

Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills - Executive Director for Environment & Economy

Report to:	Mid Lincolnshire Local Access Forum
Date:	19 January 2016
Subject:	Prioritisation of path, associated works timescales and proactive inspection regimes

Summary:

A report into the proposal that due to budgetary constraints the scheme of prioritisation of paths and the associated works timescales requires alterations alongside the County Council's proactive inspection regimes.

Recommendation(s):

That the report is considered and formal written advice to the Authority from the Local Access Forum is provided

1. Background

With Central Government support grants reducing and the attendant pressures this brings to Local Government services it is inevitable that attention must be given to review current practices to ensure that they remain feasible.

As a consequence of direct funding and staffing decreases over a number of years the Rights of Way service is required to review the following elements of its work.

- a) the prioritisation of public rights of way
- b) the timescales to which the County Council will commit to undertake different types of works, in itself linked to the priority of the individual right of way.

2. The Prioritisation of Public Rights of Way

The County Council has operated a system of prioritising individual rights of way based on their character and usage for many years with the existing system rooted in a study done in 1994.

The need for such a system is based on the finite level of resources available to deliver an extensive remit of maintenance and enforcement across a widely dispersed network of 4000 km in total length. In common with the well-recognised

"classification" system for roads (A, B , C etc) it has been the position of the County Council that some rights of way have a greater value to the public than others and it is only right that resources are allocated accordingly when required.

The current levels of prioritisation can be defined as follows:

Priority 1	Routes actively promoted by Lincolnshire County Council (e.g. Viking Way, Bridle Trails, Recreational Walk Routes)
Priority 2	Routes that are known to be well used, predominantly close to settlements <u>or</u> routes promoted by other bodies and specifically endorsed by Lincolnshire County Council
Priority 3	All other available routes.
Priority 4	Routes that could only be made available by the significant investment of capital resources or requiring extensive legal work to resolve alignments and obstructions.

Source: Highways & Traffic Guidance Note 73 "Path Prioritisation Policy, Standard Issue Resolution Timescales & Inspection Regimes" 1/4/2013

Officers are currently considering what alterations may be appropriate in the current resource climate to ensure that the limited funding is allocated wisely and to the greatest benefit for the public.

Options may include:

- The reduction in the number of levels of prioritisation
- The altering of the types of route that attract a priority (e.g. promoted routes are not considered of any greater value than routes used predominantly by local communities)
- Removal of routes promoted by others as a specific priority
- Retaining the existing set of priorities

The County Council does however believe that there will be a number of routes which it will be clear that only significant investments in financial or officer resource will enable the route to be made available (the current priority 4 routes). It is not envisaged that there will be a change to this concept.

3. Timescales for the Resolution of Commonly Encountered Reports / Problems

The prioritisation of any individual path or way will determine what timescales may be achieved to resolve user complaints. There will be occasion when the type or scale of any problem may preclude being able to meet these timescales however officers will ensure that correspondents are informed if this is the case.

Currently the matrix for resolution of commonly encountered issues is demonstrated as follows:

PRIORITY	Rights of Way Act Infringements (Ploughing & Cropping)	Grass Cutting & Vegetation Clearance (Subject to cyclical programme)	Path Furniture Repair and Minor Obstructions	New or Replacement Bridges	Essential Surfacing Works
1	3 Months	2 Months	3 Months	Subject to size, location and resource availability	Works Subject to Finance and Availability of Workforce
2	4 Months	2 Months	6 Months		
3	Works Subject to Finance and Availability of Workforce				
4	Works only to be undertaken when major issues are resolved.				
Any report which is a Health and Safety consideration will be dealt with in a timescale dependent on an appropriate risk analysis					

Source: Highways & Traffic Guidance Note 73

The County Council will align any evaluation of the priority scheme against the likely availability of resources and officers ability to inspect paths reactively.

Options may include:

- Only committing to a timescale for highest priority routes with all others being subject to the availability of resources.
- Extending the timescales for types or problems
- Giving greater priority to a certain type of problem
- Considering the closure of routes on health and safety grounds e.g. where an existing bridge has failed and there are insufficient resources to replace.

4. Proactive Inspections

The County Council does currently undertake limited proactive inspections but, due to significant numbers of reactive works in some areas (mainly North and South Kesteven) this is not necessarily possible across the whole County.

Proactive inspections ensure that the network is maintained in a safe condition (with urban paths being inspected for trips etc on an annual basis by Highways Officers) as well as ensuring that routes remain easy to use and to limit the number of complaints made to the Council.

The current regime is as follows:

Priority 1:	Once per annum.
Priority 2:	Split over two year cycle.
Priority 3:	Split over a three year cycle.
Priority 4:	When routes are programmed for reopening based on available resources.

Source: Highways & Traffic Guidance Note 73

As with the resolution of works this may require alignment to any new scheme of prioritisation of paths.

The Council also considers that there is a likelihood that the number of complaints made concerning the network will rise and as a consequence officers will have to spend more time on reactive work.

The Council still values its proactive inspections and may consider altering the cycles and will also consider whether to retain the link to priority of paths or alternatively to commit to inspecting all paths in a geographic area (e.g. groups of parishes) in any given year. The cycle may possibly be spread over a greater period of time

5. Summary

The County Council is undeniably facing greater resource pressures and challenges than in very many years. Since an increase in staffing levels in 1994 and 2002 the quality of Lincolnshire's Rights of Way has visibly improved. Whilst it is recognised that less input from the Authority will mean some routes become less easy to use it is considered that the efforts of the last two decades has ensured that the majority of the network is generally available and the emphasis going forward is to ensure that this quality does not decrease significantly to the extent that paths that have been made available fall into such disrepair that only significant inputs of resource will restore them.

5. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

n/a

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

n/a

c) Scrutiny Comments

n/a

d) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

6. Background Papers

[Highways & Traffic Guidance Note 73 "Path Prioritisation Policy, Standard Issue Resolution Timescales & Inspection Regimes" 1/4/2013](#)

This report was written by Chris Miller, Environmental Services Team Leader – Countryside Services who can be contacted on 01522 782070 or countryside_access@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

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