

YEAR 1 REVIEW

Introduction

This report aims to demonstrate progress to deliver the outcomes of the Buckinghamshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020 – 2030 in Year 1: between 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. There are six themes to the ROWIP which will be reflected in this report, with each section headed by an itemised copy of the stated aims in the ROWIP and Delivery Plan report respectively. The report starts by updating the estimated cost symbols in the Action Plan.

Estimated costs

The Local Access Forum requested provision of a key of the ‘crystal balls’ and ‘walker’ symbols (financial estimates) in the Action Plan to aid public interpretation. How much money does one walker symbol represent?



This information now needs updating on the document itself.

Theme 1 Mapping the network

The ROWIP states...

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.

The Year 1 Action Plan states...

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions	Actions 2020 – 2021	Estimated Cost	Funded	PROW Team	Partner Organisations
MN1	To uphold our duties to provide an up-to-date Definitive Map and Statement.	MN1.3	Improve our online, publicly viewable mapping, registers for DMMOs, PPOs, TTROs, HS2 and EW Rail updates and Landowner Deposits.	Build upon Unitary “frontline” service provision and review public information provision. More time investment on making better use of CAMS web for Definitive Map matters.		Existing budgets	DM	Parish Councils LAF
		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.	Time track and programme process work. Keep under regular review and set targets. Upskill both junior Definitive Map Officers to increase capability.		Existing budgets	DM	Parish Councils Archives Ramblers BHS Chiltern Society

MN.1

The stated aim is to consolidate the definitive map by 2025 following the previous update in 2006. With staff resource returning to normal in 2022 this target should still be realistic.

MN1.2

The aim is to reduce the number of map anomalies. A map anomaly is an incorrect recording on the definitive map based on historical evidence and/or information on the ground. A quick initial investigation is made of anomalies as they arise. If it is clear the map is correct these are not logged. Any initial evidence suggesting further work is required, for example, in the record centre archives, the case is logged on a spreadsheet. None of these cases were resolved in Year 1, so this will need to be reviewed in Years 2-5 (2022-2025).

MN1.3

CAMS (Countryside Access Management System) is the GIS mapping and database software used by rights of way officers daily to receive and manage issues and reports or job sheets, and through which the public gain access to information. This was brought on-stream in March 2019 prior to publication of the ROWIP. Reference MN1.3 aims to build on the existing information available to the public with the additional tools and information provided by this software, but which are not currently in use on the website. Staff resource needed is to input and 'cleanse' and check the data is correct before appearing on the public-facing area of the website.

There was no staff time to invest in CAMS in Year 1, mainly as time was lost through staff redeployment on Covid-19-related work and managing existing PPO workloads. With an easing of staff pressures in 2022 this aim is predicted to be addressed in years 2-5.

Website information on 1. landowner deposits; 2. modification orders; 3. public path orders (diversions); 4. temporary traffic regulation orders; and 5. traffic prohibition orders; are updated on a weekly basis, with accompanying maps and provided via this web link:

<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/environment/public-rights-of-way/changes-to-public-rights-of-way/>

Extra data additional to 1-5 above could include access to historical PPO's and historical landowner deposits. The ambition for year 2-5 is to make these publicly available with maps.

Existing legislative obligations require us to provide 1-5 above and it is considered this is being provided successfully. However, in light of the major railway in Buckinghamshire having a widespread and significant negative impact on the ROW users in Years 1-6 of the ROWIP. Therefore, we've allocated an area of the website providing information on East West Rail (EWR) and High Speed 2 (HS2) temporary closures as these are not always easily available on either EWR or HS2 websites in a clear and concise manner. Two additional items are therefore listed: 6. East West Rail closures; and 7. HS2 closures.

Existing landowner statements deposited under s31(6) are provided and updated on the website.

MN1.4

Public Path Orders (PPO's) were delayed with staff re-deployed on Covid-19-related work, but the backlog is now up to date – meaning any application received is considered without

undue delay. During the first Covid-19 lockdown, between 24th March and 31st July 2020, all PPO's were put on hold. There are currently 53 PPO's being progressed.

There is currently a backlog of Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMO's). At 31st March 2021 there were 6 ongoing determined cases with 34 to be investigated. Work is taking place to reduce delay between receiving the application and either rejecting or determining applications. Covid-19 reduced access to the Records Office and restricted opportunities for wider public consultation on applications.

It's difficult to predict how many DMMOs can be determined per year as they vary significantly in complexity, but if fully staffed in 2022, it is hoped to increase the rate at which applications are brought forward for determination, perhaps around 8-10 per year.

