



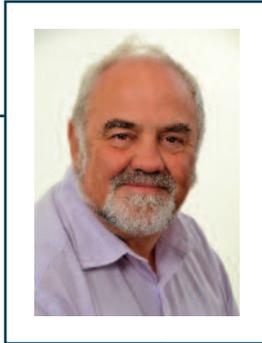
# Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2

# WELCOME TO THE 2ND SOMERSET RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

**Public Rights of Way** are more than a valuable recreational resource - they are also an important asset in terms of the rural economy, tourism, sustainable transport, social inclusion and health and well being. The public rights of way network is key to enabling residents and visitors alike to access services and enjoy the beauty of Somerset's diverse natural and built environment.

Over the next few years, the focus is going to be chiefly on performing our statutory duties. However, where resources allow we will strive to implement the key priority areas of this 2nd Improvement Plan and make Somerset a place and a destination for enjoyable walking, riding and cycling.

**Harvey Siggs**  
Cabinet Member  
Highways and Transport



# OVERVIEW

This Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) is the prime means by which Somerset County Council (SCC) will manage the Rights of Way Service for the benefit of walkers, equestrians, cyclists, and those with visual or mobility difficulties.

The first RoWIP was adopted in 2006, since that time although ease of use of the existing network has greatly improved, the extent of the public rights of way (PRoW) network has changed very little. Although many of the actions have been completed, the Network Assessment undertaken for the first RoWIP is still relevant for RoWIP2.

## There are 5 main aims of RoWIP2:

- **Raise the strategic profile of the public rights of way network**
- **Deliver statutory functions in an efficient way**
- **Develop a safe and improved access network**
- **Improve access information**
- **Work in partnership with volunteers and key organisations**

The ENPA chapter of the RoWIP is reviewed periodically but it is not possible for the timing of this to coincide with the RoWIPs for Devon and Somerset as well as the ENPA Partnership Plan.

A similar sized county in terms of area is Cornwall which has nearly 2000km less in paths.

## Network Assets:

- 15,000 gates
- 10,000 signposts
- 11,000 stiles
- 1300+ culverts
- 2800+ bridges <6m
- 400+ bridges >6m

Somerset has one of the longest rights of way networks in the country – it currently stands at 6138 km.

Over 78% of the network is made up of footpath with just over 21% being available to horse riders and cyclists.

There are over 12 metres of path per person in Somerset compared to 4.5 metres in Devon.

# RAISING THE STRATEGIC PROFILE OF THE PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK

The Rights of Way network in Somerset is inextricably linked to tourism, health & wellbeing, living sustainably, travel planning, road safety, economic well being, volunteering and community involvement.

The Rights of Way Service can help to deliver benefits in relation to these areas.

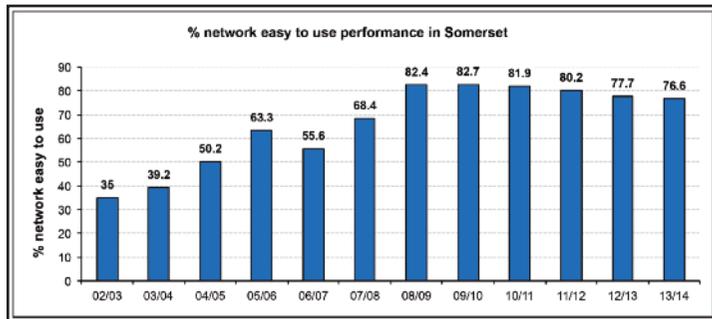
Raising the strategic profile of the path network and this Improvement Plan will not only increase awareness with other organisations, policy- and decision-makers; but will enable better planning and development of neighbourhoods, with the needs of path users taken into account, and help facilitate external funding or investment in improving the quality and accessibility of paths.

Liaise with all Local Planning Authorities to ensure that any policies and strategies (including Minerals & Waste Development Framework) in general has regard for the RoWIP, any priority routes and the PRow network.

Continue to ensure that improvements to the rights of way network are secured through planning applications and that the necessary funds and agreements are sought to implement improvements.



## DELIVER STATUTORY FUNCTIONS IN AN EFFICIENT WAY



A 10% sample of the network is surveyed every year by trained volunteers. The survey not only makes up part of the inspection programme but also provides a good indication of how much of the network is easy to use. Since 2002/03 the percentage of the network considered easy to use has doubled from 35% to over 76%.

