

**Buckinghamshire County Council**  
**Rights of Way Improvement Plan**  
**2008-2018**

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## **FOREWORD**

### **Cabinet Member for Community Services, Councillor Margaret Dewar,**

Welcome to Buckinghamshire County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2008-2018

This plan sets out the strategy for the rights of way network for the next ten years, identifying the priorities, actions and approach the Council will take in developing the network for the future.

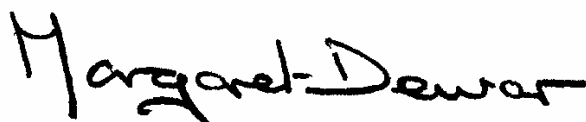
The 3,300 km network of public rights of way in Buckinghamshire is a considerable economic asset as well as an important part of the highway infrastructure. It provides opportunity for quiet recreation and improving health, as well as safer access to services and links between communities. There is, therefore, a significant opportunity for a more integrated approach to sustainable transport, leisure, tourism, land management and the management of rights of way within Buckinghamshire.

Our natural environment is Buckinghamshire's most beautiful and distinctive asset, often cited as the primary reason why people choose to live, work and visit the county and it is through our exceptional network of rights of way that the countryside is accessible and free for all to enjoy. We firmly believe that providing good access to the countryside is important to you and we have committed ourselves to improving access for everyone, regardless of location, age or ability.

Following direct consultation with the public, this final plan identifies 8 areas, our key themes, through which we will deliver various actions to look more widely at the use of rights of way in the county, developing them as an asset for all whilst seeking to protect the character of the countryside that we all enjoy so much.

This plan shows Buckinghamshire County Council's commitment to the protection and improvement of access to our countryside and I look forward to the continuing close working relationships that we have with our partners, user groups, volunteers and landowners to help us deliver these aims for the benefit of all who love and enjoy the countryside.

Finally I would like to thank everyone that helped in the delivery and publication of this plan and to those that contributed through the stages of consultation up to now.

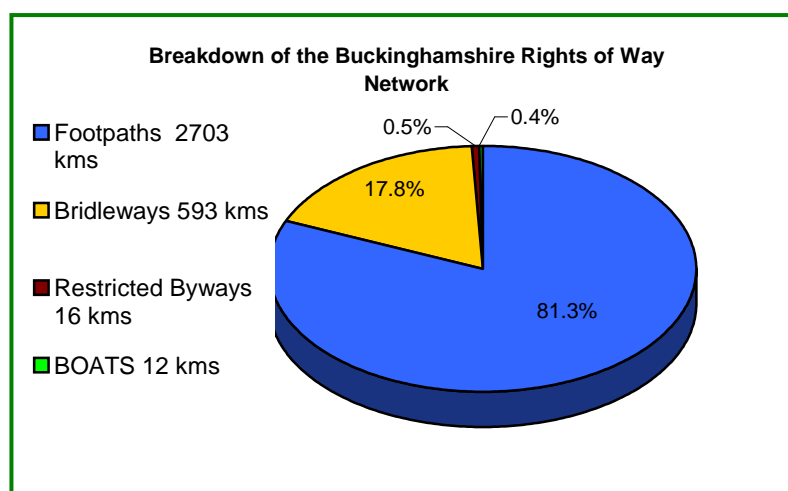
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Dewar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## **RIGHTS OF WAY IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

Public rights of way are the primary means for people to access the Buckinghamshire countryside and are defined in legislation. In simple terms, there are 4 types; Footpath, Bridleway, "Byway Open to All Traffic" (BOAT) and Restricted Byway.

This county offers:

- 2703kms of public footpaths - for use by walkers only
- 593kms of bridleways - for use by walkers, horse riders and cyclists
- 16kms of restricted byways - for use by walkers, horse riders, cyclists and non-motorised vehicles such as horse-drawn carriages
- 12kms of byways open to all traffic (BOATS) - for all users including suitable motorised vehicles.



**Figure 1: The Buckinghamshire rights of way network**

### **The access network**

Buckinghamshire offers an enormous level of access opportunities. In addition to the countywide network of rights of way, extending to 3324kms in length<sup>1</sup>, Buckinghamshire has 4783ha of green space<sup>2</sup> where the public have a legal right of access, incorporating 43ha of open access land, where people have the right to walk and, in some cases, ride and 1175ha of Common Land.

These access links are very important assets for local people, local businesses and visitors alike. Within a county that is 80% rural, they have served as access links to the countryside. Increasingly it has become clear that the rights of way network also serves and can serve a wider range of needs, becoming a multi-purpose network of routes and access opportunities. The network links communities together and is as important for those making trips on foot or bicycle for pleasure as it is for those making journeys to school, work, shops and other local amenities.

Not only are the access links important but they are set within a rich countryside scene. Historic landscapes such as the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Vale of Aylesbury and the Bernwood Ancient

<sup>1</sup> Figures accurate to December 2007

<sup>2</sup> As defined by the Buckinghamshire County Council Green Infrastructure Strategy

Hunting Forest provide magnificent backdrops that are visited in great numbers and are highly valued.

In short, the current access network offers opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding, carriage driving and off-roading to every community in Buckinghamshire. It is vital that these assets are well managed, well protected and that plans for their improvement are developed for the long term.

## **WHAT IS A RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)?**

Buckinghamshire County Council as the local Highway Authority is required by law to develop and produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), under section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act 2000).

The RoWIP must assess:

- How much local public rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- The opportunities provided by local public rights of way for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and leisure;
- The accessibility of local public rights of way to blind and partially sighted people and users with mobility problems.
- Other such matters relating to local rights of way that the Secretary of State may direct

### **Scope of the Plan**

The RoWIP is the Council's strategic document, setting out its aspirations and priorities for the public rights of way and countryside access network. These aspirations and priorities reflect our statutory duties and the needs of our partners and the public developed through the defined consultation process.

The plan will assess the rights of way network as defined by the CROW Act and subsequent guidance, to look at rights of way in their broadest terms, as a resource for the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Council will also assess the strategic context of the network and incorporate the impact of wider agendas into the plan for the network's management. The final Statement of Action will incorporate the Council's statutory duties, as well as the very significant role played by the Council's partner organisations.

The Council is legally obliged to review the plan at least once every ten years. It is likely to be reviewed and refreshed before that deadline to ensure that the Plan retains its links to wider agendas such as the Council's Corporate Plan, Local Transport Plan and relevant funding streams.

### **Funding the Plan**

The Buckinghamshire Plan is a deliberately ambitious and aspirational strategy. The Council will fund its statutory duties in respect of the Definitive Map and to maintain the network. However many of the plans and opportunities to develop and improve countryside access will challenge the Council to secure funding from other means.

The ability of the Council to deliver these outcomes, without further funding opportunities is limited. The successful delivery of the plan will depend on the Council's ability to source new partnership arrangements and external funding opportunities, as is the case at present.

The outcomes that can be delivered with existing funding, derived from the Council's revenue streams, Local Transport Plan funds, external grant sources, such as Natural England, and developer funded improvements as part of the growth agenda, will remain the priority to be delivered annually.

## **OUR VISION**

### **The Rights of Way Vision**

The Council will "Expand, manage and promote the network of routes and open spaces, recognising its historical and ecological significance whilst providing real economic benefits to the rural communities and health benefits to local people, to create safe and sustainable access provision for all."

The vision reflects both what is required to manage and improve the rights of way network in a wider context of access and the visions for Buckinghamshire as contained in the Buckinghamshire County Council Corporate Plan 2005-2009 and Sustainable Communities Strategy. This states:

### **The Corporate Vision**

"Buckinghamshire will be an excellent council that represents the interests of all residents by:

- Providing high quality services and delivering good value for money
- Working with customers and communities to deliver services they need
- Using modern business techniques to become more innovative and responsive to changing circumstances."

### **The Sustainable Communities Vision**

"In 2015, Buckinghamshire will have maintained its economic success and position as one of the most prosperous counties in England. At the same time it will enhance its environment and improve the well-being and quality of life of all its residents."

The visions for Buckinghamshire both stress the importance of the quality of life of its residents; focus on the needs of customers and the provision of top quality, effective and affordable services.

### **Delivering the Vision**

In order to deliver its vision, the Council has consulted widely to assess the rights of way network and develop its Statement of Action. These are set out later in the 8 themes with corresponding Action Plans.

The data from the consultation process has been the main driver behind the Action Plans. The next chapter looks at the consultation methodology and results in more detail.

## **STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

By providing a strategic framework for rights of way work in the county, giving direction to and ensuring coordination of activities and wider agendas, the RoWIP will focus its attention towards specific local access needs.

There are many agendas, directives and statutes that drive rights of way work. This plan seeks to identify those driving forces that shape the Council's priorities in this area.

### **The legislative framework**

Many statutes set out the County Council's legislative duties for the management of rights of way including the CROW Act 2000, Highways Act 1980 and Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The Council's main legal duties are set out within the individual themes but centre around the Council's primary duty to protect public rights of way, asserting the public's right to use and enjoy them and to develop access to the countryside in a way that is fit for 21<sup>st</sup> Century use.

The legislation behind the RoWIP is set out in the CROW Act 2000, sections 60-62 requiring the Council to set rights of way and countryside access in a **wide context**. Statutory guidance sets out the Government's intentions for local highway authorities, providing details of how each authority should prepare, publish, assess and review its plans.

The guidance requires that local authorities **fully assess the network** from a range of viewpoints and include a Statement of Action to secure the management and improvement of the network. The plan must be published and reviewed at a minimum of every 10 years as defined in the CROW Act.

Fundamentally, the Council has a duty under HA1980 to maintain the rights of way network. The Council recognises this as its core responsibility in ensuring the public can safely and easily access the countryside. Furthermore, the Council has specific duties contained in the WCA 1981 to maintain an up to date Definitive Map and Statement, the legal document that defines all public rights of way in the county and provides them with legal certainty. These duties are explored in greater detail in Themes 1 and 2.

### **Relating the RoWIP to other strategies**

Statutory guidance states that the plan must be developed within the context of other relevant plans and strategies produced by the Local Authority and its partners. The Council's corporate role as well as other local, regional, national and European factors continues to influence the provision of rights of way. Therefore the Council is very mindful of wider agendas in its desire to improve public rights of way in the county and to encourage their greater use.

In Buckinghamshire, rights of way work has always been an area with significant partnership involvement and this has led to wide participation in other agendas and plans to date. The Council's Improvement Plan will in turn influence other areas of service provision and wider partner action plans. The range of such plans is outlined here:

### **The Buckinghamshire County Council Corporate Plan 2006-2009<sup>3</sup>**

The Corporate plan sets out the Council's agenda and priorities for the lifetime of the present Council up to 2009. Based on an assessment of customer need, the plan identifies how the County Council intends to continue delivery of excellent quality services that are value for money.

High quality, cheaper services require community and partner involvement, in turn leading to stronger, more cohesive and vibrant communities. This is reflected in the aims of the rights of way strategy that actively seeks volunteer and community involvement.

The Corporate Plan strongly reflects the Council's duty to protect and enhance rights of way, emphasising that the work already in hand with key partners to provide a quality network of routes, in line with customer needs at a reduced cost, should continue and be encouraged. Many initiatives such as volunteer working arrangements and working directly with our key partners are already leading to an enhanced network at a reduced cost in some areas.

### **The Buckinghamshire Sustainable Communities Strategy<sup>4</sup>**

Buckinghamshire has a diverse population of approximately 479,000 that is going to change and increase rapidly over the coming 25 years. Therefore, a strategy for 'Sustainable Communities' is crucial for Buckinghamshire and is led by the requirements of the new Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This includes a new duty<sup>5</sup> to involve local people through Local Strategic Partnerships, as part of a best value regime. The Council's Sustainable Communities Strategy has been formulated to directly influence the way the Council looks to accommodate the needs of the changing customer base and deliver a Buckinghamshire Local Area Agreement through strategic partnerships.

The County Council fully recognises the rights of way network as one of the important assets that significantly adds to people's quality of life<sup>6</sup> and a significant aspect in the delivery of the vision for sustainable communities in the future.

In particular the involvement of local communities in the delivery of improvement works will assist in the building of strong, cohesive, diverse and empowered communities. This will allow all residents to improve their quality of life through the provision of a well maintained and protected network of countryside access for all to enjoy.

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<sup>3</sup> The full document can be accessed at [www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc)

<sup>4</sup> Full details of the strategy can be accessed at [www.bucksisp.org.uk](http://www.bucksisp.org.uk)

<sup>5</sup> Available to download at [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk). Section 3A

<sup>6</sup> Resident's survey data 2006

## **Delivering the Health Agenda**

'Healthier lifestyles' is a shared priority between central and local government and has raised the profile of delivering improved physical health and well-being within communities.

The Choosing Health white paper places greater responsibility on Local Authorities for the health of communities, with particular focus on obesity and sedentary lifestyles. There are many positive links between increased physical activity and improved physical and mental well-being that bind the health agenda to countryside access. In Buckinghamshire, this is delivered through a Local Area Agreement (LAA), led by the County Council with other key partners from the Bucks Strategic Partnership<sup>7</sup>.

The Council is already responsible for delivering certain targets within the LAA through rights of way provision and aims to improve physical health and increase participation in physical activity through the marketing of access opportunities and new schemes such as Simply Walk.

## **Buckinghamshire's 2nd Local Transport Plan 2006-2011**

Buckinghamshire County Council strongly values the traditional and historic nature of the rights of way network but is also under a duty to consider the whole network from a multi-purpose perspective that satisfies a wide range of local access needs. The network is no longer regarded as simple leisure routes but must cater for those that use the links for journeys to and from key services within education, employment, health, culture and economy.

In delivering this 'wider context' approach to rights of way provision, the ROWIP forms an integral part of the Council's Local Transport Plan<sup>8</sup>, where rights of way form part of a wider network of urban and rural routes that can deliver aspects of the 5 LTP themes; namely Road Safety, Tackling Congestion, Environment, Maintenance and Accessibility. This is explored in detail later in Theme 7, and the Local Transport Plan will continue to be a primary funding source for rights of way improvements.

With obvious links to sustainable transport, rights of way work is already partnered to the Transportation arenas of cycle lane provision, the development of greenways and quiet lanes, cycling and walking strategies, safer routes to school and passenger transport access to make steps toward the creation of multi-purpose routes.

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<sup>7</sup> Full details can be found at [www.bucksisp.org.uk/laa](http://www.bucksisp.org.uk/laa)

<sup>8</sup> Visit [www.buckscc.gov.uk](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk) to view the Second Local Transport Plan 2006-2011

## **Buckinghamshire's Green Infrastructure**

Green Infrastructure is defined as the network of multi-functional green spaces in the County, where rights of way, access links and accessible green spaces (country parks, common land, open access land, National Trust land and woodland) are the integral components.

The County Council highly values its historic and natural green infrastructure assets and seeks to ensure these are enhanced as part of the implementation of major development within the county. In order that growth is sustainable in the future, the County requires further green infrastructure and accessible green spaces to be realised in key areas.

Driven by the emergence of the new South East Plan for development and growth, Buckinghamshire's draft Green Infrastructure Strategy (2007) sets out the vision for the provision, enhancement and protection of accessible green space and links, and provides a framework for planning and utilising the opportunities presented by the growth agenda.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan sets out the strategy for such access links in particular. The two documents combine to deliver a network of links and spaces that serve a multi-functional purpose and share similar objectives, namely to create a sense of place, deliver access for all and sustainable movement through a targeted approach.

## **The Olympic Vision**

Between July 27 and August 12 2012, London will host the Olympic Games with the Paralympic Games being held between August 29 and September 9. The games represent an unparalleled opportunity in this country and in Buckinghamshire, where some of the events will be hosted. Dorney Lake in the south of the county will be the venue for rowing events, with Stoke Mandeville Stadium in Aylesbury, the venue for the Paralympic Games.

Within the structure of the London 2012 Group, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes has its own Olympic Co-ordination Group, which is engaging the local communities with the benefits of the Games. Not only will the events inspire many into pursuing sports of all kinds, the Games will generate widespread benefits from such active lifestyles, deriving economic prosperity, community involvement and new partnership opportunities.

The RoWIP recognises the aims of the Olympic Co-ordination Group to energise communities and seeks to deliver this through rights of way improvements and other opportunities with the Buckinghamshire Sport Partnership, which will have positive knock-on benefits for healthier and active communities.

## **Buckinghamshire's Countryside and Heritage**

Buckinghamshire has a highly treasured and valued countryside landscape<sup>9</sup>, full of opportunities to learn about the history, geology, archaeology and ecology in the County.

The rights of way network has a major role in providing and promoting access to the natural environment in its various guises; the built heritage; archaeological sites and flora and fauna of all types. Indeed many rights of way are routes of historic and ecological interest.

To assist the understanding and management of Buckinghamshire's landscapes and the associated historical and ecological heritage, the county council is developing the Buckinghamshire Environmental Character System<sup>10</sup>. It aims to ensure that we have the best available data about our environment, to protect and manage it accordingly.

The county's rights of way and open access areas also provide opportunities to enjoy the varied scenery, flora and fauna of woodlands, watercourses, downlands, heathlands, farmland and more. Public access to designated nature conservation areas such as the Chilterns AONB makes it possible to see rare and special flora and fauna. The priorities for biodiversity conservation in the county are set out in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan<sup>11</sup>.

## **Buckinghamshire's Cultural Strategy**

The Council has a duty to produce a Local Cultural Strategy to widen everyone's access to all forms of culture and foster pride in the area we live in. The Council's cultural vision<sup>12</sup> defines Culture as "*anything that makes life worth living*" and sets out 6 cultural objectives for the future focusing on: access, diversity, pride, creativity, regional contribution and young people. Overall it aims to strengthen and promote culture and leisure provision, make a difference to people and communities and increase culture's contribution to our way of life.

Developing culture incorporates the need to improve access to open spaces, countryside recreation and informal leisure pursuits. In particular, rights of way work contributes to the key themes of Well Being and Recreation, through the provision of countryside access and physical activity opportunities.