With this in mind, staff training has been targeted to consider and research existing DMMO's. In Year-1 the LAF requested more condensed DMMO information to be presented at their meetings, providing more useful information to judge progress on dealing with DMMOs. This will be provided in July 2021.

MN.2 Common land and Village Greens

MN 2.1

This area of work has low caseload numbers, but applications are complex, costly and time consuming. With all existing cases having undergone some investigation work in Year 1, there is no backlog between receiving the application and starting investigations. At March 2021 there were 4 live cases with one having been rejected in Year 1.

THEME 2 – Looking after the network - maintenance & enforcement

The ROWIP states...

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.

The Year 1 Action Plan states...

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions	Actions 2021 – 2024	Estimated Cost	Funded	PROW Team	Partner Organisations
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	Consult LAF, ROW Liaison Group BHS and Management team annually to take advice on the effectiveness of the management matrix and annual capital programme 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.	Review effectiveness of current management matrix. (Project move to orange next phase)		Existing budgets	ROW OPS	Parish Councils Ramblers Chiltern Society BHS LAF TRF
LN2	To improve understanding of the network, its assets and its condition.	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.	Continue to carry out 6 year programme of inspections on known bridge structures an update details on CAMS. Move forward inspection programme and design new report outputs which reflect what is needed for any ROW Asset Management Plans (inc costs, replacement, life span/cycle etc)		Existing budgets	ROW OPS DM	Parish Councils Ramblers Chiltern Society BHS LAF TRF NFU CLBA

LN 1.1

This aim seeks to consult widely with partners on the effectiveness of the Management Matrix. <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/environment/public-rights-of-way/maintaining-public-rights-of-way/>

The Matrix table allows officers to prioritise reported issues between routes with high, medium or low use, against promoted route and the type of issues reported: from missing signposts, to enforcement issues or problems that are risks to the public. These set timescales which the team are expected to meet, and the matrix allows performance to be measured, for example, '75% of Priority 1 issues were met in the required timescale' and so on. The matrix originated in the 2008 ROWIP and reviewed by the Local Access Forum in 2016. Members requested that nothing was changed, to ensure consistency of long-term data that enabled accurate performance trends over many years.

A review of the matrix's effectiveness and opportunities for improvement were due for review in Year 1, but this wasn't achieved, in part because due to Covid-19 the LAF didn't meet in July 2020 and the Rights of Way Liaison Group hasn't met since January 2020. Also, the greatest need in 2020 was to maintain and keep the network open, with an increased number of enforcement issues, when use of the network was high, so other consultation work had to be pushed back. However, a review is proposed to be undertaken in the latter part of 2021 for consultation with the Local Access Forum and Rights of Way Liaison Group in 2022.

The annual capital programme is added to every liaison group and LAF agendas, outlining intended expenditure, accompanied by a summary of works completed. This was presented at September 2020 and March 2021 LAF meetings, but both ROWLG meetings were cancelled in Year 1.

LN.1.2.

The figures will be available to be presented to the LAF for Year 1 in November 2021. Performance for enforcement and maintenance are based around the Matrix, with two elements normally reported to LAF and ROWLG: Category C (maintenance) and how we're meeting our enforcement across categories A, B and C. This provides a snapshot to reflect the general pictures. The Year-1 figures will be available at the 3rd November 2021 LAF.

It is likely that the figures would have been poor against other years, as the works team were stood down, then on returning were restricted to reduced hours for some weeks. Site inspections were suspended and team members were redeployed to the Covid-19 response. Volunteer teams were also stood down. Anecdotally, response rates to reported issues were much slower than in previous years.

LN.1.3

A new enforcement policy has been completed and is shortly to be available on the website. It will be presented to the Local Access Forum on 14th July 2021.

The majority of enforcement in 2020 revolved around unlawful obstructions in the first Covid-19 lockdown. Rights of way remained open, but some landowners chose to lock gates or erect barriers. A request was made to close a footpath in Chalfont St Peter through the grounds of a care home, which was refused.

Five enforcement notices were served in Year 1, including one case requiring Police attendance. Examples include two panels of Heras fencing removed in Hazlemere; boards removed against a kissing gate in Great Missenden; removal of several "Covid-19 KEEP OUT" signs, taking issue with landowners threatening people; and removing wooden pallets blocking two stiles in Stoke Mandeville. Most obstructions are removed pre-enforcement through negotiation.

Officers worked with Chiltern Area planning enforcement partners in Year 1, for example, a bridleway along Dibden Hill, Chalfont St Giles needed reinstating after construction traffic damage. A 'construction traffic management plan' ensured the condition was returned to the original, pre-construction state, and the planning condition secured traffic routes to avoid vulnerable sections of bridleway.