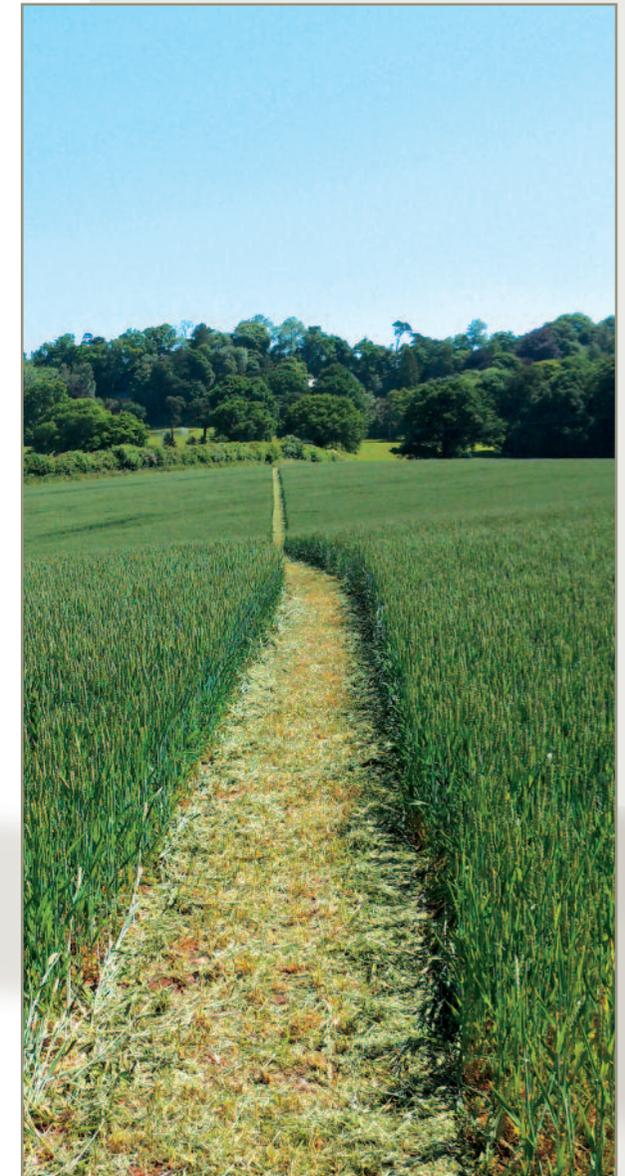
Resource constraints over the next decade will make it increasingly challenging to continue the upward trend.

Developing volunteer initiatives and partnerships with other organisations will help to make resources go further enabling us to continue to deliver our statutory functions as effectively as possible.

Maintain the 2013/14 % ease of use until 2025, and if possible, improve it.

When significant expenditure is required on the maintenance of a right of way, we will consider a diversion of the route (providing the legal tests are met) to reduce installation and future maintenance costs.

Continue to process and reduce the backlog of applications to modify the Definitive Map and Statement and work towards producing an updated Definitive Map and Statement.



## DEVELOP A SAFE & IMPROVED ACCESS NETWORK

Ways in which the path network can be improved and made safer for walkers, equestrians and cyclists, are better connectivity, improving road crossings, replacing stiles with gates and upgrading footpaths to multi-use paths.

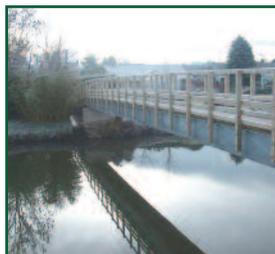
Improvements to the network, where appropriate, should be achieved alongside existing maintenance, especially where there are long term asset management benefits (e.g.: replacing a stile with a galvanised metal pedestrian gate). Whilst resources are limited for this kind of work, there are external sources of funding that can assist.

Development of a safer access network can also be achieved through financial contributions from developers and agri-environmental/land management schemes, which do not have a direct cost for the Highway Authority.

Rationalisation of rights of way will be a key consideration, when changes to the network are proposed through public path orders or development. Future network maintenance will be an important factor when improvements are sought as part of a public path order or development proposal.

Work with developers and relevant stakeholders to streamline, develop and improve the PRow network within and in the vicinity of development. Local mitigation and strategic improvements will be sought through public path orders and where necessary, physical works.

Create a list of routes currently available to those less able and also put forward for assessment those routes that could be improved.



When improving PRow or creating new PRow, an inclusive approach will be taken from the outset, so that wherever possible the routes will be accessible to horse riders, cyclists, walkers and those with visual and mobility impairments.

When creating, improving or diverting PRow, we will endeavour to improve connectivity of the network and improve safety when emergence onto or crossing a road is part of the proposal.

Work with Policy Planners and others to identify PRow which link communities, schools, services, public open space etc, that could be upgraded/improved to serve as multi-use routes.

## IMPROVE ACCESS INFORMATION



The public can view information on all public rights of way, their associated features such as gates/bridges etc, faults and relevant public registers on the internet. They can report faults that they have come across while walking, riding or cycling. However, there is still more that can be done to improve access to information. Information campaigns can be complementary and effective tools to assist officers with carrying out statutory duties.

Permissive paths (informal paths provided by landowners and organisations) can greatly enhance the public rights of way network, but the record of what exists is incomplete. A complete combined record of public and permissive access would be of much benefit to the public.

There is also limited information about easy access paths, e.g.: routes without stiles. Research for the first RoWIP showed that the main barrier for people with disabilities was not so much a shortage of easy access routes but a lack of co-ordinated accessible information about the routes that do exist.