## **In summary**

It is clear that Buckinghamshire offers a network of rights of way that impact on many levels and within many agendas around the County. It is certain that the Council acknowledges all of these influences and will seek to utilise them positively over the course of this Plan to the benefit of wider access provision.

Many other agendas such as tourism, land management, social well being, climate change, sport development and economic prosperity also have an

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<sup>9</sup> 2005 residents survey data.

<sup>10</sup> Available at [www.buckscc.gov.uk](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk)

<sup>11</sup> [www.buckscc.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/biodiversity)

<sup>12</sup> "A Life Worth Living"<sup>12</sup> available at [www.buckscc.gov.uk](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk)

effect on the provision of rights of way and are picked up through the themed chapters.

## **CONSULTATION**

### **Consultation methodology**

The CROW Act 2000 and statutory guidance on the production of the ROWIP state that local authorities should consult widely about the needs of all users and potential users of the rights of way network in the County to fully assess the network.

The final RoWIP was produced, following a public consultation period between June and October 2007. Responses from parish councils, district councils, key partners and the general public allowed this final plan to be endorsed in 2008.

A variety of consultations were undertaken between 2005 and 2007 to gather views and opinions from a wide range of sources as well as a continuous process of engagement with the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum.

Many organisations and partners gave feedback during the consultation process including Natural England, local members, key partners, county and district councils, parish councils, officers, user groups, interested parties and the general public. The Council has listened to these views and incorporated them into the various Action Plans.

The consultation needed to assess:

1. How much local public rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
2. The opportunities provided by local public rights of way for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and leisure;
3. The accessibility of local public rights of way to blind and partially sighted people and users with mobility problems.
4. Other such matters relating to local rights of way that the Secretary of State may direct

### **The process of assessment**

To make this assessment, the Council has followed the statutory guidance, involving the:

- Study of the Definitive Map and Statement
- Collation of data on modifications to the Map and Statement
- Collation of data on requests for improvements to the network
- Collation of data on the condition of the network
- Undertaking of surveys on the needs of users
- Identification of relevant information within wider plans and strategies

## **ASSESSING THE RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK**

### **The needs of users**

The local Council considered the needs and circumstances of a wide range of people with a range of expectations, interests and levels of ability and considered the adequacy of the provision of:

1. The needs of different types and classes of user, including the mobility and visually impaired
2. The accessibility of the network especially off-road, cycling, carriage driving and horse riding users
3. Links with circular routes
4. Convenient and safe crossings of roads, rivers, canals and railways
5. The level of fragmentation, where ways carry different rights or end in dead ends
6. Routes that support local journeys to key services such as shops, schools, health facilities and transport hubs

### **Walkers**

Able walkers currently have the widest access opportunities with legal access to the all rights of way route types, common land and open access land. As a result consultation suggests that walkers are largely happy with the network provided and constantly seek new places to walk.

There are many types of 'walker', ranging from the traditional 'rambler' who might access many miles of the network on a regular basis, to local dog walkers accessing very local networks every day, over short distances. Other daily users include parents using paths to take children to school in safety, often with pushchairs or younger siblings. Older users take advantage of routes close to home with limited structures, whilst the very mobile use the network for recreation as an outdoor, no-cost gym. These responses from users strongly suggest that the Council needs to prioritise local walking networks and continue with its programme of reducing the number of structures on paths to improve access for all.

Long distance and regular walkers rely on wider information to enjoy the full benefits of the countryside. Issues such as missing signs and limited information on new routes were highlighted as key barriers to accessing the wider network. Conversely, dog walkers want more information about shorter, circular routes that are close to home and have requested dog accessible structures where possible.

Parents with young children want to be able to walk to school on routes accessible for pushchairs in greater safety, with greater ease, with fewer awkward structures to negotiate.

Older walkers want to know more about the gradients of paths and the surface conditions, seeing adverse cambers and muddy conditions as barriers. They also wish to see fewer structures on paths, specifically stiles that can be barriers to access for those with even slight mobility problems. Conversely, runners are not dissuaded by muddy paths and gradients and require

information about where the more challenging paths are, seeing the network of paths as a place of adventure. New users also seek wider information on where to go and enjoy themselves as well as information on their rights.

Another area the Council will consider is where paths meet with some of the more major, heavily trafficked roads. These locations will be reviewed against accident and safety data and, wherever possible, opportunities will be taken to secure improvements either from a safety viewpoint or in terms of providing additional linkages in the rights of way network.

One of the key areas for the Council will be to take all opportunities to secure safer crossings at road junctions, especially on the more major, heavily trafficked routes. This is not only a priority consideration for the council but is something regularly highlighted by the Ramblers Association and local people.

Whilst this feedback is not new or unexpected, the consultations carried out during the RoWIP production, highlight the concerns that people (users and non-users) have about countryside access, none of which is unique to Buckinghamshire. The County Council has long recognised the need for greater access to information, and already has a regular programme of works that delivers an annual reduction of structures and continually evolving information detailing where to go.

## Cyclists

The 593 kms of public bridleways, byways and restricted byways provide legal access to cyclists on less than 20% of the network. This, however, does not fully reflect the true extent of routes that are suitable and available for cyclists. There are many miles of County Council developed highway cycle lanes, an extensive length of routes with permissive cycle access and 50 miles of cycle routes on the Sustrans Regional and National Cycle Networks.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Buckinghamshire County Council has a reputation for healthy cycle access provision, for which it is nationally recognised.

As a result of consultations, cyclists and cyclist user groups such as the Cyclists Touring Club have identified improvements at many locations to improve and join network connections. In addition to an enhanced network, greater in length and accessibility, cyclists also want more and better information on where to go, with emphasis on long routes for the keen cyclists and short, circular, all weather surfaced routes for family cycle trips.

To deliver such improvements the Council will take advantage of the many opportunities that present themselves for enhanced cycle provision. In conjunction with the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Local Transport Plan, through planning and development issues or as a partnership approach with Sustrans and district councils, who seek improvements to the network of safe cycle routes throughout the county, work will continue to deliver an enhanced cycling network.

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<sup>13</sup> Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity

## Horse Riders

Similar to cyclists, equestrians have access to less than 20% of the countryside access network, a network that suffers from considerable fragmentation. As a result the network is relatively under-utilised considering the high volume of such users in Buckinghamshire. There are approximately 25 equestrian centres across the county with thousands of equestrians, many concentrated in the Chiltern and South Bucks districts where bridleway provision is less concentrated.

Horse riders have identified the fragmented nature of the bridleway network as their primary concern, a limitation that reduces the potential for modal shift as much as it prevents longer horse rides. Improvements in the vicinity of local livery yards and stables are keenly sought. Riders also want improvements to the condition of existing routes, considered too narrow or overgrown in certain places.

Despite such concerns, the Council has been extremely successful in creating new horse riding networks, by utilising land that it owns, negotiating access as part of planning considerations or simply by direct negotiation with landowners. Indeed, in 2006 the Council was presented with a National award by the British Horse Society in recognition for its work in creating new access for horse riders.

Safety of equestrians is also a key concern to the County Council. The safety of crossing points on the network has been highlighted by equestrians and although the history of recorded horse and vehicle accidents in the county is relatively few, there is no doubt that there is scope for further work to improve safety at key locations.

Horse riders have a highly valuable role in the local economy and the Council will continue to establish new countryside access that, as far as possible and appropriate, is multi-functional. Therefore, the creation of routes as public bridleways, for example, gives the opportunity to establish access for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, whilst supporting the objectives of the Local Transport Plan.

## Motorised Users

Buckinghamshire has relatively little in the way of an access network for off-road vehicle use, having a mere 12kms of byways. The majority of this length is also hard surfaced, leaving only a few kilometres of real off road access provision. It is unknown how many users access the countryside in this way and it is difficult to estimate whether the current network is sufficient for such use. There is no doubt that where there has been use by vehicles (or where use of certain routes is implied) that it is a subject of considerable concern within local communities. The Council has a specific policy on the Management of Vehicles in the Countryside, which, for the most part, follows guidance issued by Government.

Consultation data suggests that other, more vulnerable users are deterred from accessing parts of the network by motor vehicles on inappropriate routes. It is not the Council's experience that there is significant damage

caused by the level of unauthorised off road vehicular activity, although some parts of the network – especially urban fringe areas – do suffer from illegal motorcycle usage. Where problems do arise relating to motorised access on the network, the Council will look to follow its policy guidelines through the management and monitoring of vehicle use but may ultimately, take action to protect the environment and vulnerable users through police enforcement where applicable<sup>14</sup>. The Council is not in favour of any increased access to the countryside by motorised vehicles.

### **Landowners**

As well as identifying the needs of users, it is essential that quality access is balanced with the needs of landowners and agriculture.

Approximately 30% of the access network lies on agricultural land where the reinstatement of paths is vital to keeping links open. Landowners and farmers want users to act responsibly by keeping to identified paths whilst users want farmers to fully and adequately reinstate paths on arable land so that they are safe and convenient to use throughout the growing cycle. Landowners are under an obligation to maintain structures such as stiles and gates on their land and ensure that hedges do not obscure paths.

As part of the consultation process, users identified aggressive landowners as a primary reason for choosing not to access the countryside. In practice this type of conflict rarely occurs. For the most part, landowners understand the obligations they have to keep their paths open and accessible and the majority comply with this without need for direct intervention by the Council. The Council has its own obligations to ensure that public rights of way are protected and available for use at all times and, if necessary, will resort to the powers that it has to enforce the law.

### **The accessibility of the network for all users**

At first glance the availability of the network would seem beyond question, covering thousands of kilometres in every corner of the County. But are the paths accessible? Users need networks that are close to home that provide links between town and country, to services and provide links to other communities. Therefore the question of accessibility depends upon how close the network is to both users and potential users.

People tend to use routes that are close to home, within 500m of where they live. It is therefore reasonable to assess a route's accessibility based on its proximity to a population centre. 1811kms of the network, roughly 53%, lies within 500m of the main urban settlements that house 63% of the population<sup>15</sup>. All Parishes in the county have public rights of way and, on this basis a considerable section of the network is highly accessible for the majority of the Buckinghamshire residents on foot.

From a standpoint of users such as carriage drivers, cyclists and horse riders, the network is less than adequate. The Council fully recognises that the

<sup>14</sup> To view the policy of motorised vehicle use in the Countryside visit [www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights\\_of\\_way](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights_of_way)

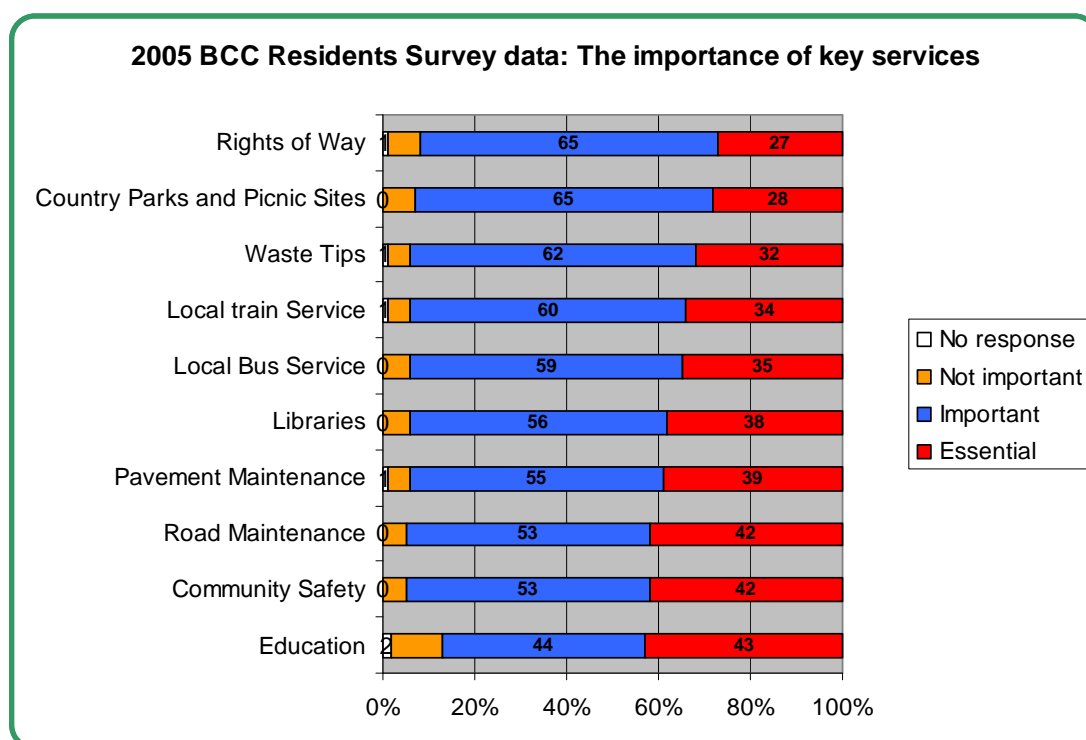
<sup>15</sup> Based on the DEFRA classification of urban/rural areas (2004), Buckinghamshire has 311,303 people (Census 2001 data) living in areas with a population greater than 10,000.

network is fragmented to these groups in many locations and there is a need for strategic improvements to deliver continuous long distance access opportunities.

### The opportunities for exercise, outdoor recreation and leisure

To know what people think of the opportunities for outdoor recreation, it is first important to know how important rights of way are in Buckinghamshire. The graph below is derived from data collected by the 2005 Residents' Survey that polled 2000 face to face interviews within five community areas. People were asked to say whether a particular service was *important*, *essential* or *not important*.

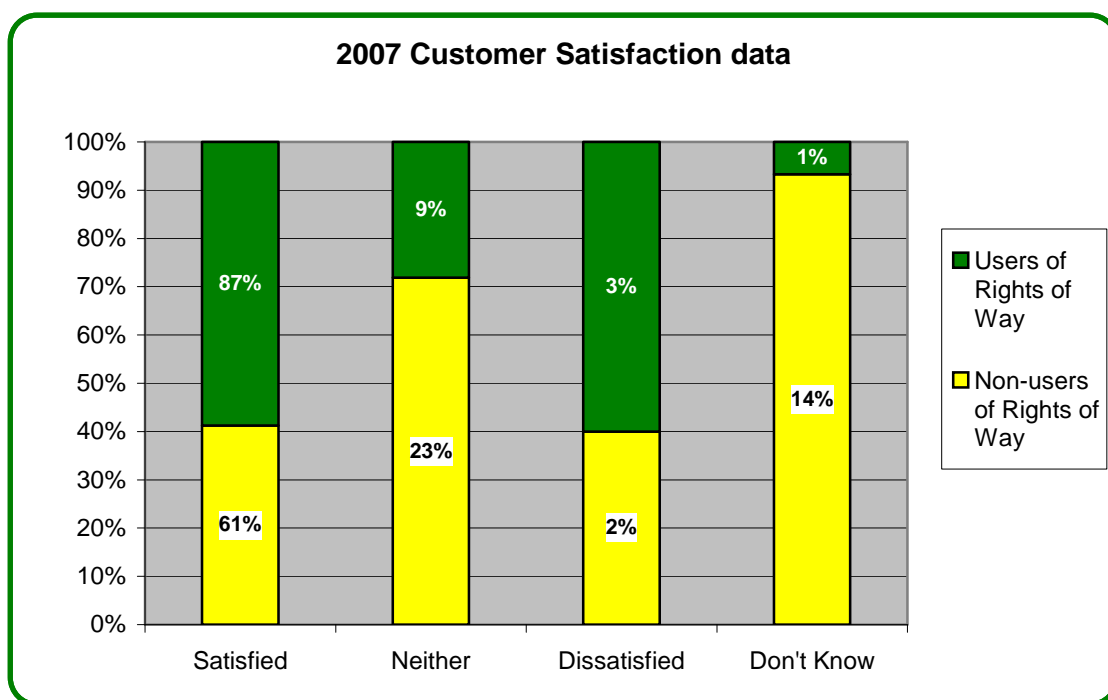
The graphic shows the top ten most essential services to the public and reveals that the countryside network, including rights of way is highly regarded. 92% concluded their existence was either important or essential.



**Figure 2: The importance of the rights of way network**

Furthermore the survey concluded that country rights of way network were considered valuable services to protect within the County's Corporate Plan.

This builds an encouraging picture that rights of way are important to the people of Buckinghamshire. Figure 2 draws data from the 2005 residents survey and shows that, customer satisfaction is very high specifically related to rights of way provision. Users were asked their opinion of the existing network and 87% of users and 61% of non users were *satisfied*. The Council now hopes to build upon this success but is encouraged that the data suggests the network meets the needs of the majority of Buckinghamshire's overall population.