LN1.4

Following the council becoming unitary on 1st April 2020, delegated powers were granted to senior officers to serve notice on owners that obstruct footpaths. The updated Rights of Way Enforcement policy explains the delegated powers, which includes a typical work-flow process. The policy was presented to the LAF in July 2021 and will be available on the website in Year 2.

LN 1.5

Advice to landowners from Area Officers continues daily through phone conversations, meetings and letters. The main route for distributing waymark discs is through volunteers, such as the Chiltern Society Area Secretaries and Path Checkers, but the council continues to support landowners with other signs to help manage access, for example, waymark discs, no cycling signs and no dog mess signs. An area of the website is devoted to advising landowners.

The council continues to provide gates to the Ramblers (RIPPLE) volunteers to install at the rate of 1 per week; mainly in north to replace stiles. In the south the council supports the Donate-a-Gate scheme and (also in the north) offers gates free to landowners willing to install them and when replacing stiles to improve access. While the RIIPPLE team normally installs around 52 gates per year, this was reduced in Year 1 to 32 due to Covid-19 working restrictions.

LN 1.6

The team maintain good relations with and support from the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails teams and are guided by national trail standards. In Year 1 there was no staff capacity to attend Ridgeway Board or Delivery meetings or any Thames Path meetings. However, the Ridgeway officer benefits from attendance by the south Area Officer and LAF member for the British Driving Society at Delivery Group meetings. The council and LAF's comments on the Wendover cycling audit, related to the Ridgeway Riding Route, has been useful.

Larger works by the Ridgeway team in Year-1 have generally been in the planning stages, including surfacing at Bacombe Hill and Coombe Hill SSSI's. New pedestrian gates were completed by the council to support the Ridgeway team at Chequers (Ellesborough), Lodge Hill (Bledlow) and Whiteleaf (Princes Risborough) in Year-1. The Ridgeway and Thames path volunteers undertake annual summer strimming and mowing to keep paths clear.

On the Thames Path one bridge structure was re-decked along Marlow Footpath 1 (MAW/1/1) to be compliant with disabled and Environment Agency standards. An additional surface repair in Little Marlow will be joint funded by Thames Path and council in Year 2.

LN 1.7

Ensuring high standards of environmental protection remains integral to daily work. Officers benefit from electronic mapping (GIS) layers to indicate sensitive wildlife and archaeology sites. Permission was obtained from Natural England in Year 1 to work on two Ridgeway sites: at Bacombe Hill (Wendover) and Lodge Hill (Bledlow). Two officers received training on ROW works requiring Environment Agency consent, which is sought for bridges across main rivers.

LN 2.1

In a normal year and with the help of volunteers from the Chiltern Society, the team would survey 5% of the network twice a year in May and November. Covid-19 restricted the May 2020 survey, but the November 2020 was completed and the results reported to the March 2021 LAF meeting.

LN 2.2

This aims to gather information onto a database of structures for which the council are responsible: an asset management system. Armed with this information, and the predicted lifespan of each structure, the team can forward-plan costs more accurately to future demands, then bid for funding.

Bridge inspections were undertaken in Year 1, recording the type of bridge and condition. This a bridge inspection regime has continued for a number of years, similar to inspecting vehicular highway structures for insurance purposes, and started when ROW maintenance fell under the Ringway Jacobs contract.

To survey the whole network of bridge structures takes around 7 years. We don't currently have the technical engineering expertise to assess and price it up larger bridge structures but can estimate.

The council's online mapping software (CAMS) provides a full inventory of every structure and intelligence is gathered and edited daily by officers. To this extent, the team are meeting the Action Plan target.

We should be able to price each bridge, signpost and waymark according to that inventory, together with contractor costs for replacement. Surfaces could also be included so we can evaluate depreciation, but much private work happens on the network to which the council is unaware. We should also include stiles and gates as the council sometimes repairs these structures on a de facto basis and funds replacement of stiles with gates to improve access.

At present there is no staff resource to compile an asset management system or make active decisions on prices.

Maintaining up-to-date information on CAMS that accurately reflects the situation on the ground is an issue. Surveys indicate out-of-date content including furniture, path issues and signage. While there will inevitably be changes on the ground to which the council are not always made aware, advice will be sought from the LAF in Year 2 seeking solutions to remedy the problem.

LN.2.3

The LAF member for the Chiltern Society, Andrew Clark, has offered to start by surveying 'The Chiltern Link' promoted route in Year 2. The ROWIP suggests reviewing which routes should continue to be formally promoted and this will lead future survey programmes.