the current condition of the network.

Statement of action

12. The assessment should enable the County Council to reach a conclusion about the strengths and weaknesses of the network, and identify where action is required, to draw up a Statement of Action which is an integral part of the plan. The statement should show proposed action, costs and key partners in the action, and timescales for implementation.

Publication

13. The Council will be required to publish a draft plan, and it will be necessary to publicise this fact and invite representation. Before publishing the final plan comments must be considered and acknowledged.
14. Following any amendment the plan will be published and a copy made available for public inspection. Copies may be made available free of charge, or at a reasonable cost.
15. The Council is required to monitor progress on the Statement of Action, and within 10 years make a new assessment and decide whether to amend the plan.

Background Papers

Rights of Way Improvement Plans – Statutory Guidance to Local Highway Authorities in England, available from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This document is also available on line at www.defra.gov.uk

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose name, telephone number and email address is given at the head of the paper.