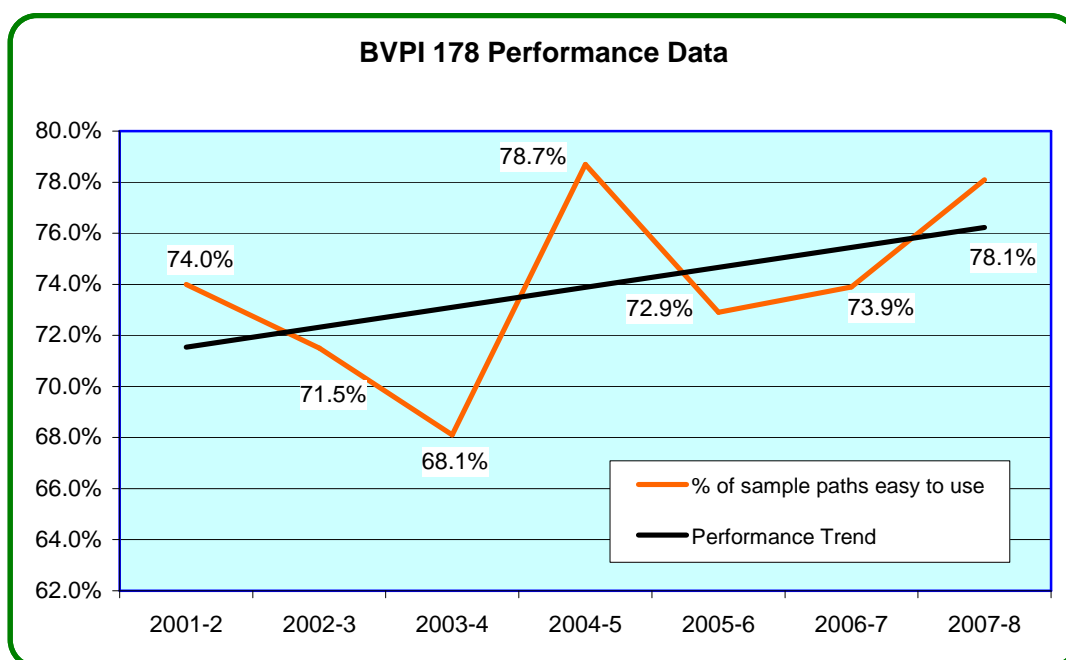


**Figure 3: Customer satisfaction with rights of way provision**

In addition to high customer satisfaction and our consultation data, the condition of the network is nationally regarded as excellent, albeit not perfect. BVPI 178 is the national performance measure relating to rights of way and assesses each local authority based on the “% of total length of rights of way in the local area, which are easy to use by the general public.”<sup>16</sup>

Although mid-quartile nationally with a score of 73.9% in 2006/7, the Council’s network ranks well above the national average (69%). The Council has made it a priority to regain top quartile status and, in this respect, has secured additional capital investment in each of the three years 2007-08 to 2009-10 to deliver improvements across the County.

<sup>16</sup> The Audit Commission Performance Indicator Reference Guide, 2004/5, visit [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/performance](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/performance)



**Figure 4: Buckinghamshire's BVPI 178 performance since 2001.** <sup>17</sup>

Nationally, the public rights of way network is believed to be under-utilised, with only 35% of all paths surveyed in 2000<sup>18</sup> considered to be "*frequently used*" and only 27% "*occasionally used*". The remaining 38% are "*rarely used*". The Council does not have further data on visitor numbers due to the difficulty and expense of implementing appropriate monitoring systems on the network, but consultation data suggests that people use many parts of the network all year round, whatever the weather and at varying times. Various parts are used daily for walking to work and walking to school, as well as dog walking, cycling for pleasure and horse riding. The network as a whole is used less often to visit attractions or have family days out.

Furthermore, the Council has a very good understanding of the needs and feelings of the people of Buckinghamshire and users in general. This is derived from the very high level of public interaction with the Council's Rights of Way service. This strongly implies not only the extent to which the network is used but the value that is placed upon it and the desire by the people of Buckinghamshire for a quality service.

The Council has historically not collected data from whole routes, preferring instead to ascertain accurate figures from specific locations, where counters can be installed. Where appropriate the Council will look to develop data on whole routes using volunteers, counters and periodic surveys to gather such data over the long term in a cost effective manner. Whilst such information could prove helpful for individual paths in order to calculate their value or levels of use, such activity is currently a low priority.

<sup>17</sup> Unaudited 2007-8 BVPI 178 data

<sup>18</sup> Countryside Agency Survey of 2000

## Assessing the needs of the Mobility and Visually Impaired

The CROW Act requires the Council to assess the accessibility of the network for those people with mobility problems and those who are blind or partially sighted. This can include those with children and pushchairs, and ailments such as asthma and arthritis as much as it does those in wheelchairs or who walk with a guide dog.

The countryside network of rights of way will always have barriers to some users and some areas will only be accessible to the fittest and most mobile. The needs of users that have audio, visual and mobility needs or a combination of them all, have a range of individual requirements. This leads to a picture of considerable complexity, where a vast range of improvements would have to be implemented to satisfy each circumstance. In the medium term, such improvements will be limited. However, the Council will carefully consider what improvements are made to benefit the majority of such users.

To develop this, the Council undertook an initial consultation in 2007 to identify the main barriers to access on the network and highlight the extent of the problem in the County. The survey was sent to a range of individuals and specific users groups (209 people in total) and delivered a variety of positive and negative experiences.

Impairments of any nature will have a greater or lesser effect on a user's ability to access the countryside. This is substantiated by the consultation, data where 43% claimed to be occasional users of the network and 36% regular users. This is highly encouraging and suggests that significant areas of the network are already sufficiently accessible for even the least mobile. It is certain that with greater attention to the delivery of 'access for all' improvements, all users including those with impairments would use the network in greater numbers and on a wider range of routes.

Such users are dependent on having access to the network close to home to access it regularly. The consultation data states that many access the network via car, especially on trips further afield and are almost always reliant on enjoying the routes with other people. Furthermore, those with a mobility problem expressed the need for improved information about routes and what they might find in terms of barriers and surface problems rather than widespread surface improvements or the creation of fully wheelchair accessible routes. In this respect, the Council will continue to target the removal of barriers and some surface improvements where most relevant and in demand but will also look to considerably improve the quality of information that is available.

Wherever possible, the Council will look to take action that encourages greater access to the countryside for its diverse population. In the short to medium term it will look to continue the work to remove the physical barriers to access. It is accepted that even this must be balanced. There are still a large number of stiles on paths in the county and it needs to be recognised that in many cases these will remain much-loved characteristics of a countryside walk.

Finally the consultation highlighted the types of barriers and issues that can prevent access and these are explored in Theme 6: the Access for All section.

Ultimately, the Council's aim in this area is to deliver improvements to allow a higher proportion of the network to be accessible to those with mobility and visual ailments and to ensure that the needs of people with mobility problems are fully developed and understood. Additionally, due to the low level of responses from key impaired user groups, the Council aims to follow this survey with a second and more detailed version through the course of this plan to develop this data further for a wider range of impaired users.

## **IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN**

The consultation work has delivered a range of results that cover the whole county very broadly. However, Council services are increasingly targeted towards a locally supported, parish and community led system of working and it is the Council's intention to deliver the improvement plan through a local framework.

This strategy will be supplemented by annual action plans, with delivery by the Council and local communities in partnership, and will seek to fulfil both the Council's aims and those of our partners as well as the needs of local communities.

The RoWIP is an intentionally aspirational plan, and has no specific sources of funding to deliver it. The ability of the Council to deliver the aims of the plan will depend very much on its ability to source new partnership arrangements and external funding opportunities, as is the case at present.

The plan is essential, however, as it states a clear intention to raise the standards of rights of way provision for the years ahead. It can be used as a guide to all who work with and in partnership with Buckinghamshire County Council as a tool that clarifies priorities and performance outcomes as well as establishing a long term vision for improved access to Buckinghamshire's countryside.

Additionally, Buckinghamshire County Council aims to use the RoWIP as a way of securing funding from external sources for vital access improvements and initiatives. There is high demand for access improvements from the general public and, through an established strategy, the Council will be in a strong position to work in partnership with developers, national bodies such as DEFRA<sup>19</sup> and Natural England and other third parties, whether local, regional or national, to deliver more through new funding opportunities.

### **Monitoring progress**

The RoWIP is aspirational and sets high standards to deliver significant improvements, with many of the targets linked directly to the LTP themes with the associated implication of how rights of way work assists in the delivery of national targets and indicators. Monitoring the implementation of the RoWIP over the period 2008 to 2018 will, therefore, be focussed in the following main ways.

- Regular reporting to the Local Access Forum
- Production of an Annual Report
- Regular delivery reports through the Local Transport Plan
- BVPI 178

### **Assessing the Plan**

Natural England and DEFRA will assess the final RoWIP and feedback from this will be delivered to the Local Access Forum. The Council will evaluate the

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<sup>19</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); visit [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

plan on an ongoing basis, throughout its four year term and will seek to deliver a new plan at least every 10 years following the conclusion of the first plan in 2018.

## **THE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM (LAF)<sup>20</sup>**

### **The Role of the Forum**

The CROW Act 2000 places a duty on the County Council to establish and maintain a Local Access Forum. The LAF is an independent advisory body that aims to improve recreational and utilitarian access to the Buckinghamshire countryside for all users, whilst enabling landowners and managers to make the best of their land. Membership now stands at 15, with representatives from key partner organisations, local people and Local Members.

The County Council provides officer support to the Forum, advising it on current issues and project delivery and the Forum supports the decision making process, advising the Council on local perspectives. The inaugural meeting of the Forum was held in March 2003 and meets quarterly.

The Government issued new statutory guidance for LAFs in 2007 designed to widen the scope of their work and the number of organisations that need to be mindful of the advice of the Forum. Any member of the public or organisation can ask to speak at the Forum to raise local issues.

The ultimate aim of the Buckinghamshire Forum is:

To advise appropriate bodies as to the improvement of public access land (by foot, by horse, cycle, canoe, mechanically propelled vehicles or any other lawful means for the purposes of open air recreation and enjoyment.<sup>21</sup>

### **Chairman of the BCC Local Access Forum, John Elfes**

The Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum congratulates the County Council on the production of the 2008-2018 Rights of Way Improvement Plan and is pleased to endorse it.

Our Forum has worked with the Council to generate and develop ideas, and was directly involved in the production of the plan in a steering group capacity. We were glad to be consulted and engaged throughout its development and now look forward to delivering the outcomes of the plan in conjunction with the Council in the years ahead.

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<sup>20</sup> [www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights\\_of\\_way](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights_of_way)

<sup>21</sup> DEFRA Guidance on LAFs in England, section 3.2.4

## **THE STATEMENT OF ACTION**

### **Themes**

1. [Mapping the Network](#)

Focus on: The Definitive Map

2. [Looking after the Network](#)

Focus on: Maintenance and Enforcement

3. [Creating New Links](#)

Focus on: Strategic Access Improvements

4. [Knowing where to go](#)

Focus on: Marketing the network of routes

5. [Looking after You and the Environment](#)

Focus on: Linking rights of way to environmental and health issues

6. [Rights of Way for Everyone](#)

Focus on: Access for all

7. [Delivering the Corporate Agenda](#)

Focus on: Wider Corporate strategies

8. [Working in Partnership](#)

Focus on: Local Community Involvement

## **OUR AIMS IN BRIEF**

- 1) Deliver an accurate and fully up to date Definitive Map and Statement (DMS)
- 2) Provide and protect a well maintained rights of way network
- 3) Publicise public rights of way and access information and the DMS
- 4) Deliver a better integrated and more accessible rights of way network
- 5) Improve the use and enjoyment of the rights of way network
- 6) Improve the asset management of the rights of way network
- 7) Provide an efficient, value for money service supported by high customer satisfaction
- 8) Support safe, strong and cohesive communities
- 9) Protect and assert the County's National Trails and Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- 10) Improve access to 'Open Access' sites
- 11) Deliver economic benefits to local communities and businesses.
- 12) Generate positive historical, environmental and biodiversity benefits.
- 13) Deliver health benefits for users and residents.

## **THEME 1: MAPPING THE NETWORK**

### **Improving the way we record data on public rights of way**

The County Council has an excellent record of delivering a well protected and recorded network of rights of way. Nevertheless, the Council aims to continuously improve the way it records and protects the existing network through the constant development of the Definitive Map and Statement, and the methods of making it more accessible.

The Council has an efficient process to deal with applications to modify the Map and Statement and has set high standards to deliver an improved and effective service to the public. This will include progress towards fully informed and interactive maps available on the Internet.

### **The Definitive Map and Statement (DMS).**

The Definitive Map and Statement is the legal record of public rights of way and the established method of recording the location of all known rights of way in Buckinghamshire. It is conclusive evidence that the rights of way shown on it exist and allow public access unless there has been a legally authorised change.

The map shows footpaths, bridleways, byways and restricted byways over the whole county. The statement supports the map and although it does not describe each right of way shown, it gives details in some instances of the width of a route and of any limitations or conditions attached to the public's rights of access. Buckinghamshire County Council undertakes the statutory duties to keep the map and statement under review and making it available for public inspection.

### **Definitive Map Duties and Responsibilities.**

As the Surveying Authority, the County Council has a considerable number of statutory duties placed upon it, which govern how it must record the rights of way network. A summary of the most significant Council duties and powers are listed here.

#### **The Council's Definitive Map Duties**

- To hold a Definitive Map and Statement of all known public rights of way and keep it under continuous review by making modification orders where necessary.  
[Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA 1981) section 53]
- To consider applications from landowners for public path diversion or extinguishment orders.  
[CROW 2000 Schedule 6 & 7-10]
- To maintain a register of applications for diversions and extinguishment orders, modification orders and HA 1980 section 31(6) depositions  
[CROW 2000, Schedule 6]

#### **The Council's Additional Legal Powers for Definitive Map Work**

- To create public rights of way by Agreement / Order [Highways Act 1980 (HA80) s25-26].

- To divert or extinguish public rights of way [HA80 s116, 118, 119].
- To stop up or divert rights of way to enable development to be carried out.  
[Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA 1990) s257].
- To make orders to create cycle tracks.  
[Cycle Tracks Act 1984 (CTA 1984) s3]

### **Making changes to the Map and Statement**

The term “Definitive Map” is slightly misleading, as it can never be considered to be 100% up to date. Although the map shows all legally recorded routes, rights may exist in other locations that are not recorded, or additional rights may exist on already recorded routes. Therefore work is always ongoing to deliver the most accurate map and statement possible.

Where user groups, landowners or residents allege alternative rights, procedures exist under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to enable the allegations to be tested. These procedures allow the Council to make Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs) to amend the map and statement. Such orders are entirely based on evidence of use and are determined without consideration of the suitability of the proposal or the public’s needs or wishes. In that sense the only consideration is ‘do those rights exist or not’. The Council aims to determine all applications within 12 months of receipt.

Definitive Map Modification Orders are made to amend the map and do not necessarily involve changes on the ground. The orders enable Buckinghamshire County Council to:

- Add new rights of way on the basis of their existence and usage,
- Record additional rights to existing routes (for example, amending a footpath to a bridleway),
- Remove recorded rights from existing routes (for example, amending a bridleway to a footpath),
- Delete a right of way from the map,
- Amend the details of the right of way without changing its status (for example, changes to the recorded width).

To ensure that the Map and Statement are as up-to-date as possible the County Council produces a consolidated Definitive Map and Statement on a regular basis. The consolidated map includes all the changes that have been made through the making of Public Path Orders and Creation Agreements. The last consolidation was undertaken in 2002 and a further consolidation is scheduled for 2008. The aim is to continue with future ‘consolidations’ at least every 5 years.

### **Making changes to the rights of way network**

The Council has powers to make changes to the network through the process of a Public Path Order (PPO). These powers enable the Council, where appropriate to divert, extinguish or create new routes. Any member of the

public can apply to have changes made to the network, following an initial meeting with the Council regarding their proposal<sup>22</sup>.

Where an application for a change to the network is received, the Council will make a decision whether or not to proceed with making an order within 4 months of receipt. This allows time to be given to the necessary research and consultation within the process.

This process can sometimes be lengthy, and may involve discussions with landowners and users, and research into the benefits of such changes. The Council makes a charge for this service.

The CROW Act has introduced a new 'right' for owners of agricultural land to apply for an order to divert paths and this process will be dealt with similar to that outlined above.

### **Adding New Paths to the Definitive Map and Statement**

The Council has powers under HA80 section 25 to enter into agreements with owners of land to dedicate new rights for the public. It also has powers under section 26 to create such rights by Order, without consent from the owner of the land.

These powers will be particularly important to the Council in the rollout of this Plan, enabling the Council to provide new access and improved linkages within the current network. Wherever possible, the Council will do this in conjunction with landowner requirements elsewhere but, wherever the Council feels it needs to take action to secure additional access, it will make use of its powers to create new access compulsorily. It will, though, be mindful of the needs of landowners and farmers when making such judgements.

### **Highways Act 1980 Section 31(6)**

Section 31(6) of the Highways Act 1980 enables a landowner to deposit a statutory declaration with the Council showing ways that are dedicated as highways, enabling them to protect land against further claims for future rights made on use. A Register of such declarations is kept on the County Council's website.

### **“Discovering Lost Ways” and Extinguishing Unrecorded Public Rights**

Whilst the Definitive Map is 'conclusive' evidence of the existence of a public right of way, the reverse is not true – i.e. public rights can exist that are not currently recognised by the County Council on the Map. As mentioned earlier, there exists through the Definitive Map Modification procedure, the means to add paths to the Map or amend the rights shown on discovery of evidence. This can be an extremely lengthy process.

The CROW Act 2000 attempts to draw a line under this continuing uncertainty by setting out that all previously unrecorded public rights will be extinguished on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026 and that, as a consequence, highway authorities would

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<sup>22</sup> To discuss changes to the network in your area, please contact the relevant Area Office by calling Highways on Call on 0845 230 2882

need to research documentary records to identify any such routes not presently recorded.

Clearly as this will be an extensive task for local authorities nationwide, the Government under the auspices of Natural England, has commissioned consultants to undertake the research nationally on a phased basis over the coming years. Referred to as the 'Discovering Lost Ways' Project, this will identify, as far as possible, where records indicate that a modification to the Definitive Map may be needed and provide the information direct to the Council concerned. Currently it is anticipated that this research will be undertaken in the Buckinghamshire area around 2012, well in advance of the 2026 cut-off date.

Alongside the issues of unrecorded rights, the Government felt that it needed to address a specific problem. Previously, if evidence existed that a route was a public right of way for vehicles in a bygone age (those vehicles being horse-drawn), then that would give rise to a right of way for vehicles today (with vehicle meaning any vehicle). This is now addressed through the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, which provides that use by non-mechanically propelled vehicles will not give rise to the existence of rights for mechanically propelled vehicles. All unrecorded rights for motorised vehicles are, as a consequence, (with a few exceptions) extinguished.

However, this only affects modifications to the map based on documentary or map based historic evidence of public rights. It will still be possible for public rights to come into being by virtue of use by the public for a period of 20 years, even beyond 2026.