Develop the interactive mapping website to provide detailed information on easy access paths.

Enhanced signage and waymarking, e.g.: destination, distance, etc, may be considered on promoted routes (national, regional & local).

Continue to liaise with landowners and other key stakeholders to collate and map permissive and other route information and formalise permissive access with agreements where necessary.

## WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH VOLUNTEERS AND KEY ORGANISATIONS

**Community Paths Partnership** is an umbrella term for many initiatives, the essence of them being the same, to encourage community involvement in the maintenance and improvement of the rights of way network at a local level. Community involvement and the use of volunteers should represent a cost saving, thus helping limited resources to go further. Individual initiatives are piloted (where necessary) and subsequently monitored to ensure they continue to deliver efficiency savings.

It is important that the Partnership is sustainable and does not rely too heavily on administrative support or on large amounts of funding. Examples of very successful initiatives include the Parish Path Liaison Officer and Trail Watcher schemes.

Whilst delivery of efficiencies by the effort of volunteers is a welcome benefit of the Partnership, the additional benefits of local ownership, engagement and awareness-raising should not be underestimated. The relationship with volunteers and local councils can help when staff need to speak to landowners.

There are also many large landowning agencies and organisations that we work with to improve the path network and it is vital that we maintain and develop strong partnerships with them.



Continue to work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders when developing, maintaining and implementing improvements to the PRoW network.

Continue to develop and maximise the benefit of the Community Paths Partnership and review and celebrate the success of individual initiatives.

Continue to work in partnership with neighbouring authorities to resolve cross-border maintenance, legal and improvement issues and to ensure consistency in the signage and maintenance standards of promoted routes.

## NEXT STEPS

### Implementation

Although it is a statutory duty to produce a RoWIP and review it when required there is no similar duty to implement it. There is no revenue funding for improvements and it is unlikely that there will ever be any dedicated funding to deliver all of the actions. Where possible, improvements to the existing network will be built into the routine maintenance programme, delivered through partnership initiatives or through planning gain. Actions shall be addressed in priority order so far as is possible within available resources.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Where possible, processes may be put in place to monitor the impact and/or success of an action. This will be particularly relevant to route development where people counters can be installed before and after improvements to illustrate any trends that may occur.

### RoWIP review

The RoWIP will be reviewed in 2024 or earlier if deemed necessary.

### RoW Legislation

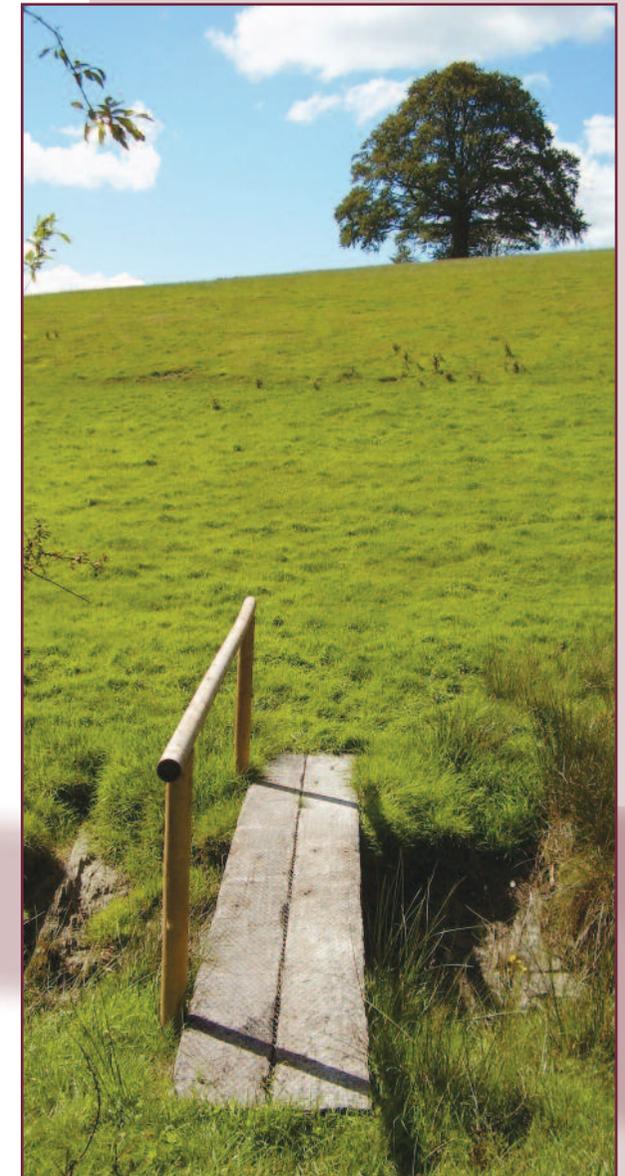
There may be further policy changes as a result of changes in legislation.

### You can also contact us by:

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