

Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills - Executive Director - Communities

Report to: **South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forums**
Date: **17 January 2013**
Subject: **Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2 – Stakeholder Consultation Report**

Summary:

A report outlining the findings of the Second Rights of Way Improvement Plan stakeholder consultation.

Recommendation(s):

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

1. Background

The duty to publish and review a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) is contained in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. In preparing a RoWIP the County Council must make an assessment of:

- The extent to which local rights of way meet the present and the likely future needs of the public.
- The opportunities presented by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the authority's area with particular emphasis on footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways and restricted byways.
- The accessibility of the local rights of way network to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

The first Lincolnshire RoWIP published in April 2007. The plan set out how the County Council intended to improve the management, provision and promotion of the County's public rights of way network. A great deal has changed since the publication of the first RoWIP and RoWIP 2 will have to take account of significant changes in National policy and the current economic climate.

Unfortunately limited resources prevent the County Council from undertaking a full round of public consultation or a detailed network assessment, however, the principles regarding public need which underpinned the first RoWIP, and the network assessment made at that time are all still considered to be relevant. This report details the findings of the use and demand consultation which was undertaken with stakeholder groups.

The Lincolnshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2 – Stakeholder Consultation is attached to this report as Appendix A.

2. Summary

The consultation was sent to a range of organisations including Parish Councils (Parish Paths Partnership members), District Councils, landowner representatives, user groups and other key agencies. The consultation was also advertised on the Lincolnshire County Council website and members of the public invited to provide a response.

The consultation took place over a 12 week period between 20 July 2012 and the 12 October 2012. It was designed to obtain stakeholder views on the success of the first Lincolnshire Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) and invite suggestions for the direction of the second RoWIP.

Consultees were asked the following questions;

- 1) Do you feel that the Statements of Action contained in the first RoWIP were sufficient?
- 2) What areas of the RoWIP do you feel the County Council has-
 - a. Delivered well
 - b. Failed to deliver or didn't completely deliver
- 3) What areas do you feel should be considered for the next RoWIP?

It is clear from the responses received that the public rights of way network is valued and has a multitude of uses. The majority of respondents consider the scope of the first RoWIP was sufficient and that the plan has been well delivered. In particular, most respondents believe that better maintenance, enforcement and promotion have brought about significant improvements to some parts the public rights of way network.

It is widely accepted that the RoWIP has been implemented against a backdrop of limited resources and this has ultimately affected the delivery of the plan. Some respondents also considered that the first RoWIP may have been too ambitious and care should be taken to ensure that the next RoWIP is realistic and deliverable.

Whilst the majority of consultation responses acknowledged that significant improvements had been made in the delivery of maintenance and enforcement during the initial stages of RoWIP implementation, it was recognised that the reduction in resources in 2010 led to a deterioration in the standard of maintenance and enforcement in some areas. A number of consultees expressed particular dissatisfaction with the recent standard of vegetation clearance on the network. Without regular vegetation clearance some paths quickly become inaccessible and this has an adverse effect on access particularly to disabled and blind and partially sighted users.

The Rural Economy and Tourism section of the RoWIP aimed to identify and develop circular and linear routes to and from the countryside. Whilst improved access has been provided in some areas, a number of respondents considered that the level of implementation had not been as extensive as anticipated. The parish council's affected by the Coastal Grazing Marshes Project also believe that little has changed during the implementation of the first RoWIP.

A wide variety of suggestions have been submitted for inclusion in the second RoWIP. Again, there is a general acceptance that RoWIP2 should provide a realistic reflection of what can be delivered within the available resources. It is therefore considered that the

next RoWIP will require a strong emphasis on community involvement in order to make the most of the voluntary sector.

The South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum are keen to ‘continue the present course of action in RoWIP2’. Other suggestions for inclusion in RoWIP2 include developing the walking for health network, filling missing links, improving the accessibility and the provision of behind the hedge routes. The consultation also highlighted a continued high demand for developments in horse riding and cycling facilities. In particular horse riders and cyclists are looking for more off road routes, road safety improvements and surface improvements.

A number of respondents also commented that the rights of way network should not be considered in isolation and that the management and improvement of the public rights of way network is interlinked with many other green infrastructure plans and the LTP4.

3. Consultation

Scrutiny Comments

n/a

Executive Councillor Comments

n/a

Local Member Comments

n/a

Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Lincolnshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2 – Stakeholder Consultation Report

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