### Commons Registration

Common Land and Village and Town Greens are an essential local resource. 4% of all land nationally<sup>23</sup> is protected from development under this guise and there are 1175 hectares in Buckinghamshire.

The Council as the Registration Authority is required to maintain the Registers of Common Land and Town and Village Greens in the county and to respond to searches of the registers<sup>24</sup>. The Council responds to approximately 2000 Commons and Town and Village Greens searches over the course of each year. Each search is returned within 2 days and as requests are made throughout the year, there is a constant demand on resources.

In 2006, the Commons Act was launched which placed further duties onto Local Authorities to manage Common Land. It now allows mistakes on the registers to be rectified through a simpler process and enables Common Land to be de-registered and exchanged.

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<sup>23</sup> DEFRA website

<sup>24</sup> Commons Registration Act 1965 and the Commons Act 2000

## Village and Town Green Applications

Anyone can apply to have land registered as Town or Village Green, but specific criteria apply in all cases. New legislation on town and village greens came into force in April 2007, such that

- There must be a significant use of the area by the local inhabitants for lawful sports and pastimes, as of right, for a period of 20 years or more, or:
- This use of the land must either be continuing at the date of the application, or have ended not more than 2 years before that date.

This now means that landowners can voluntarily register their land as a town or village green. Buckinghamshire County Council has a duty to register the land as long as all required consents are given

## How Rights of Way Data is Held

Because the Definitive Map and Statement is a legal document, the Council has been (and continues to be) legally obliged to print a version, keeping it bound for public inspection. It has also deposited individual maps at district and parish council offices for their relevant areas so that they can be inspected by the public at all reasonable times. Improvements need to be made to the way that information about the Map is disseminated.

For the purposes of carrying out its work, the Council maintains the Map on a computerised Geographical Information System, a high-tech solution that enables the Council to store a high level of data against individual paths. This system is very sophisticated in that it records the locations of all path furniture (such as signs, bridges, stiles, gates, etc) as well as the locations of all reported problems.

Clearly, as a management tool, this has become essential but it is well recognised that having this level of information available for the public would be an exceptional asset. Information of this kind could, potentially,

- Provide basic information to the public about where they can walk, ride or cycle
- Allow people to understand what they might expect or encounter on any given route
- Provide details of known problems or planned works on any route
- Allow for better planning for anyone wishing to take a walk
- Allow the public and user groups to provide information interactively in respect of any problems they encounter

By providing this level of detail over the Internet would, potentially, open up a much enhanced level of service and enthuse those wishing to access the rights of way network.

## **In summary**

### **You said...**

- 1) A well protected and well recorded network is important to you.
- 2) Improved access to the Definitive Map and Statement through a web based facility would be of use.
- 3) The Council should use its powers to amend paths and routes where benefits to users will be realised.
- 4) The Council should investigate potentially unrecorded rights before the 2026 deadline.

### **Buckinghamshire County Council will...**

- 1) Continue to consolidate the DMS on an ongoing basis after legal event changes, usually within 5 years
- 2) Seek to implement an interactive web based mapping facility for the whole rights of way network.
- 3) Consider all applications for PPOs, DMMOs, Common Land and Village Greens in line with the appropriate legislation.
- 4) Seek to define, with Natural England and LAF involvement, a clear process for identifying unrecorded routes in the short term and resolving them by the 2026 deadline.
- 5) Provide new access either by agreement with landowners or, where necessary, by Order.
- 6) Further integrate the DMS with the Council's List of Streets to form an integrated highways asset management plan.

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	Timescale	Resources	
<b>What is our aim?</b>	<b>How will we do this?</b>	<b>What we will monitor.</b>	<b>What is our deadline?</b>	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<b>1.1</b> To uphold our duty to deliver an up to date Definitive Map and Statement	Through efficient and transparent processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider all applications with regard to Public Path Orders, Definitive Map Orders, Common Land registrations, Cycle Track Orders and Village Greens</li> <li>• Update the DMS after legal event changes</li> <li>• Consolidate the DMS at least once every 5 years.</li> <li>• Reduce the number of map anomalies annually</li> </ul>	Ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPOs are determined within 4 months</li> <li>• DMMOs are determined within 12 months</li> <li>• Village Green Applications are determined within 12 months</li> <li>• Common Land Searches are responded to within 2 days</li> <li>• Deliver a consolidated definitive Map, accessible on the internet and in key offices</li> <li>• Annually report the number of outstanding anomalies on the DMS</li> </ul>	Ongoing work	This is deliverable with existing resources	No
<b>1.2</b> To improve public rights of way network information and the DMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a web based interactive map of the DMS</li> <li>• Continue to make the DMS available to view at County Hall, major libraries and all Parish and District Council offices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver a web based interactive map</li> <li>• Deliver a consolidated DMS to partners once every 5 years</li> </ul>	Interactive map is ongoing work  Consolidated Map in 2008 / 13 / 18	A fully interactive web map system will require specific funding	IT partnerships are required
<b>1.3</b> To deliver a better integrated and more accessible rights of way network	The Council and LAF will work with Natural England to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, evidence and resolve unrecorded routes and 'Lost Ways' before the 2026 deadline</li> <li>• Correlate the Definitive Map and List of streets as part of an integrated Highways Asset Management Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued LAF involvement in prioritising rights of way improvements</li> <li>• Work begins with Natural England by 2012</li> <li>• Resolution of unrecorded routes and Lost Ways by 2026</li> </ul>	NE work begins in Buckinghamshire by 2012  Completion by 2026 deadline	NE resources will be required to fully investigate unrecorded routes	LAF, parish, public and NE essential

## **THEME 2: LOOKING AFTER THE NETWORK.**

### **Managing and maintaining the rights of way network**

Buckinghamshire County Council aims to deliver a well maintained rights of way network that provides an enjoyable and high quality experience to all who use it. Through long term investment the network will become easier to access for a multitude of people, using better surfaces and structures where they are needed, combined with improved signage and information.

The Council aims to deliver a network that is efficiently and soundly managed, where priorities for maintenance and development are established and link with wider Council policies. As a result, the public will benefit from a service that delivers an improved standard of maintenance that is affordable.

The Council will also seek further funds to deliver improvements to the quality of the network to ensure that rights of way in Buckinghamshire rank amongst the best in the Country. With the help of partner organisations and by making the most of opportunities as they arise, the network will continue to evolve as an essential leisure and utilitarian asset for everyone.

### **Maintenance of the network**

The County's network experiences high levels of demand and there is a high public expectation for quality routes. As a result, the majority of available funds and resources are diverted towards the Council's core duty of maintaining the existing network to the highest possible standard, ensuring that users can access the network at all times and that no illegal barriers or obstructions prevent access.

Our priority is to ensure that rights of way are safe to use. Reports of problems potentially affecting the safety of the public remain the paramount. The Council monitors the level of resources given to all areas of the network through regular progress reporting based on a problem management matrix referred to later in this section.

### **The Council's Duties for the Maintenance of the Network**

- To assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of all rights of way and prevent so far as possible their obstruction. [Highways Act 1980 section 130, amended by CROW 2000 section 63]
- To maintain all public rights of way [HA 1980 s41]
- To enforce the reinstatement of footpaths and bridleways that have been lawfully ploughed or disturbed [HA 1980 s134]
- To erect and maintain signposts where any type of right of way meets with a public road. [Countryside Act 1968 s27]
- To erect signposts, where in the opinion of the Highway Authority there is a need to assist people unfamiliar with the locality. [CA 1968 s27]
- To have regard to the needs of people with mobility problems when authorising structures on footpaths. [CROW 2000, s69]

In addition to statutory duties, the Council has powers to make improvements to the network. In maintenance terms these are secondary priorities to the statutory duties and are implemented where resources are available and agreements can be reached.

### **The Council's Legal Powers**

- To erect or maintain signposts along any right of way [CA 1968 s27].
- To improve or widen a right of way [HA 1980, s62 & s72].
- To construct a bridge to carry a public right of way [HA 1980 s92].
- To remove an illegal structure from a right of way [HA 1980 s143].
- To require maintenance work to be undertaken on stiles and gates [HA 1980 s146].
- To require the cutting back of vegetation overhanging a right of way. [HA 1980 s156].
- To make traffic regulation orders. [RTRA 1984 s1 and s14].

### **Surface maintenance**

The majority of the county's public rights of way have no formal surface running, predominantly, on natural ground. Only a relatively small percentage of the network has any form of man-made surface. This might be where paths follow private roadways and tracks, or where the Council has, itself, applied a surface as a means of improvement or to keep routes in a suitable state of repair. The Council's data on surface condition is incomplete for the entire network and further work to complete this for the whole county will be undertaken through a 10-year plan.

Although looking to improve access of the whole network, the Council does not anticipate large scale surfacing of rights of way. Most users prefer to see routes in their natural condition and it will be the Council's aim that paths will comprise a natural surface unless action is required to bring them into a proper state of repair or where there are improvements that can be made to facilitate access.

Where surface improvements are identified, the Council will consider the needs of users and potential users in deciding how to proceed, balanced with environmental considerations. Sometimes such considerations can be at odds with the Council's duty to keep the highway in repair but these are minimal and will be undertaken following consultation with landowners and parish councils.

The RoWIP consultation data suggests that certain users would like to see surface improvements especially on bridleways from both cycling and equestrian perspectives. Whereas all-weather accessible routes enable sustainable travel modes such as cycling to flourish, bridleways that have high levels of equestrian use may suggest that a more natural surface is required for horse riders. The Council is of the view that surfaces should not be implemented to the detriment of one user type. Therefore where the needs of different users need to be accommodated, a sympathetic and balanced design will be provided to allow all users to access the network.

## Structures

Structures are defined as bridges, gates, steps, stiles and signs of all kinds. Buckinghamshire currently has almost 29,000 different structures<sup>25</sup> on the rights of way network. The County Council has the responsibility, for the most part, to maintain these structures although many stiles and gates are provided by and, therefore, must be maintained by landowners and farmers. The Council takes a very proactive role in liaison with landowners to make improvements to structures across the county and, to this extent, fully recognises its duties for accessibility contained in section 69 of the CROW Act.

Consultation data has discovered that horse riders, cyclists and less mobile user groups feel that structures are the single biggest barrier to accessing the countryside and that making them 'easy to use' or removing them is fundamental to improving access. The Council therefore has targeted the reduction of structures on the rights of way network wherever possible or, where this is not possible, their replacement to aid accessibility.

Whilst many structures are vital to the countryside and will no doubt remain, the Council's aim is to address the less essential gates, barriers and stiles where access issues arise or where there is opportunity to make improvements. In this respect the Council has adopted the principle of the 'least restrictive option' set out in the British Standard<sup>26</sup>.

As a minimum, the Council has targeted the improvement of 2.5% of the network's structures each year to aid mobility access. This represents approximately 250 structural amendments every year, in addition to a further 5% (500) of the network's structures that fall into disrepair each year, requiring some form of maintenance.

## Bridges

The Council maintains 2242 bridges across the rights of way network ranging from simple timber constructions over ditches and streams to major structures over primary rivers. Bridge maintenance can be expensive and there is an annual work programmes to replace outdated and out of repair structures along with works to strengthen major bridges to extend their lifespan.

The Council's aim is that all bridges on the rights of way network will be assessed to determine their remaining life span and plan for their replacement as part of an asset management programme. Within this, the Council will also undertake mobility audits to ensure that, wherever possible, they do not act as a barrier to access. Without doubt this will require significant investment and represents a highly ambitious improvement. The Council recognises that it is not a realistic option to improve all bridges on the rights of way network from its own revenue budgets. Wherever possible, opportunities will be taken to secure additional resources to undertake works of this kind as part of an overall asset management programme.

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<sup>25</sup> 28,739 confirmed structures as at December 2007. (bridges, gates, signposts, fingerposts, steps, stiles, and others)

<sup>26</sup> Guidance from British Standard 5709, Specification for gaps, gates and stiles

### **Addressing overgrown vegetation.**

The RoWIP consultation responses identified overgrown vegetation as a major factor dissuading people from using the network. The Council already recognises this and prioritises the removal of overgrown vegetation as key to the improvement of access and increase visitor numbers. Each summer the Council targets key paths and prioritises clearance work so that vegetation can be removed within 6 weeks of any reported problem.

To achieve this efficiently, the Council has developed intelligence on those routes that are susceptible to this type of problem and require regular attention throughout the summer months to ensure that, as far as possible, vegetation does not become a natural barrier to access.

### **Enforcement**

As well as maintaining the path network, the County Council is under a duty (HA80 section 130) to assert and protect the rights of the public. Inevitably this means that, on occasion, it is required to take enforcement action in order to resolve obstructions, nuisances and other interferences with the public's rights of access.

The Council works to an Enforcement Protocol so that it will, in the first instance, attempt to resolve any obstruction or nuisance by negotiation with the owner or occupier of the land. It may consider immediate, direct action of its own if it feels that there is a danger to the public or if, for example, unlawful notices have been erected.

The Council has a wide array of enforcement powers, which, fundamentally, fall into two categories

- Direct action itself to remove an obstruction or abate a nuisance, following Service of a Notice, and / or
- Prosecution through the Courts

Prioritisation of any obstruction will be addressed through the Problem Management Matrix referred to later in this section.

### **Illegal Vehicle Use**

Motorised vehicles only have the right to access 12kms of the rights of way network recorded as Byways Open to all Traffic. Section 34(1) of the Road Traffic Act 1988 provides that anyone driving a mechanically propelled vehicle off-road or on a road that is classified as a footpath, bridleway or restricted byway without authority is guilty of an offence. Such matters would be referred to the Police for action.

In the interests of public safety, some rights of way may also be managed by a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order, which, under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 section 14, temporarily prohibits use.

In addition the Council will work to resolve uncertainty surrounding the status of unclassified, unmetalled county roads, shown on the list of streets yet recorded on the Definitive Map as public rights of way.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Policy for the Management of Vehicles in the Countryside - [www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights\\_of\\_way](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights_of_way)

## **Ploughing and Cropping**

Buckinghamshire's countryside is predominantly rural in character and rights of way are often susceptible to the effects of the annual growing cycle. Each year sees extensive clearance work undertaken on the network where rights of way cross or run alongside arable land to ensure that the paths remain accessible. The responsibility for ensuring that paths are available for public use and are visible on the ground through arable land rests with the farmer, and the County Council is under a duty to ensure that such restoration and maintenance takes place.

Paths crossing arable land should not be ploughed up or sown where this can reasonably be avoided. Where this cannot be avoided, farmers must ensure that the path is levelled and marked out so that the route is clear on the ground and convenient to use within 14 days of the first disturbance of the ground and within 24 hours of any subsequent disturbance. Any crop growth or encroachment must also be removed by the farmer throughout the growing season to ensure that it does not become an obstruction to public use. Paths following the headland, or field edge, must not be ploughed up or cultivated under any circumstances.

The penalty for allowing crops to obstruct rights of way can be severe and the Council views such infringements as a priority area for enforcement.

## **MANAGING THE EXISTING NETWORK**

### **Setting Priorities**

Over 3000kms of rights of way is a considerable network to maintain. To do so in an efficient manner, a Problem Management Matrix has been developed to prioritise issues on paths according to the nature of the problem and its location.

The matrix is essentially a public service agreement, pledging to deliver maintenance to the entire network and to give the public a reasonable expectation of when works will be completed. Although maintenance related to public safety concerns and the more heavily used sections of the network will remain the top priority, regular maintenance is carried out countywide on an ongoing basis as the need arises.

The Council has set itself ambitious targets to deliver a high standard of maintenance countywide and continuously monitors its progress. This recognises the level of public involvement in the process in terms of reporting problems and shows a commitment to their resolution.

Any problem arising on the network is currently addressed according to its severity. The Council has defined 4 categories of problem (A to D) as outlined below. **High Severity issues (category A)** are considered to be problems of an immediate or potential danger to the public. Levels B & C are both medium priority and level D represents a lower priority for action.

#### **(A) HIGH SEVERITY – Problem is an immediate or potential danger or nuisance to the public requiring priority action.**

- Hung up tree or branch
- Potentially dangerous structure
- Fallen tree completely blocking path or partially blocking bridleway
- Dangerous animal
- Aggressive landowner / intimidation
- Shooting near to or across path

#### **(B) MEDIUM SEVERITY - Ploughing/Cropping and maintenance items**

- Path obstructed due to undergrowth or overgrowth
- Missing signpost / replacement signpost / Waymarking at roadside
- Routine structure repair / replacement
- Disturbance of surface of a path
- Path obstructed due to growing crop

#### **(C) MEDIUM SEVERITY - Other maintenance and enforcement items**

- Complete obstruction of path
- New or recent erection of fence across path
- New or recent encroachment
- New or recent unauthorised structure on path
- Electric Fence / Barbed Wire adjacent to path uninsulated / not signed

#### **(D) LOW SEVERITY - Issues that have a minor impact on access.**

- Path being used by public not on definitive line
- Horses on footpaths not causing damage
- Cycling on footpaths not causing damage
- Surface out of repair (non-specific danger)
- Requests for dog access
- Fallen tree on path where public are deviating around
- Path diversions, except where formal applications submitted

PROBLEM SEVERITY	PATH STATUS		
		1	2
<b>A (High)</b>	<b>Within 5 working days</b>	<b>Within 10 working days</b>	<b>Within 15 working days</b>
<b>B (Medium) Priority enforcement</b>	<b>Within 3 Months</b>	<b>Within 4 Months</b>	<b>Within 6 Months</b>
<b>C (Medium) Other enforcement</b>	<b>Within 3 Months</b>	<b>Within 5 Months</b>	<b>Within 6 Months</b>
<b>D (Low)</b>	<b>Within 3 Months</b>	<b>Within 6 Months</b>	<b>Within 12 Months</b>

Figure 5: The Rights of Way Problem Management Matrix

Priorities are further addressed by assessing the level of significance or use of a particular route. This gives the Council a clear indication that the most serious problems on the more heavily used routes take priority for action. Three categories of path type are summed up below.

