

**Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills - Executive Director for
CommunitiesCommunities**

Report to: **Mid Lincolnshire and South Lincolnshire and
Rutland Local Access Forums**
Date: **17/ 18 April 2012**
Subject: **Community Involvement Update**

Summary:

A report outlining the progress made in the development of Community Involvement in the management of Lincolnshire's public rights of Way network.

Recommendation(s):

- i) That the forum notes the contents of the report.

1. Background

The County Council's vision is to engage with the community, to promote the opportunities for volunteering, to improve our services and to develop capacity within the third sector by providing opportunities for volunteers to work within services throughout LCC.

During the last 12 months the Countryside Access Team has been working on a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the opportunities for volunteers to become involved in public rights of way work. These include;

Ease of Use Survey – The Ramblers Association now assist the County Council to undertake the twice yearly PRow condition survey.

Volunteer Working Groups - Forming partnerships with a variety of community groups to undertake public rights of way maintenance tasks

Adopt a Leaflet – Developing an 'adopt-a-path' scheme to assist in the management of the routes used by the Lincolnshire Walks series of leaflets.

Parish Paths Partnership Scheme – Re-launching the scheme to maximise the value of the partnership to parish councils and the County Council.

2. Summary

Ease of Use Survey

Lincolnshire County Council undertakes an annual survey to establish the overall accessibility, or ease of use, of the definitive public rights of way network in the County.

The County Council manages 4000 km of public rights of way. 10% of the entire network is surveyed each year - 5% in May and 5% in November. Completing the survey in two parts takes account of seasonal variations in the network .i.e. overgrowth in May and surface condition in November.

The condition survey records the total length of public rights of way which are easy to use by members of the public. The Survey considers various issues along a path such as obstructions, ploughing/cropping issues, way-marking, signage, surfaces, stiles/gates and bridges in determining the condition of a public right of way.

The survey (formerly BVPI 178 'Ease of Use survey') has proved a useful tool in the management and improvement of Lincolnshire's public rights of way network since its introduction in 2000. The information obtained from the survey has enabled the County Council to plan work programmes, develop policies and effectively target budgets.

The November 2011 survey was the first survey to be undertaken by volunteers. 21 volunteers from the Ramblers Association surveyed 5% of the total rights of way network.

As with previous surveys, the County Council checked a random sample of survey results to check the quality and consistency of the survey data gathered. The verification exercise established that the survey has been undertaken to a high standard with only a small number of results requiring amendment.

The November 2011 achieved a final score of 71.73%.

Random samples are now being generated for use in the May 2012 survey.

Volunteer Working Groups

Although Lincolnshire County Council is committed to maintaining and protecting the network of public rights of way across the county, consideration is being given to the use of volunteers to undertake maintenance tasks.

Work is underway to develop partnerships with a variety of community groups to including the scouts and users groups. It is intended that regular tasks will be undertaken to help us install gates and stiles and clear vegetation.

The first volunteer day took place at Washingborough on Sunday 11th March. During the day 28 volunteers from the Washingborough Scout Group cleared 100m of vegetation from Well Sykes Lane.

Adopt –a- leaflet

Work is continuing on the development of an adopt-a-leaflet scheme for the routes including in the Lincolnshire Walks series of leaflets.

It is proposed that volunteers will be involved in a variety of tasks including:

1. Walking the promoted route and recording it's condition and any works required
2. waymarking – attaching discs to waymark posts
3. clearing localised vegetation from around stiles, gates and signage.

Each Volunteer will be expected to walk their leaflet 3 times per year.

The County Council will provide full training and support to the volunteers throughout the process. Volunteers will also be provided with equipment to enable them to undertake their role.

It is envisaged that the adopt-a-leaflet scheme will commence in the 2013/14 financial year.

Parish Paths Partnership Scheme

The Parish Paths Partnership Scheme (P3) was introduced into Lincolnshire in 1994. The Countryside Agency provided financial support in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council to enable local communities to improve and promote their own rights of way network. However, since April 2000 the scheme has been wholly supported and funded by the County Council. The County Council now has local agreements with 93 parish Councils.

The Lincolnshire Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan aimed to review the P3 scheme and explore ways to increase community involvement. Core Task 4 also highlights that P3 improvement schemes should meet ROWIP objectives and priorities.

All of the P3 groups were consulted in 2009 to establish their views of the P3 scheme. The consultation revealed that the P3 scheme is well received with 82% of the respondents considering the scheme to be a success. A number of the parish councils remarked that the scheme has allowed them to have greater control of their local rights of way network and prioritise vegetation clearance and other improvements to meet the needs of the local community.

An internal review of the scheme has revealed that only 44 (40%) of the participating parishes have been active in the last 3 years and the vast majority of the implemented schemes have involved mowing works.

It is therefore proposed to draw the current scheme to a close and invite parish councils to apply to become members of a revised P3 scheme. It is proposed that the re-launched scheme will contain 50 parish and community groups and be encouraged to implement a broader range of tasks. It is also proposed that participating groups will be required to undertake an annual survey of all of the routes in their parish.

It is intended that the Parish Paths Partnership scheme will be re-launched in 2013/14 financial year.

5. Background papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Andy Savage - Senior Countryside Access Officer, who can be contacted on 01522 782070 or andrew.savage@lincolnshire.gov.uk