



A statutory advisory body to Lincolnshire County Council, North East Lincolnshire Council and other providers of outdoor recreational access

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| Report to: | Lincolnshire Joint Local Access Forum |
| Date: | 23 April 2024 |
| Subject: | Lincolnshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025 |

Summary:

The Council has started the process to review and publish a new Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), to be published in 2025. The first stage of the process is to consult key stakeholders, including the Local Access Forum (LAF), prior to undertaking any statement of needs consultation. The original RoWIP for Lincolnshire was created in 2007, and a draft revised plan was consulted upon (but not formally adopted) in 2014. The report outlines the process of developing a revised RoWIP and the initial project schedule for RoWIP 2025.

The advice of the Local Access Forum is being sought as to what the current and likely future needs will be of the rights of way network for all users, and the approach planned for the development of the ROWIP 2025.

The report recommends that the Local Access Forum consider how it will be able to respond and support the Council during the development of the plan and recommends that the Forum consider developing a sub-group to consider the detail of the ROWIP, prepare recommendations to the LAF proper to assist in the issuing of formal advice, and respond to consultations in between LAF meetings.

Actions Required:

Provide advice to the Council for the following:

1. From a strategic perspective, in the Forum's opinion what are the current and likely future needs of the public from the perspective of
 - a. Walkers
 - b. Runners
 - c. Disabled users
 - d. Horse Riders
 - e. Cyclists

- f. Carriage Drivers
- g. Off Road Motorcycling
- h. Off Road Vehicle Users

2. Are there other specific user groups that have not been listed above and should be considered?
3. Provide initial advice regarding the approach to be taken for the preparation of the new RoWIP 2025
4. Decide how the LAF wishes to be engaged with the RoWIP process, and whether to create a Local Access Forum sub-group to examine proposals and plans in detail and provide initial guidance to the Council during the development of the plan and to the LAF to assist with the preparation of formal advice.

1. Background

The RoWIP is one of the Council's key strategic documents for public rights of way. The plan assesses the anticipated needs of the public rights of way and wider access network and identifies where changes should be made to meet the current and likely future needs of the public.

A RoWIP is intended to last for 10 years, after which it should be reviewed, and a decision made whether to amend the original plan or not. The outline process for reviewing an RoWIP is as follows:

- Initial consultation with key stakeholders
- Make an assessment of needs for the local public rights of way network, considering the following:
 - The Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way and any applications for changes
 - The current condition of the network
 - Any improvement requests for the network
 - Assess:
 1. To what extent routes are available to different groups of users
 2. Routes that are not suitable for all or some users
 3. Inconsistencies on individual rights of way
 4. Opportunities to improve the network
- Assess whether the existing RoWIP statement of action adequately meets the needs identified.
- If the plan requires amendment, prepare a new statement of action, identifying how the Council plan to manage local rights of way for each type of user based on the assessment above.
- Publish a draft plan and undertake a full public consultation, giving a minimum of 12 weeks for comments to be received.

- Publish a revised RoWIP, after making necessary changes that have been identified following the public consultation.

The first Lincolnshire County Council RoWIP was published in 2007 and expired in 2012. A second RoWIP process commenced as a light touch review and a draft plan was published in 2014. The Council is looking to restart this process and publish a revised RoWIP in 2025.

A considerable time has passed since the last assessment of need and the Council is seeking advice from the Local Access Forum as to the current and likely future needs of the public for access to the countryside and the public rights of way network, and the approach proposed for the development of the RoWIP 2025.

In contrast to the position when the original RoWIP was developed, the Council has the benefit of a wealth of knowledge about the condition of the network and the assessments of need undertaken as part of the existing Improvement Plan 2007-2012 and Draft Revised RoWIP 2014 processes. It is therefore not considered necessary to undertake a full public consultation for the statement of need but instead undertake a light touch approach using the original plans as a basis to undertake a fresh analysis. This will then feed into the preparation of fresh statement of action which will form the draft RoWIP 2025.

The proposed light touch consultation exercise would involve consultation with the following key stakeholders:

- District Councils, Town Councils and Parish Councils
- Lincolnshire Local Access Forum
- Neighbouring Highway Authorities
- Natural England
- User groups
 - Ramblers
 - British Horse Society
 - British Driving Society
 - Trail Riders Fellowship
 - Green Lane Association (GLASS)
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- Country Land and Business Association (CLA)
- Canal & Rivers Trust

The initial outline project plan timescale for the ROWIP 2025 is as follows:

| Task | Start | Finish |
|---|--------------|------------------|
| Review existing documentation and existing policies | April 2024 | May 2024 |
| Develop statement of need | May 2024 | June 2024 |
| Undertake statement of need consultation | June 2024 | Sept 2024 |
| Develop draft RoWIP 2025 | Sept 2024 | Dec 2024 |
| Undertake draft RoWIP 2025 public consultation | Dec 2024 | May 2025 |
| Prepare final RoWIP | May 2025 | June 2025 |
| Adoption of final RoWIP | June 2025 | Sept 2025 |
| Publication of final RoWIP | | Sept 2025 |

The LAFs advice will be key throughout the process of development of the plan. It is recommended that the Forum consider the creation of a working group that will be able to respond on behalf of the Forum during meetings, and report back to the Local Access Forum at each formal meeting.

2. Conclusion

The Forum is invited to consider the report and actions required.

3. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report:

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| Appendix A | Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007-2012 |
| Appendix B | The Draft Lincolnshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2014- 2019 |

This report was written by Andrew Fletcher, Public Rights of Way and Access Manager, Lincolnshire County Council.