**CATEGORY 1 – approximately 30% of the network**

- The Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails
- The 37 County Council Promoted routes
- Canal Towpaths
- Paths known to have high-volume usage

**CATEGORY 2 – approximately 25% of the network**

- Health Walks routes and promoted Parish routes
- Routes within 0.5km of a settlement boundary
- Other routes within the Chilterns AONB

**CATEGORY 3 – approximately 45% of the network**

- The remainder of the network

When the two classifications are combined, a matrix of severity and route type is formed. This is used by rights of way officers to apply a consistent and efficient approach to maintenance over the whole network. The Council monitors its performance against each of these criteria.

## **In Summary**

### **You said...**

- 1) You are happy with the overall condition of the rights of way network.
- 2) A well maintained network of rights of way is important to you.
- 3) The removal of barriers to access is a top priority.
- 4) Surface improvements on bridleways would encourage further use.
- 5) Overgrown vegetation was a major factor dissuading use of the network.
- 6) Improved enforcement of the rights of way network, especially the removal of obstructions, is important to you

### **Buckinghamshire County Council will...**

- 1) Deliver a nationally regarded, well maintained network of rights of way.
- 2) Prioritise the effective maintenance and management of the whole network.
- 3) Remove barriers that obstruct access, focussing in particular on those barriers that obstruct those with mobility and visual impairments.
- 4) Consult widely with a range of users groups where surface improvements are to be made.
- 5) Improve methods of addressing overgrown vegetation and prioritise its removal where it obstructs access.
- 6) Enforce the removal of crops and the reinstatement of paths, where access is affected.

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	When?	Resources	
What is our aim?	How will we do this?	What we will monitor?	What is our deadline?	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<p><b>2.1</b></p> <p>Provide &amp; protect a well maintained rights of way network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain rights of way to the highest possible standard.</li> <li>Enforce against obstructions of public rights right of way and ensure reinstatement following ploughing and cropping.</li> <li>Mitigate against abuse of rights of way by users of motorised vehicles in line with policy.</li> <li>Focus resources in summer to deal with vegetation within 6 wks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek sustained top quartile BVPI 178 performance nationally</li> </ul> <p>Regularly report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The % of structures removed or improved</li> <li>The length of rights of way mown annually</li> <li>The % of reported issues dealt with within established matrix timescales</li> </ul>	<p>Bi-annual BVPI surveys will be carried out</p> <p>Annual reporting of targets</p>	<p>Current levels of maintenance within existing resources</p> <p>Further funds required to deliver improved maintenance standards</p>	<p>Further volunteer contributions and partnership coordination will be required to deliver improved maintenance standards</p>
<p><b>2.2</b></p> <p>Improve the Council's knowledge and asset management of the rights of way network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver an improved, corporate asset management action plan and IT systems</li> </ul> <p>Using staff and volunteers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey the entire network and accurately record details of path surface type and condition, all structures locations and conditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feed rights of way data into the corporate asset management action plan by 2011</li> <li>Completion of the asset management survey of the entire network</li> <li>Update the Bridge Maintenance Action Plan on a 10 yearly basis</li> </ul>	<p>Production of asset management plan by 2011</p> <p>Completed asset management survey by 2018</p> <p>Implementation of Bridge Maintenance Plan by 2011</p>	<p>A complete asset management database and action plan will require specific funds, potentially as part of the LTP</p>	<p>An integrated approach with the Highway Asset Management Systems is essential</p>
<p><b>2.3</b></p> <p>Provide an efficient, value for money service supported by high customer satisfaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage all network maintenance and enforcement work in line with matrix timescales</li> <li>Regularly review the status of paths within the matrix</li> <li>Work with partners and volunteers to maintain parts of the rights of way network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report on customer satisfaction with the rights of way network</li> <li>Report the levels of volunteer effort</li> </ul>	<p>Annual reports to LAF and Rights of Way Liaison Groups and Council website</p>	<p>The service can deliver good standards using existing resources</p>	<p>Further work with volunteers and partners will allow for improved value for money maintenance</p>

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	When?	Resources	
What is our aim?	How will we do this?	What will we monitor?	What is our deadline?	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<p><b>2.4</b></p> <p>Support safe, strong and cohesive communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where appropriate, develop maintenance strategies with Local Communities</li> <li>• Consult with local parish councils prior to major maintenance schemes</li> <li>• Collaborative working with Parish Councils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report the number of parishes engaged with the P3 initiative</li> <li>• Embed guidance on safe, strong and prosperous communities into rights of way practices</li> </ul>	<p>Annual reporting on P3 work and involvement</p> <p>Ongoing work to deliver wider community involvement</p>	<p>Existing P3 scheme and appropriate liaison with all parishes can be delivered within existing resources</p>	<p>Improved partnerships with all parishes and relevant user groups will be required.</p>
<p><b>2.5</b></p> <p>Protect and assert the County's National Trails (The Ridgeway and Thames Path)</p>	<p>Work with the National Trails Management Group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify maintenance concerns on the National Trails</li> <li>• Contribute funds annually to the monitoring and maintenance of the National Trails</li> <li>• Support enforcement strategies to protect the Trails</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report customer satisfaction on the National Trails</li> <li>• Monitor the levels of use of the National Trails through the Management Group</li> <li>• Report to the Local Access Forum on works undertaken on the National Trails.</li> </ul>	<p>Regular reports on public satisfaction</p> <p>Annual work programmes and vehicle monitoring regimes</p>	<p>The NTMG can be supported through existing resources</p> <p>Further NE support to the Trails would deliver improvements</p>	<p>Improved partnerships / funding opportunities will be necessary to ensure that National Trails remain flagship routes</p>
<p><b>2.6</b></p> <p>Improve the use and enjoyment of the rights of way network</p>	<p>Through a 10 year plan, the Council will monitor use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out annual surveys of key routes</li> <li>• Identify popular sites and routes</li> <li>• Monitor route guide downloads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish the results of each route survey on the website and to the Local Access Forum</li> </ul>	<p>Annual progress reports</p> <p>Complete a countywide assessment of public use by 2018</p>	<p>Specific funds to survey public use will be required.</p>	<p>Volunteer, partner and LAF involvement is likely</p>

## **THEME 3: CREATING NEW LINKS**

### **Implementing Strategic Improvements**

Buckinghamshire's network of public rights of way is highly extensive and provides important links for many communities. The Council is looking to develop the network in areas of under provision, or where links are severed or fragmented, to deliver a more integrated network of footpaths, bridleways and cycling routes across the County.

Many opportunities have arisen over recent years to deliver such improvements and it is anticipated that this trend will continue to escalate to 2018 and beyond as a result of population growth and housing development in Buckinghamshire. The Council has identified partners to maximise these opportunities and will continue to work closely with them.

### **The network of tomorrow**

A fundamental role of this Plan is primarily to modify the network of rights of way into a 21<sup>st</sup> Century resource, suitable for the enjoyment of a range of multi modal pursuits and users across the county.

Priorities for this area are complex, as there are many competing factors for change. However, in the light of increasing public expectation to improve the network of public rights of way to satisfy their needs, the Council will seek to take advantage of opportunities to improve sections of the network in line with its priorities as well as targeting routes for specific and strategic improvement.

The Council has powers in statute to deliver a wide range of improvements to the network in accordance with these needs and will seek to implement access improvements for the greater use and enjoyment of the network, where appropriate.

Therefore the Council will seek to secure funding, partnerships and opportunities to deliver such schemes and will support local communities by exercising a range of powers to deliver them. Through a reasoned approach, where benefits to local communities, the access agenda, landowners and others are considered, the Council will use its powers to negotiate for the creation of new footpaths & bridleways, cycle track conversions, creation agreements and through section 106 agreements with developers. Ultimately new access will be created by compulsory creation orders<sup>28</sup>, where supported by the Council's Members.

### **Delivering Improved Green Infrastructure**

The landscape and biodiversity of the County is seen by most residents and visitors as an asset that makes Buckinghamshire unique<sup>29</sup>. However, a significant area of Buckinghamshire forms part of the Milton Keynes and South Bedfordshire growth area, which will put pressure on areas of Buckinghamshire's landscape to change.

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<sup>28</sup> Highways Act section 26

<sup>29</sup> Buckinghamshire County Council Resident's survey 2006 data

The South East Plan includes plans for growth in Buckinghamshire to 2026 and it is anticipated that over 1500 new homes will be built each year within the County. Encouragingly, the South East region has the fastest growing economy in the UK and housing growth is likely to be matched by significant inward investment.

This investment represents an enormous opportunity for the Council to improve its provision of green infrastructure and open spaces for Buckinghamshire residents and develop new links on the rights of way network to connect existing and new urban centres with the countryside. Indeed it is an essential and fundamental role of this plan to ensure that such investment is optimised to include enhanced access to the countryside. It is vital that as the population grows, the green infrastructure provision in the County increases accordingly.

As with built or 'grey' infrastructure there is a need to plan for the provision of 'green' spaces to meet the future needs of the growing local communities. Buckinghamshire County Council in partnership with the district councils has, developed a vision for Green Infrastructure to enhance existing green spaces and plan for the development of new ones.

The rights of way network is one of the fundamental parts of the overall provision of green infrastructure and countryside access, including country parks, open access land, woodland and National Trust Land. Consultation data for the development of this Plan highlighted that the majority of users still use the network as a means to relax, enjoy and learn about the countryside. It is therefore essential that rights of way provide the leisure links and routes that allow the landscape to be fully appreciated.

The Green Infrastructure Strategy aims to maximise on growth related investment to support improvements to the County's green spaces and wildlife habitats. The Council has the ability through planning agreements to utilise development funds to preserve key areas of the natural landscape, enhance biodiversity and woodland and create new recreational facilities. This will be an ongoing priority both to and beyond 2026.

The current provision of green and open space across the County is high. However certain areas – such as within the Aylesbury Vale district – have a deficit of green space and fail to meet any of the ANGST<sup>30</sup> standards set out by Government. Other communities may have ample green space but lack the links to enable these areas to be accessed easily.

Where there are inadequate or limited public rights of way, the Council will seek to maximise all opportunities to generate the resources required to implement new links or improvements through opportunities presented by housing growth investment and external funding contributions.

Furthermore, there exists considerable opportunity to develop areas of existing countryside as an access opportunity. Canal towpaths, areas of woodland and picnic sites are but a few areas that people visit in great numbers and form part

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<sup>30</sup> Accessible Natural Green Space Targets

of the larger picture of countryside access. The Council recognises that work needs to be done to develop these links in the future and provide a more comprehensive picture of access with other service providers such as the National Trust, the Forestry Commission, British Waterways and The Chilterns' Conservation Board.

### **Open Access Land**

The Council is responsible for improving access to land designated as Open Access Land<sup>31</sup>. These areas are recorded on the Council's asset management system.

In recent years the Council has provided access improvements to these pockets of land in partnership with landowners and the former Countryside Agency and it is hoped that funding opportunities will arise to support this scheme under the guise of its successor body, Natural England.

The Council recognises that open access land requires further work to allow a greater proportion of the land to become fully accessible. Priorities for Open Access will therefore remain twofold; to deliver enhancements to existing open access sites and market its provision through improved signage on site and through the provision of information.

### **Working towards a more joined-up network**

The Council will target the development of new links and the connectivity of the network around the County. Some routes become "dead ends", or terminate at busy roads leading to a fragmented and incomplete network. Some routes also change status or end at the County boundary preventing longer routes being established.

The Council has powers to enable changes to the network to take place where these are deemed to be a priority for the community it affects or users in general. As mentioned earlier, the Council will seek to make changes through negotiation but will, where appropriate and necessary, make use of compulsory powers to create new access. Requests from parish councils, local users and community groups have identified many areas where the network is deficient. Additionally, local communities have highlighted rights of way concerns within their Local Area Action Plans and it is anticipated that these will become future projects for the Council to implement in partnership.

The huge response from local communities, user groups and parish councils suggesting improvements has provided the Council with a considerable volume of potential schemes which it will look to prioritise within the life of this plan and beyond.

A process will be established to prioritise schemes in conjunction with local community leaders and residents to ensure that, where possible, funds can be diverted to schemes that are in greatest need or demand, or additional resources raised to implement them in partnership. This process will enable the Council to deliver a countywide action plan for the creation of new links,

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<sup>31</sup> [www.openaccess.gov.uk](http://www.openaccess.gov.uk)

prioritised by the communities involved. This vision can then be fed into the planning process, ensuring that development and growth provide opportunities to improve and extend the existing network.

### **Bridleway Fragmentation**

The Council recognises that the bridleway network is, essentially, the most fragmented, with relatively few complete routes between many of the major equestrian centres, the wider countryside and local communities. Consultation data from parish councils and user groups such as the British Horse Society has highlighted the volume of bridleway improvements needed to provide an adequate network of multi-purpose routes.

To address this, the Council will establish programmes of work, in partnership with user groups outlining the aspirations for new routes to be pursued. The Council's success in this area in the past has, in part, been due to opportunities presenting themselves and negotiations undertaken to ensure that benefits to the access network are fully exploited. The Council sees the creation of public bridleways as significant in that they provide multi-user options for walkers, horse riders and cyclists which, in turn, leads on to discussions about the provision of routes that are constructed in a way that supports multi-level usage where appropriate.

### **Permissive Paths**

The Council has a very strong preference that any new access will be formally dedicated or created as part of the Definitive Rights of Way network.

It is accepted, though, that there exists a 'permissive access' resource – routes provided by land managers on the basis of allowing the public to use them as opposed to establishing any public right. Much of this access is tied to Agri-Environment Schemes supported by Central Government.

Little is recorded by the Council of this resource but, where appropriate, it will be considered as part of any arrangements to close gaps in the network of countryside access.

Formal Permissive Path Agreements with the Council will be considered a low priority as a means of securing new access.

## In summary

### You said...

- 1) Improvements to rights of way in your area are important to you.
- 2) Addressing the fragmentation of the network, especially bridleways is a top priority.
- 3) Ensuring the preservation of the network during a time of population and housing growth is a high priority.
- 4) Where insufficient rights of way exist, the Council should seek to resolve this.
- 5) Rights of way are vital to accessing key services and leisure opportunities in your area.
- 6) Providing improved access to Open Access Land is essential.
- 7) Providing strategic green links and increased provision of green spaces is highly important.

### Buckinghamshire County Council will...

- 1) Seek to deliver strategic improvements through an annual programme of work.
- 2) Identify and prioritise the worst areas of bridleway fragmentation in the County and seek to implement improvements.
- 3) Utilise all opportunities presented by developers and partnership arrangements to secure funds for improvement works.
- 4) Identify areas of the county in conjunction with local communities where new rights of way links are needed.
- 5) Deliver improvements to rights of way where they serve a multitude of needs and prioritise these routes within the maintenance hierarchy.
- 6) Seek to deliver Open Access improvements in partnership with Natural England.
- 7) Work to generate investment into the county's green infrastructure and deliver improved green links and green spaces.

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	When?	Resources	
What is our aim?	How will we do this?	What we will monitor.	What is our deadline?	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<p><b>3.1</b></p> <p>Improve the use and enjoyment of the rights of way network (linked to 2.6)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The delivery of an annual programme of works</li> <li>• Involving local communities</li> <li>• Providing an extensive bridleway network</li> <li>• Link communities together with rights of way</li> <li>• Address areas with a low provision of rights of way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The overall provision of bridleways in Buckinghamshire</li> <li>• The improvement of green space provision in Buckinghamshire</li> <li>• The levels of public rights of way use</li> </ul>	<p>Annual delivery of schemes</p> <p>Continual bridleway assessment</p> <p>Annual monitoring of levels of use</p>	<p>Creation of new rights of way and monitoring levels of use will require specific funds and LTP support</p>	<p>BCC will seek to deliver works with appropriate partners and users.</p>
<p><b>3.2</b></p> <p>To deliver a better integrated and more accessible rights of way network (linked to 1.3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish areas of footpath &amp; bridleway fragmentation, map their locations and produce Action Plans</li> <li>• Deliver the Green Infrastructure strategy to improve and link green space provision</li> <li>• Deliver path creations where required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The overall provision of bridleways in Buckinghamshire</li> <li>• Improved accessibility to the rights of way network</li> <li>• New Green Infrastructure provision</li> </ul>	<p>To be delivered as opportunities arise</p> <p>Map known areas of fragmentation onto CAMS by 2009</p>	<p>Better and more integrated access will require specific funds</p> <p>Growth funds will be used to deliver improved green space provision.</p>	<p>A continued partnership approach will be required to improve green spaces in areas of under provision</p>
<p><b>3.3</b></p> <p>Improve access to the County's natural environment through Open Access sites</p>	<p>Work with landowners and Natural England to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote open access provision in Bucks</li> <li>• Identify key Open Access sites requiring work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on the delivery of Open Access Initiatives to the LAF</li> <li>• Monitor the levels of open access provision in Buckinghamshire</li> <li>• 100% of open access sites to be signed as to their restrictions</li> </ul>	<p>Annual delivery of improvements and monitoring provision</p>	<p>NE funds will be required to deliver open access improvements</p>	<p>Partnerships with NE and landowners are essential</p>
<p><b>3.4</b></p> <p>Support safe, strong and cohesive communities (Linked to 2.4)</p>	<p>Work with local communities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify key projects</li> <li>• Deliver work in partnership</li> <li>• Support the implementation of parish plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on partnership projects to the LAF</li> <li>• Monitor the input of local communities in rights of way work</li> </ul>	<p>Continual delivery of partnership / local framework approach</p>	<p>The local framework of delivery will be supported through existing funds</p>	<p>Partnerships are essential</p>

## **THEME 4: KNOWING WHERE TO GO**

### **Improving our information and publications**

The County Council will fully review its strategies for publicising and promoting access to the Buckinghamshire countryside. It will investigate the quality of information provided and its ease of access. In providing greater information about the location of routes, how to get to them and what to expect whilst enjoying them, this will encourage more people to access and enjoy the countryside for a variety of purposes.

The Council aims to provide information in a variety of ways. In addition to traditional walks leaflets, the Council aims to further develop web based route guides, which can be accessed interactively, and utilise the local media and popular publications to better inform communities of the outdoor opportunities on their doorstep.

The Council aims to ensure that all public rights of way are easy to follow on the ground, by continuing to provide adequate signposting and waymarking of all routes.

### **Developing Internet access**

All public rights of way are recorded in the Council's Geographical Information System (GIS) and available publicly on the Internet at Bucks Online<sup>32</sup>. Through its computerised map systems the Council records all path management data, infrastructure details and where improvements or maintenance works are required. It is the Council's aim to provide improved map data through an interactive web system that will not only provide information to potential path users about conditions or constraints on particular routes, but will more readily facilitate the reporting of problems on line.

In this way, users with particular requirements could, for example, identify routes that are stile-free or to check if a problem they have encountered is already recognised by the Council. The ROWIP consultation data indicates that greater and easier public access to this information enables people to discover new routes.

The County Council's current website has considerable information available for the public to download including a number of walks and rides leaflets. This is regularly updated and provides relevant information required to take a walk or ride on a particular route. Each includes a map and descriptions of the route showing what people can expect while accessing the area, including information about where to eat or park or how to get to the walk by public transport.

The Council aims to further develop the provision of web based information as well as its quantity and quality over the course of this plan. Currently the Council website provides considerable additional information about wider

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<sup>32</sup> [www.bucksonline.gov.uk](http://www.bucksonline.gov.uk)

rights of way issues, the work of the Council and 'frequently asked questions'. This has been identified as a priority area for investment.

### **Public access to the Definitive Map and Statement.**

The Definitive Map is available at various locations including all major libraries and the County Council offices. In addition, parish councils have extracts from the map of their own areas and extracts are available to the public for a small fee. Whilst there is access to mapping showing rights of way on the Council's website, it is a long term aim to develop access to Definitive Mapping and databases via the Internet.

### **Marketing the Network**

The Council aims to market the provision of access corporately, where access reflects the wider network of rights of way, cycle lanes, open space, open access land and common land. It is anticipated that this ambitious marketing strategy will be delivered through a strong partnership approach, where the Council will play a central role in delivering an improved standard of information to the public about where to go and what to enjoy. It will also provide more linked access over the Internet to partner sites – such as the Chilterns' Conservation Board – which also provide information about walking, cycling and horse riding in Buckinghamshire. Jointly, this provides an extensive resource of public information.

### **Promoted Routes**

Traditionally, the Council has produced leaflets for some 35 promoted routes. These routes were devised in consultation with partners to provide a mixture of historic and environmental attractions to encourage access by people in greater numbers, especially by those not necessarily familiar with walking in the countryside. They are also routes that, by and large, concentrate on areas away from the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where walking provision is extensive. By encouraging people to walk a well-waymarked route, people will be enthused to walk more widely on the network.

Many of these leaflets are in need of upgrading to reflect changes and to meet today's needs. The Council will seek to develop partnerships and funding opportunities to revamp leaflets over the course of the next 3-5 years, make information more accessible and look at other means of promotion.

Wherever possible, the Council will seek to ensure that there is added benefit to the economies of local communities, by working with local pubs, shops and small businesses that will directly benefit from an increase in users on the routes, and seek sponsorship for route and leaflet provision wherever it can.

### **Parish Walk Leaflets.**

Alongside the Council's own promoted walks and rides, the Council has also worked closely with parish councils to develop leaflets for individual parishes and communities, seeking to engage local people to enjoy the opportunities on their doorstep.

Such requests, when made in an ad hoc way, place significant demand on resources, and the Council fully intends that requests in future will be treated

on a more planned and prioritised basis, with emphasis on funding them in partnership.

### Improving Signage

The County Council has a duty to provide signposts indicating where all public rights of way join with public roads and to provide waymarking on the routes where the paths may not be easy to follow by those unfamiliar with the area.

There are some 4425 signpost locations<sup>33</sup> throughout the county and a considerably larger number of waymarking locations. In 2000, 95% of our paths were “easy to find”<sup>34</sup> and this has risen to 97% in 2007<sup>35</sup> as a direct result of investment in roadside signage improvements. In Buckinghamshire, the rights of way network is well signposted from roads and this will remain a priority.

Away from the roadside, there exists a wide variety of waymarking on the network. These are small discs, featuring yellow, blue and red arrows that follow a national standard denoting the status of the route. They are now highly popular as a subtle means of directing users without urbanising countryside areas.

The RoWIP consultation data suggests that improved signage is vital to developing the network for the wider public, especially non users who lack information on where to go. The Council has prioritised signage improvements to be delivered, as a major factor in the BVPI assessment and as a crucial element to opening up the network for future users. In partnership with local communities and other stakeholders, opportunities will be taken to improve the quality of information provided on signposts where appropriate.

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<sup>33</sup> Accurate to December 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Countryside Agency, Rights of Way Condition Survey 2000, p8 & p67

<sup>35</sup> BCC monitoring data. “Percentage of rights of way signposted in accordance with CA 1968, s27”

## **In summary**

### **You said...**

- 1) Lack of information about where to go was a major reason for not using rights of way.
- 2) You would like to discover somewhere new, if information was provided.
- 3) Word of mouth, the local press, websites and libraries were your main ways of accessing information about countryside routes.
- 4) An interactive facility for downloading routes via the Internet is a priority.
- 5) Delivering a wider range of leaflets for local communities should continue.
- 6) Publicity should be improved to include details of passenger transport links, services such as pubs, shops and toilets and route details such as gradients, surface type and structures.
- 7) Signage needs to be clear and consistent so people understand where to go.

### **Buckinghamshire County Council will...**

- 1) Deliver an improved source of informative leaflets and downloads via the Internet.
- 2) Seek to deliver leaflets in new areas in partnership with town councils, parishes and user groups.
- 3) Deliver information to the public through a variety of sources with particular focus on the local press and the Internet.
- 4) Seek to develop an interactive web based facility that improves the public's ability to access the wider network.
- 5) Improve the content of publications so that key facilities are taken into account.
- 6) Deliver a high standard of route signage, so that all routes are clearly marked throughout.

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	When?	Resources	
<b>What is our aim?</b>	<b>How will we do this?</b>	<b>What we will monitor.</b>	<b>What is our deadline?</b>	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<b>4.1</b> To Improve public rights of way network information and the DMS (Linked to 1.2)	Encourage wider access through the provision of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive web based maps</li> <li>• Downloadable route guides</li> <li>• Promoted Route leaflets</li> <li>• Health walk leaflets</li> <li>• Local community leaflets</li> <li>• CCB publications</li> </ul> Improve rights of way publications with data about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passenger transport arrangements</li> <li>• Local provision of key facilities including toilets</li> <li>• Surface and access data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver a web based interactive map</li> <li>• Deliver a complete programme of download-able route guides of promoted routes</li> </ul>	Interactive map work ongoing  Download route guides to be complete by 2011	Improved information on the BCC website will be delivered using existing resources	Partnerships with Tourist Boards and others will be required for complete access marketing
<b>4.2</b> Support safe, strong and cohesive communities (Linked to 3.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with parishes and user groups to develop a wider range of route guides in key areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor the number of parishes involved in developing parish route guides.</li> </ul>	Annually deliver improved local community access information	Specific funds will be required to deliver local community access info	Parish and user group partners will be sought
<b>4.3</b> Provide & protect a well maintained rights of way network (Linked to 2.1)	Deliver a network that is easy to access through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate signage and waymarking in line with policies</li> <li>• Improved signage of open access sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek ongoing top quartile BVPI 178 performance nationally</li> <li>• Annually report on the % of signs removed, altered or improved</li> </ul>	Bi-annual BVPI surveys  Annual reporting of signage targets	Effective signage will be delivered within existing resources	Delivered with volunteer and partner assistance

## **THEME 5: LOOKING AFTER YOU AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Improving the Quality of Life in Buckinghamshire**

Buckinghamshire County Council is very aware of the essential role that public rights of way play in many people's lives, providing significant opportunity to enjoy the countryside and use it for a variety of purposes. Without such access to the rural environment, our culture, health and well-being would be adversely affected.

The Council will seek to enhance the existing network of paths to allow all residents to enjoy the natural and historical environment and landscapes. In addition it will continue to link the network to the health and culture agendas, encouraging people to access the countryside and improve quality of life wherever possible. The Council will encourage access provision where local economic benefits can be realised for local business interests and the farming industry.

### **Tourism and Economy**

Buckinghamshire has an extremely strong and competitive economy. Rated as one of the top ten places to do business in the UK, it offers an excellent environment from which businesses can flourish. The following facts and figures highlight the county's success:

- Buckinghamshire's economy presently equates to around £5.6 billion per year.<sup>36</sup>
- The county's economic growth rate is higher than the national average and that of the South East region, with GDP currently increasing at 3.3% per annum.<sup>37</sup>
- The average income in the county is 35% higher than the national average, and 165% higher than the EU25 figures.<sup>38</sup>

With the intended development of the County, Buckinghamshire will continue to be a great place to live but it is also a short-term destination, with much to attract tourism and businesses alike. It is estimated that there are over 2 million visitors annually to Buckinghamshire, generating £285 million for the local economy. In turn, this supports an estimated 14,000 local jobs<sup>39</sup>. A significant proportion of these are based within rural communities, in guesthouses, pubs etc.

The Council has not undertaken an economic assessment of the value of its rights of way network to the economy but it is estimated to be considerable. Nationally there are approximately half a billion walks taken in the countryside per annum, generating £6.7 billion in turnover for local businesses.<sup>40</sup> These figures are for walking only and, given that the rights of way network is *the single most important means for people to access the countryside*<sup>41</sup>, for a multitude of users, its impact upon Buckinghamshire's economy is significant.

<sup>36</sup> Buckinghamshire County Council Economic Assessment 2003

<sup>37</sup> Buckinghamshire County Council Economic Assessment 2003

<sup>38</sup> Buckinghamshire County Council Economic Assessment 2003

<sup>39</sup> Buckinghamshire County Council Structure Plan – Policy 28

<sup>40</sup> 'The Economic and Social Value of Walking in England' – Ramblers' Association 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Countryside Commission - 1988

Analysis suggests that of those visiting the countryside, the majority do so to walk, visit friends or to eat/drink out<sup>42</sup> and there are many small businesses, such as pubs, shops and guest houses within easy reach of the network of paths that benefit from walkers and riders.

The County Council will look to deliver as much economic prosperity through the development and marketing of the rights of way network as possible. Through new key links with established tourist centres and local service providers, such as shops, local accommodation, pubs and specialist service providers such as livery yards and cycle hire, the rights of way network helps to bring wider tourism benefits to the county.

### **Protecting Agriculture and the Natural Environment**

Buckinghamshire is a county of great beauty that is prosperous and successful with an exciting mix of cultures, heritage and varied communities. Generally, people value the countryside around them and visitors are naturally attracted to it. Its landscape has two predominantly distinctive characteristics. The northern half of the county is predominantly agricultural with rolling green fields dotted with attractive market towns, quaint villages and rivers, a landscape of historical, ecological and agricultural importance. The southern half of the county is dominated by the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), characterised by its chalk hills and beech woodlands and leads down to the River Thames valley forming the southern boundary of the county.

Naturally, the predominantly rural landscape of Buckinghamshire relies heavily on the agriculture industry and the production of local food. The access network is an integral part of this landscape and has benefited from strong links with the agricultural community and landowners. The Council places high value on relationships with local farmers and landowners and will continue to work with land managers to ensure that their responsibilities towards the management of access is understood, whilst any adverse impacts of increased access is minimised.

It is vital for all those with an interest in the countryside to ensure that access impacts positively on the lives of farmers and land managers and develops a positive social and economic impact. In this respect it is important that users of the countryside fully respect and understand their own responsibilities so that trespass, vandalism and abuse are minimised.

Buckinghamshire County Council is always willing to work with land managers and farmers in particular to develop wider access opportunities. Landowners are encouraged to contact the Council where they feel their land offers an opportunity to develop new links on the network, especially where economic benefits can be realised.

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<sup>42</sup> 2002-03 Day Visits Survey – Countryside Agency

## The Historical Access Network

National Planning guidance expresses the desirability of preserving important archaeological remains, historic buildings and landscapes and the County Council preserves and manages 145 Scheduled Ancient Monuments 36 registered historic parks and gardens and 5772 listed buildings and structures<sup>43</sup> across the county in line with this principle. The sites have varying degrees of access but the rights of way network provides access to a number of them. However the provision of access to such special sites is sensitive, due to the need to consider conservation and biodiversity issues. Path surfaces, heavily used routes and poorly sited structures can have a detrimental effect on historical sites and future access improvement must consider the specific needs of each one.

Through a partnership between the Rights of Way and Archaeological Teams, the Council will seek to identify sites where access can be improved to the benefit of the access network and the use and appreciation of the County's historical assets. In a bid to encourage wider appreciation and understanding of the natural landscape, historical sites will continue to be identified in the Council's walk guides and marketed. This in turn could realise economic benefits to the county through increased tourism opportunities.

## Biodiversity

Buckinghamshire is a county rich in biodiversity and it is essential that the County Council plays a role in developing new access whilst considering the environmental implications. New legislation in the shape of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, stresses that "all public bodies must have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in all that it does"<sup>44</sup>. This legislation has the aim of delivering the Government's target to halt the net loss of biodiversity by 2010 and "mainstream" biodiversity conservation.

Effectively, this places a duty on the County's Rights of Way service to consider the consequences on biodiversity within all areas of its work, and significantly extends current responsibilities to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to further the conservation and enhancement of its 85 Sites of Special Scientific Interest<sup>45</sup>

Future Government performance assessments will consider each authority's ability to deliver biodiversity enhancements and it is essential that the Council's services, including Rights of Way management, demonstrate positive measures for biodiversity where applicable.

Several key wildlife species and habitats are specified within the WCA Act 1981 and extended within the NERC Act 2006 that must be expressly considered and the County Council has begun the process of mapping habitats, which will be completed in early 2008. To deliver nature conservation measures, the Council will liaise with relevant partners and

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<sup>43</sup> English Heritage, 'Heritage Counts: SE 2007'

<sup>44</sup> NERC Act 2006, section 40

<sup>45</sup> Buckinghamshire Environmental Records, accurate to December 2007

utilise the Buckinghamshire Environmental Character System and the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

### **Protecting the countryside**

Information from landowners and farmers regularly highlights their concerns about abuse that occurs from time to time, including leaving gates open, trespass and unauthorised use, especially by motorcyclists. To continue to enjoy the enormous benefits of the countryside and the access network, great emphasis is placed by the Council and its partners and all those who respect the natural landscape in acting responsibly. The ROWIP consultation data confirmed that the negative aspects of countryside access such as litter, dog mess, fly tipping and illegal vehicle use are major reasons for not wanting to access the network more frequently.

The Council will seek to address such issues by encouraging greater individual responsibility through the Countryside Code. Promoted by Natural England, the code<sup>46</sup>, revised in 2004, gives plain advice to the public about their responsibilities whilst enjoying the countryside.

The 5 elements of the code cover: how to protect plants and animals, respect gates and countryside property, how to consider other people and be responsible with dogs and, finally how to be safe in the countryside.

### **Delivering health improvements<sup>47</sup>**

The World Health Organisation recommends everyone should do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five times a week to be healthy<sup>48</sup>. The easiest way to achieve this is to go for a brisk walk and the rights of way network offers a safe and attractive way to achieve this.

From April 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, Buckinghamshire County Council combined health initiatives and rights of way management through the delivery of the countywide Health Walks scheme. The countywide “Simply Walk...Your Way to Health” initiative operates via a steering group incorporating the County Council, Buckinghamshire Primary Care Trust and the four district councils in the County.

The “Simply Walk” programme delivers the aims of the Health Care sector and the Local Area Agreement target<sup>49</sup> to increase the number of people participating in led health walks.

The programme aims to improve overall levels of health and confidence to walk in the countryside and elsewhere in people who take little or no exercise. The coordination of the project includes the training of volunteers to lead the regular walks, advertising the walks through the local media and GP surgeries and the development of new walks where there is interest. The programme is

<sup>46</sup> Details are available at [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk/things\\_to\\_know/countryside\\_code](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk/things_to_know/countryside_code)

<sup>47</sup> Email [simplywalks@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:simplywalks@buckscc.gov.uk).

<sup>48</sup> [www.who.org.uk](http://www.who.org.uk)

<sup>49</sup> HCOP Block. Outcome 1. Indicator 5 “Increase number of people engaged in organised Health walks”

highly popular, managing 35 established walking routes, over 1400 participants and 150 volunteer walk leaders in 2007 countywide.<sup>50</sup>

New Health Walk programmes are launched quarterly and details are available at GP surgeries, major libraries and the County Council website.

### **In summary**

#### **You said...**

- 1) Links to wider facilities such as shops, toilets, pubs, local accommodation would be useful while using the network.
- 2) Developing access to key sites and tourist attractions in the County through rights of way will help develop and promote sustainable transport opportunities.
- 3) Protecting the rights of land managers and assisting the agriculture industry is vital to preserving the Buckinghamshire landscape.
- 4) It is important that users act responsibly on the network to not adversely affect the agriculture industry.
- 5) Wildlife and local biodiversity are two of the main attractions to visiting the countryside.
- 6) The Simply Walk programme is a highly valued service within local communities.

#### **Buckinghamshire County Council will...**

- 1) Promote the availability of local service providers on rights of way routes where possible.
- 2) Give high priority to improvement schemes where significant tourism or economic benefits can be realised.
- 3) Continue to protect land interests and educate users of the network through a variety of methods incorporating the Countryside code.
- 4) Continue to have regard for biodiversity within all rights of way work in line with statutory guidance.
- 5) Develop the programme of led Health Walks countywide in partnership.

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<sup>50</sup> Combined figures from Simply Walk and Heart and Sole programmes in 2006

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	When?	Resources	
<b>What is our aim?</b>	<b>How will we do this?</b>	<b>What we will monitor.</b>	<b>What is our deadline?</b>	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<b>5.1</b> Through rights of way work, deliver economic benefits to local communities and businesses. (Linked to 3.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote countryside access to increase visitor numbers to the network and tourist sites</li> <li>Support the access management of tourist sites</li> <li>Support the needs of farmers and land managers</li> <li>Support Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) initiatives to boost the rural economy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Levels of use on the rights of way network</li> <li>The number of schemes linked to farmsteads.</li> </ul>	Annual monitoring of levels of use	Monitoring levels of use will require specific funds and LTP support	BCC will seek to deliver with appropriate partners and users.
<b>5.2</b> Through rights of way work, derive environmental and biodiversity benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to educate users about countryside issues and the Countryside Code</li> <li>Promote and protect countryside, heritage, historic landscapes and biodiversity interests</li> <li>Support and promote guidance for land managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100% of walk guides contain Countryside Code information</li> <li>Continuing progress to identify SSSIs and SAMs that require improved access</li> </ul>	Ongoing work to identify access issues related to historical assets	Yes	Partnerships with Archaeology Service and land managers is required
<b>5.3</b> Through rights of way work, deliver health benefits for users and residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host and deliver the countywide Simply Walk project</li> <li>Promote the seasonal programmes of led Health Walks</li> <li>Deliver new led Health Walks in key areas</li> <li>Secure long term funding for the Simply Walk project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver annual increases in participation in line with Local Area Agreements</li> <li>Annually deliver new health walks in targeted areas</li> <li>Widen Simply Walk to all 19 GC2C local communities</li> </ul>	Annual reporting of Simply Walk targets through Steering Group	Long term provision of Simply Walk requires increased partner contributions or other funding	Additional partners are required to secure Simply walks over the long term

## **THEME 6: RIGHTS OF WAY FOR EVERYONE**

### **Delivering Access for All**

Buckinghamshire County Council aims to deliver access for everyone. This means targeting improvements to specific routes so they are easier to use, removing barriers and obstacles to provide the least restrictive access standards and providing improved information.

The Council will continue to develop close working relationships with “Access for All” user groups and partners and adhere to advice provided by national bodies to adapt and improve the rights of way network in line with specific user needs and requirements.

The Council, alongside the Local Access Forum, will offer advice and encouragement to landowners and land managers about making such improvements, as well as a wide range of user groups who seek a more accessible network

### **Why look at easier access?**

Legislation on improvement planning requires that each local authority assess its rights of way network in terms of “accessibility to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems”<sup>51</sup>.

Whilst this is a relatively new obligation for local authorities, Buckinghamshire County Council has already delivered significant improvements to access within the county over recent years through a variety of means, including the removal of stiles and other barriers

It is estimated that 8.6 million people, 1 in every 7, are registered as disabled nationwide<sup>52</sup>, a figure that does not include those that suffer with other mobility limitations such as arthritis. The role of this plan is to recognise that a significant proportion of the Buckinghamshire population (approx 70,000 people) potentially fits into the category of ‘registered disabled’ with many more people that will have problems negotiating barriers in the countryside due to other ailments or age-related concerns.

From the Council’s Access for All consultation exercise, the users identified the following mobility limitations:

- Difficulty walking up and down stairs (43%)<sup>53</sup>,
- Difficulties walking 100m over flat ground (28%),
- Becoming tired or breathless while walking (32%),
- Unable to walk at all (33%).

With such personal barriers, it is encouraging to note that 80% of the consultation respondents declared themselves as regular or occasional visitors to the current rights of way network. Working to deliver access

<sup>51</sup> Section 60(2) of the CROW Act 2000

<sup>52</sup> Disabled Living Foundation, Disability Awareness fact sheet, [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

<sup>53</sup> Figures represent data from the RoWIP mobility consultation in 2007

improvements to the wider countryside will encourage this trend further. The Council plans further work in this area to continually improve its knowledge of the needs of impaired users and how the network can be adapted for them

## Delivering “Access for All” Improvements

### Removing Barriers

It is recognised nationwide that delivering access for all is a top priority within countryside access. Users with mobility concerns identified the conditions that they considered to be the primary barriers to accessing the rights of way network. Specifically for Buckinghamshire it is felt that the Council could improve access by targeting resources, in specific areas, to the following concerns identified by users:

- Overgrown vegetation (55%),
- Uneven surfaces (51%),
- Mud (49%),
- Stiles (40%).

Currently the Buckinghamshire network has 6784 stiles, 193 sets of steps and 4591 gates<sup>54</sup> that are accessible to differing degrees. The Council monitors the number of existing structures considered “easy to use” to ensure that the majority are as accessible as possible<sup>55</sup>. On this basis, in 2007, 92% of structures were considered to be “easy to use”<sup>56</sup>, compared with 89% in 2000.<sup>57</sup> This information is, however, based on access for the able bodied and has not been audited against to any accessibility criteria.

Despite this good progress, annual programmes for rights of way work seeks to deliver as many structural improvements as possible. Over the life of this plan, the Council will remove structures where no longer required and provide improved structures where this can be agreed with landowners.

The County Council adheres, as far as possible, to the British Standard for ‘Gaps, Gates and Stiles’<sup>58</sup> adopting the principle of the ‘least restrictive option’ when implementing access improvements. Consideration clearly has to be given to farmers with livestock and, whilst it is recognised that many stiles on public rights of way are legally authorised restrictions, the Council will still look to provide alternative access arrangements where appropriate in consultation with the land managers concerned.

The Council is under a duty to have *regard to the needs of persons with mobility problems*<sup>59</sup> when authorising any structural repair or replacement and will continue to seek the complete removal of stiles and other barriers to access wherever appropriate. It is accepted that this approach needs to be

<sup>54</sup> Accurate to December 2007

<sup>55</sup> Structures are assessed as easy to use based on BVPI 178 criteria

<sup>56</sup> BCC monitoring data, March 2007. “Percentage of structures on rights of way ‘easy to use’ according to BVPI 178 criteria”

<sup>57</sup> Countryside Agency, Rights of Way Condition Survey 2000, p68

<sup>58</sup> British Standard BS5709:2006

<sup>59</sup> CROW Act section 69, amended HA Act 1980 s147Z

balanced and proportionate, as many stiles on paths will remain as characteristics of a countryside walk.

### **Improving Signage**

Roadside signage is not always sufficient to enable users to find paths in their area. The Council recognises that people will, in many cases, use rights of way from urban centres as links between towns, villages etc and as 'gateways' to the countryside. On key routes within the urban fringes, to deliver appropriate accessibility benefits, the Council aims to implement signage improvements, where information relating to destinations and distances can be established. These small amendments can considerably improve the accessibility of routes, allowing better access to key services and leisure opportunities.

### **Providing Additional Facilities**

From the consultation data gathered, users highlighted the need for other facilities that are not part of the traditional countryside network of routes that could ease access in particular cases. Such facilities would make accessing the network and countryside easier and more enjoyable but do not form part of the main remit of the Council's service.

Such facilities include car parking (64%), toilets (59%) and others such as cafes and tarmac surfaces. Where the potential exists to link countryside access routes to wider facilities, the Council will seek to deliver either appropriate facilities with partners or inform people about locations and access to other service providers such as local pubs or shops. This will facilitate the Council in delivering a multipurpose network of routes with facilities and services for a wide range of user needs as well as improved information on particular routes.

The consultation also revealed that rights of way are popular where obvious car parking arrangements are on offer. Similarly, routes that are well connected by the bus or rail networks are well visited. The Council aims to deliver, through other initiatives of the Local Transport Plan, route guides that provide improved information on passenger travel arrangements and other facilities provided by external suppliers.

It is envisaged that delivering routes that are accessible by bus and train, with additional facilities such as shops, toilets, cafes and accommodation nearby, the network will become more attractive and accessible to a wider section of the community and other visitors, and can assist to break down barriers of social and economic inequality.

## In summary

### You said...

- 1) Barriers that make the network harder to use were a major reason for avoiding the use of rights of way.
- 2) Delivering access for all opportunities was important to create a network accessible for everyone.
- 3) Improving information to include access issues would allow people to easier access the network.
- 4) The provision of wider facilities would enable more people to access the countryside network.
- 5) The network would benefit from clearer, consistent signage on all routes.

### Buckinghamshire County Council will...

- 1) Continue to develop its understanding of access needs within local communities and particular user groups through further survey work.
- 2) Deliver access improvements on an annual basis through the delivery of its strategic access programme, with particular focus on structures, signage and surface condition.
- 3) Annually remove structures that are barriers to access, including stiles, with community involvement.
- 4) Give priority to the removal of overgrown vegetation and improvement of poor surfaces where access is directly affected.
- 5) Deliver route guides with improved information on passenger transport options and the availability of key facilities.

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	When?	Resources	
What is our aim?	How will we do this?	What we will monitor.	What is our deadline?	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<b>6.1</b> Improve the use and enjoyment of the rights of way network (Linked to 2.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annually deliver Access for All improvement schemes; replacing structures, improving surfaces and signage</li> <li>Support the work of the Chiltern Society and Chilterns' Conservation Board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The annual number of structures removed or improved</li> </ul>	Annual monitoring of structures removed or improved  Continual support of CS and CCB	Specific access for all funding will be required	Partnerships with specific user groups and Access for all bodies is required
<b>6.2</b> Deliver a better integrated and more accessible rights of way network (Linked to 3.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop needs assessments for key user groups including the mobility and visually impaired</li> <li>Widen the availability of "access for all" routes to each of the 19 local communities</li> <li>Support stile free walking in the Chilterns AONB and deliver improved access with key partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement further consultation surveys with specific user groups</li> <li>Deliver at least 1 stile free route per district by 2011 and in every local community area by 2018</li> <li>Annual improvement of structures with volunteer assistance</li> </ul>	Ongoing needs assessment work  Access for all routes in place by 2018	To be delivered through GC2C assessment data	Stile free routes will require partner input and continued volunteer contribution
<b>6.3</b> Improve public rights of way and access information and the DMS (Linked to 1.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver wider information on the nature of routes, specifically access issues, through the BCC internet site</li> <li>Link rights of way routes with 3<sup>rd</sup> party access provision suitable for mobility impaired user groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver a leaflet / guide to cover "access for all" provision across Buckinghamshire, in partnership, by 2010</li> </ul>	Access for all route guides in place by 2010	To be delivered within existing resources	Tourism partners will be used to promote Access for all in Buckinghamshire

## **THEME 7: DELIVERING THE CORPORATE AGENDA**

The RoWIP is a strategic document set within a framework of 2 major strategies the Buckinghamshire County Council Corporate Plan and the Local Transport Plan. These documents will shape the way that future rights of way improvement, maintenance and management are delivered.

### **The Corporate Plan**

The Corporate Plan makes a commitment to deliver excellence in public service for the people of Buckinghamshire and is changing the way services are provided. Increasingly, Council services will be driven by the needs of local communities and deliver value for money. Strongly reflecting the Council's duty to protect and enhance rights of way, the Corporate Plan embraces the '*Getting Closer to Communities*' (GC2C) programme of delivery through which the RoWIP will be implemented.

Working locally to deliver differing local needs, the Local Transport Plan stresses the need for footpaths and bridleways to become part of a multi-purpose network of routes fulfilling the aims of the Accessibility agenda by linking communities together. It is the Council's ultimate aim to deliver a network that plays this vital role in all 19 local community areas.

The management of public rights of way is already a localised service and has aligned itself on a corporate level to give a very local perspective to rights of way work. To empower local communities, the Community Strategy will encourage the management of the network in direct partnership and with greater engagement of local users, residents and parish and district councils.

### **Developing Culture through Access**

As stewards to the County's history, heritage and environmental assets, the Council needs to play a leading role in the development of culture. The Council's Cultural Strategy sets out the 5 key themes required to improve, strengthen and promote the need for enhanced culture in everyone's way of life.

The 5 key themes focus on Buckinghamshire's Heritage, Landscape, Health and Well-Being, Arts and Learning and Sport and Recreation. The rights of way network is already a major contributor to the success of the County's cultural diversity and through the improvement of access that links people to the great outdoors, the network supports the action plans of the 5 themes.

Furthermore, supporting community based cultural activity is a key element of the strategy. This is already in action through various elements of rights of way work delivered in partnership with local communities, with the involvement of parish councils, volunteer work effort and key partners.

### **Getting Closer to Communities (GC2C)**

Local government in Buckinghamshire is undergoing significant change as a result of broader policies and wider agendas. Combined with the Pathfinder approach with all district councils, GC2C will lead to the three tiers of local government in the county working ever closer as partners in service delivery.

Other major influences, notably the planned increase in housing and population growth in the county will challenge service providers to meet the needs of an increasing population and our aim will be to achieve this with the continual development of wider partnership arrangements. These partnerships continue to evolve both within the public and private sectors, nationally and locally.

The Council's GC2C programme focuses entirely on the public as the customer, highlighting 15 objectives for the Council to achieve excellence in locally based service delivery. The full GC2C document can be accessed the County Council's website<sup>60</sup>

The management of the rights of way network will be heavily influenced by the GC2C initiative. The RoWIP will be delivered through a local framework in line with the GC2C ethos. Information on customer needs will become more readily available through central needs assessments within each of the 19 Local Community Areas across the County, which will enable the Council to tailor its approach to each area.

### **The Local Transport Plan 2006-2011.**

The County Council's Second Local Transport Plan, published in 2006, identifies the Council's 5 Transport priorities of *Accessibility, Tackling Congestion, Environment, Road Safety and Maintenance*. The Rights of Way improvement Plan forms an integral part of the Local Transport Plan and is a main source of funding for strategic rights of way improvements. The full document can be accessed at the County Council's website<sup>61</sup>

### **Accessibility**

Buckinghamshire County Council is committed to improving access to jobs and key services by addressing the symptoms and causes of social exclusion.<sup>62</sup> Buckinghamshire has high levels of car use and car dependency and traditional alternatives (bus, car sharing etc) are only part of the solution to resolving these access issues.

The rights of way network is a key asset to enhancing accessibility, with the potential in many cases to allow all types of users to access key services and centres countywide, at no cost and with positive effects on health and social inclusion.

The Council has closely linked rights of way to the delivery of the accessibility agenda. Over the course of the next 4 years, accessibility workshops will be held across the County to debate which links are needed to access the four key services of education, health, leisure and employment. These consultation workshops will help to prioritise rights of way work with local community involvement.

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<sup>60</sup> [www.buckscc.gov.uk](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk)

<sup>61</sup> [www.buckscc.gov.uk](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk)

<sup>62</sup> LTP2, Accessibility p3

## Tackling Congestion

The Local Transport Plan identifies the current causes of congestion and specifies areas within the County that suffer from peak time congestion. There are many hotspot locations<sup>63</sup> identified within the LTP that centre on the main urban areas.

The Council has targeted widening travel choices (improving access to transport alternatives to help reduce congestion) with schemes such as car sharing, new bus services and workplace travel plans to generate fewer vehicles on the roads. The rights of way network, fully integrated with the overall highway network, can assist efforts to reduce congestion allowing people to cycle and walk in safety and without adverse effect on the environment.

## Road Safety

Considerable effort has been targeted towards tackling the adverse effects of traffic through the previous Local Transport Plan to reduce the number of casualties on Buckinghamshire's roads. This has been achieved with great success, but more can be done to ensure that enhanced safety is built into all work delivered by the highway authority.

The RoWIP consultation process has identified that busy roads are considered to be reasons for avoiding rights of way. They act as a barrier to access and raise concerns about safety. From this, the Council has highlighted locations on the road and rights of way networks where danger is perceived to exist.

In reality, there are very few incidents involving rights of way users on the network. However evidence suggests that the perception of certain crossing points does deter people from using certain paths completely. The Council will continue to investigate where junctions, crossing points and on-road routes with traffic related safety issues are a cause of concern and where traffic affects the confidence of potential users. Where identified, such concerns will be a priority to be resolved.

## Maintenance

Effective maintenance and infrastructure management is essential to deliver the aims of the Local Transport Plan. Buckinghamshire has developed a Maintenance Strategy intended to improve highway networks from a customer led perspective and this has been incorporated within the Transport Plan.

To deliver a more cost effective maintenance management system the Council will seek to improve its asset management systems including a comprehensive register and GIS mapping facility. Together these systems will aim to deliver maintenance at reduced cost, through more effective targeting and prioritisation and, ultimately, the improved condition of public rights of way.

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<sup>63</sup> Local Transport Plan, Congestion p17

This will primarily be achieved through the integration of rights of way asset management information within the overall Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) This aims to deliver one system of identifying, reporting, prioritising and actioning maintenance works and will improve the Council's ability to respond to customer demands as well as moving the maintenance of rights of way towards a more proactive status.

### **Improving the Environment**

The Green Infrastructure Strategy in combination with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will be two of the main drivers behind improving the quality of the Buckinghamshire environment for the future. In addition to the LTP aims for improving air quality, the various strategies provide an environmental context for rights of way work through integrating public access with natural and historical features and considerations.

Therefore the Council will work with partners to consider the habitats and species defined in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and ensure that rights of way improvements and maintenance works do not adversely affect the environment and where possible actively enhance it.

This process will be aided in future by the development of the Buckinghamshire Environmental Character System which will research and map environmental factors around the County in depth. Using this data will enable all services to recognise the specific environmental issues in a given area and plan for its preservation or enhancement through scheme delivery.

### **Delivering Cohesion & Equality**

The County Council places local communities at the heart of service provision, delivering more for individuals and communities alike. To improve the quality of life for all residents, therefore, it is essential that the Council provides strong leadership on community cohesion and equality.

The Council's Cohesion and Equality Strategy is linked to the GC2C programme, promoting local area partnerships with a focus on the needs of local residents and personalised services. The community and corporate plans and their visions for success remain the main drivers behind the strategy.

Through the delivery of Local Area Agreements (LAA) and the implementation of Local Area Action Plans, the public rights of way network will play an influential part in the delivery of safer, stronger and more cohesive communities. More specifically this will be delivered by providing opportunities for communities to engage with the Council on rights of way work and issues, and participate in its development.

Many such opportunities already exist. Parishes and user groups provide the opportunity for people to have their say and input into rights of way developments and schemes such as Simply Walk provide volunteering opportunities helping to directly deliver the aims of the LAA and the LTP.

In terms of ethnicity, research shows that rights of way users are not a wide mix of races and that more can be done to market the network towards alternative user groups and those not familiar with using the countryside. This will be researched further in the coming years.

### **Safe, sustainable and cohesive communities**

The Buckinghamshire Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Council's Cultural Strategy both seek to deliver improvements to the quality of life in the county through the involvement of local people in the development of their local area.

The RoWIP also seeks to deliver improvements to quality of life issues through the development of the network and the delivery of a local framework. By improving the network and providing a more integrated system of paths and ways, the use and enjoyment of the network will increase. The RoWIP consultation data highlighted that rights of way have a huge impact on public enjoyment and quality of life with a large majority of those responding confirming that accessing the open air gives them pleasure, allows them to relax and de-stress and in some cases is a source of inspiration.

The Council will aim to further develop 'quality of life' through local community interaction. By involving local people in the processes of improving rights of way, through Local Access Forum participation, volunteering opportunities and parish council interaction, local communities can become empowered to improve their own area as they see fit.

### **In summary**

#### **You said...**

- 1) Busy roads and road safety fears are a major reason for avoiding the use of certain rights of way.
- 2) You use rights of way to access the shops, work, transport hubs and local attractions.
- 3) The high quality standard of rights of way should be maintained.
- 4) Rights of way have a highly positive impact on your quality of life.

#### **Buckinghamshire County Council will...**

- 1) Continue to deliver the aims and outcomes of the Corporate, Community and Transport agendas.
- 2) Ensure that locations on rights of way with road safety concerns are given the highest priority to be resolved.
- 3) Ensure that rights of way continue to deliver the accessibility agenda through improvement and maintenance works.
- 4) Continue to maintain the network in the most effective and efficient way and deliver value for money.
- 5) Always consider the following in the delivery of rights of way:
  - Diversity and cohesion
  - Biodiversity and the environment
  - Access to key services
  - Improving Road safety
  - Quality of Life

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	When?	Resources	
What is our aim?	How will we do this?	What we will monitor.	What is our deadline?	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<p><b>7.1</b></p> <p>Deliver a better integrated and more accessible rights of way network</p> <p>(Linked to 1.3)</p>	<p>Contribute and support the delivery of the 5 LTP aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accessibility planning</li> <li>• tackling congestion</li> <li>• improving road safety</li> <li>• improving the environment</li> <li>• effective maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bid for and receive annual LTP funds for rights of way schemes</li> <li>• Contribute towards Accessibility indicators</li> <li>• Annual reporting of RoWIP outcomes through LTP APR</li> </ul>	<p>Deliver ongoing partnership work.</p> <p>Continually seek key partners</p>	<p>No (LTP funding required)</p>	<p>Further funding partners will be sought</p>
<p><b>7.2</b></p> <p>Support safe, strong and cohesive communities</p> <p>(Linked to 2.4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the aims of the Sustainable Communities Strategy and GC2C strategy</li> <li>• Deliver a local framework approach to rights of way work</li> <li>• Support rights of way schemes highlighted within parish plans</li> <li>• Seek to resolve road safety concerns affecting rights of way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a list of local area priorities within all 19 local areas by 2011</li> <li>• Continued support and advice from the Local Access Forum</li> <li>• Maintain high customer satisfaction</li> </ul>	<p>Finalise local community priorities for rights of way work by 2011</p>	<p>Delivery of schemes will be supported by existing funds</p>	<p>The support of local communities and parishes will be required</p>
<p><b>7.4</b></p> <p>Provide an efficient, value for money service, supported by high customer satisfaction</p> <p>(Linked to 2.3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the delivery of the Corporate Plan aims</li> <li>• Deliver added value to rights of way work through partnership arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor the level of “added value” gained on an annual basis through partnership arrangements.</li> </ul>	<p>Annual assessment of value for money</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Continued volunteer and partnership support will be required</p>

## **THEME 8: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

Buckinghamshire County Council firmly believes that the future of the rights of way network should be heavily influenced by those who use it and hold it in high regard.

Working closely with partners is vital to the Council's vision of engaged and cohesive communities, taking an active role in the delivery of Council services and participating in improving the area in which they live and work. Buckinghamshire County Council already works with an extensive list of partners in a variety of ways.

### **Key Partners**

It is clear that many interested parties consider the Buckinghamshire countryside and access to it a high priority. The Council alone cannot deliver wide scale investment in the network and will continue to work with external bodies to deliver a more effective service, capable of achieving wider initiatives. Some of our key partners are identified here.

### **The Ramblers' Association**

The Ramblers Association<sup>64</sup> is Britain's biggest walking charity, working to promote and improve walking conditions nationwide. With 143,000 members in England, Scotland and Wales, it has been working for the interests of walkers for 70 years. The Association's vast network of volunteers and staff help and support all who walk, of all ages and abilities and assist the Council through participation on the Local Access Forum and with information and guidance on the needs and use of the County's path network from a walking perspective. With the County Council, it seeks to safeguard Buckinghamshire's network of public paths, ensuring that they remain free from obstruction and work very closely with the Council through its network of volunteers to assist with maintenance and monitoring work.

### **The British Horse Society**

It is estimated that there are approximately 1.2m horses in the UK, the keeping of which contributes approximately £4billion annually into the economy, supporting some 60,000 jobs nationwide. Equestrianism is the second largest rural industry behind farming in Buckinghamshire and the British Horse Society<sup>65</sup> has a membership of 60,000 recreational riders.

The society is highly visible in Buckinghamshire and the Council has long worked with its members on rights of way matters, notably the development of the bridleway network to provide much greater off road access to the countryside for horse riders. Our combined success was recognised in the 2006 National Award from the British Horse Society for the country's 'Most Active Council in opening up Horse Riding Routes.'

The continued work of the Society through the Local Access Forum to resolve the fragmentation of the horse riding network represents one of the more

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<sup>64</sup> [www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)

<sup>65</sup> [www.bhs.org.uk](http://www.bhs.org.uk)

significant challenges, but one that can benefit much wider access not just for horse riders but also for walkers and cyclists.

### **The Chiltern Society**

The Chiltern Society<sup>66</sup> works tirelessly to maintain the character of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, half of which is within Buckinghamshire. Working closely within the Local Access Forum and alongside The Chilterns' Conservation Board, it works to raise awareness and understanding of the Chiltern's countryside, its character and history, its natural environment and beauty. Through a range of partnerships, it seeks to conserve, develop and improve the Chiltern's amenities, preserve its features of historic interest and, importantly, to ensure the Chilterns remains an area of tranquillity to be enjoyed by all.

The Chiltern Society is a key partner of the County Council through the Local Access Forum. It has many highly valued volunteers who give up their time to carry out significant maintenance and improvement works to the rights of way network across the Chilterns.

### **The Chilterns' Conservation Board (CCB)<sup>67</sup>**

Designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1965, the Chiltern Hills are one of the finest assets in Buckinghamshire. A highly popular attraction of 833 square kilometres, it is visited by approximately 52 million people a year<sup>68</sup>. Half of the AONB sits in Buckinghamshire, where the landscape provides opportunities to visit chalk hills, beech woodlands and abundant wildlife.

The Conservation Board is primarily responsible for the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape, its management and meeting the demands for recreational access opportunities within The Chilterns. Buckinghamshire County Council works very closely in partnership with the CCB and adjacent local authorities delivering a wide range of access projects that bring environmental, social and economic benefits to the Chilterns.

### **SUSTRANS**

Sustrans<sup>69</sup> is the UK charity responsible for the development of a National Cycling Network (NCN) and is leading the way in the development of sustainable transport initiatives. The NCN is a valuable asset that caters for over 230 million journeys each year, 50 miles of which is in Buckinghamshire.

Buckinghamshire County Council aims to deliver annual improvements to the cycling networks through changes to or enhancements of the rights of way network in key areas. Sustrans and the Council, in partnership with others, will therefore continue to work together to negotiate land issues, raise funds for improvement projects and deliver a wider network of safe cycling routes.

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<sup>66</sup> [www.chilternsociety.org.uk](http://www.chilternsociety.org.uk)

<sup>67</sup> [www.chilternsaonb.org](http://www.chilternsaonb.org)

<sup>68</sup> Chilterns AONB Management Plan

<sup>69</sup> [www.sustrans.co.uk](http://www.sustrans.co.uk)

### **Forestry Commission**

The Forestry Commission<sup>70</sup> is the Government body responsible for the expansion and protection of Britain's forestry and woodland, delivering projects to enable and encourage their use. With other responsibilities for sustainable conservation, research, timber production as well as leisure and recreation, the aims of the Commission essentially complement the aims of this plan.

The Council already works with the Commission, through various partnership arrangements to develop the greater access and enjoyment of woodland areas, and the Commission is instrumental in the improved provision of Green Infrastructure in the county. Nationally, 50% of the population has access to a large woodland area within 4kms and Buckinghamshire is below this standard.

### **Buckinghamshire Community Action (BCA)**

BCA<sup>71</sup> is responsible for supporting communities, parishes and market towns in the development of local economic and social frameworks. Its primary responsibility is to promote the development of a local vision and the creation of achievable local action plans. These plans provide a significant opportunity to progress specific rights of way improvements with input from local people.

The Council has been involved with external funding partners and town and parish councils to realise a number of schemes to improve the local access networks and develop local economies through tourism. In 2007, projects including the Buckingham Riverside Walk, Chesham walks and the Princes Risborough walks improvements have indicated how successful local partnering arrangements can be to deliver major walking schemes that derive considerable benefit for local communities and economies.

### **National Trails**

There are two National Trails in Buckinghamshire – The Ridgeway and The Thames Path.<sup>72</sup> As National Trails these are considered to be of national (and international) significance and are hugely popular to visitors and residents alike. The most recent data suggests an estimated 12m visitors use the Trails nationally each year<sup>73</sup> and they are an essential element of access provision in Buckinghamshire.

The Council already has a long-standing partnership for the management of National Trails and is part of the Management Group to ensure that The Ridgeway and Thames Path are exemplars of countryside access. The Council contributes funds each year towards the annual programme of improvement and maintenance works on these routes and monitors their use. Since 2006 the Management Group has spent around £600,000 on the Trails' maintenance and promotion, supported by Natural England, the County Council and associated partners.

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<sup>70</sup> [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.bucks-comm-action.org.uk>

<sup>72</sup> [www.nationaltrail.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk)

<sup>73</sup> 2004/5 National Trails survey data

### **British Waterways**

Regional partnerships are essential to the continued provision of access across Buckinghamshire's boundaries. Established by British Waterways<sup>74</sup> and the local authorities of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, the 3 Counties Canal partnership aims to deliver improvements to the towpath and canal networks. These access corridors remain well used by walkers, as well as cyclists – who often have permissive rights – as well as other leisure pursuits, including angling.

The partnership aims to identify the needs of the canal network and deliver projects to increase visitor numbers by 100% on canals by 2012. The partnership will realise this through continued promotion of the current provision as well as planned improvement works on towpath surfaces.

### **Neighbouring Highway Authorities**

The Council's network of rights of way cannot be considered in isolation. Not only does the network cross the borders into the neighbouring authorities at a range of locations, the authorities already work together to manage the networks on a regional level.

Partnership working arrangements already exist in areas such as Regional Local Access Forum development, specific cross border forums such as the National Trails Management Group, Ashridge Management Group, The Rural Access Group for the Chilterns AONB and through the work of Sustrans and Tourism South East.

Following receipt of consultation data specifically related to fragmentation issues, the Council will look to establish new partnership elements with neighbouring authorities to look at specific cross border issues. Some routes experience changes of status, dead ends, and access issues because of structures or surfacing that require both authorities to work together to resolve the legalities and practical issues that exist.

### **District Councils**

The onset of even closer working arrangements with the four district councils in Buckinghamshire through the Pathfinder initiative (the collaborative working arrangement between the County Council and the four district councils) will benefit the way rights of way improvements link to the work of district councils in the provision of open spaces, leisure facilities and housing developments. Therefore the Council, will seek to develop its Action Plan for wider access improvements through direct consultation with all district councils with consideration of their local strategies for cycling and walking.

### **Natural England**

Delivery of rights of way improvements is highly dependent on the support of Natural England<sup>75</sup>. Formerly three separate bodies – the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Rural Development Service – the new combined body (Natural England) has the task of providing countryside advice to the

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<sup>74</sup> [www.british-waterways.org](http://www.british-waterways.org)

<sup>75</sup> [www.naturalengland.org](http://www.naturalengland.org)

Government. It is required to fulfil the aims and objectives set by the Secretary of State and its Strategic Direction<sup>76</sup> outlines the 4 aims: to protect a healthy natural environment, enable greater enjoyment of it, deliver prolonged security and promote its sustainable use.

The Council will work closely with the new body and, wherever possible, seek to secure financial support to deliver key access improvements. Open Access Land, National Trail projects and assistance to the Local Access Forum is highly dependent on this continued support.

## **DEFRA**

The Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)<sup>77</sup> is the Central Government Department that represents the interests of farmers, the countryside, the environment and the rural economy, whose core purpose is to improve the current and future quality of life. This aim is upheld by the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and within other Council strategies and is essential to securing the means to deliver improvements at a national level.

DEFRA's 5 year strategy<sup>78</sup> outlines its method of delivering this vision and places responsibilities with local authorities to take account of rural affairs in greater detail, challenging them to recognise rural needs and support the development of rural communities. Rights of way work is deeply embedded in this approach delivering rural improvements through the network's maintenance and improvement as well as Open Access schemes, Higher Level Stewardship arrangements with farmers, the development of market towns and close working with parish councils.

## **Parishes and Town Councils**

As mentioned earlier, working closer with communities necessitates improved partnership arrangements and working methods with parishes and town councils alike.

This is not new to rights of way management as there is a considerable history of close working with local councils and communities. Currently, over 50% of parish councils already work jointly with the County Council to maintain paths and implement schemes that benefit the local community. Such working arrangements will be widened through initiatives such as support of Parish Plans, Local Area Agreements and DEFRA's "Quality Towns / Parishes" scheme.

## **Farmers and Land Managers**

Farmers and landowners already have a number of responsibilities in respect of public access on their land. In order for the network of public rights of way to function satisfactorily, it is essential that landowners undertake continued work. Where it is not, it is the County Council's duty to ensure that owners comply with their responsibilities towards the management of rights of way through proper enforcement.

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<sup>76</sup> [www.naturalengland.org.uk/about](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about)

<sup>77</sup> [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

<sup>78</sup> [www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/5year-strategy](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/5year-strategy)

Buckinghamshire County Council is very supportive of its farming community and highly values the nature and character of the Buckinghamshire environment with its rich tradition in agriculture. It is increasingly the case that farmers and land managers are working jointly with service providers, such as the County Council, to encourage greater access on their land so that greater benefits of public use can be derived.

The majority of access improvements require agreement, co-operation and partnership with land managers, whether to improve surfaces, signposting or structures on paths. The Improvement Plan not only envisages the continuation of such work but the very nature of scrutinising route networks will make discussions and negotiations with land managers an essential part of any successful Improvement Plan.

### **Volunteers**

The Council currently delivers elements of its rights of way maintenance and improvement works in partnership with volunteer organisations. In 2006/7, 2246 volunteer hours were recorded, contributing significantly to the volume of work undertaken at reduced cost to the Council representing significant value for money. Much of this work is undertaken by The Chiltern Society members, referred to above, but includes contributions by other organisations – such as The Ramblers' Association – as well as individual volunteer effort.

Wherever possible, the Council will do all it can to encourage volunteer groups to undertake suitable works to maintain and improve rights of way.

### **In summary**

#### **You said...**

- 1) Working with partners and a coordinated approach to the delivery improvements is essential.
- 2) You would like to know more about volunteering opportunities on the rights of way network.
- 3) Delivering access improvements in the Chilterns AONB would enable more people to enjoy the landscape and its beauty.

#### **Buckinghamshire County Council will...**

- 1) Continue to deliver schemes in partnership and support strategic plans delivered by partners.
- 2) Continue to support volunteering opportunities specifically within the Simply Walk programme and through partners such as the Chiltern Society and Ramblers Association.
- 3) Work with the CCB and Chiltern Society to deliver strategic improvements within the Chilterns AONB.
- 4) Continue to support close working with parish and town councils to deliver local community benefits.
- 5) Work with partners to bid for and secure additional funds that enable wider rights of way improvements to be implemented.

Objective	Action	Outcome / Output	When?	Resources	
What is our aim?	How will we do this?	What we will monitor.	What is our deadline?	Is the Action achievable with existing funds and resources?	Are new partnerships required to deliver the action?
<p><b>8.1</b></p> <p>Provide an efficient, value for money service supported by high customer satisfaction</p> <p>(Linked to 2.3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support a strong partnership ethos within all elements of rights of way work</li> <li>• Work within key established partnerships to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate greater public use and enjoyment of the rights of way and access networks.</li> <li>• Secure external funding opportunities</li> <li>• Contribute to and support partner strategies such as the Chilterns Management Plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rights of way input into key partnership arrangements</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing partnership contribution, support and delivery</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>New partnerships will be sought in specific cases</p>
<p><b>8.2</b></p> <p>Support safe strong and cohesive communities.</p> <p>(Linked to 2.4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empower local communities through partnership arrangements and a local framework</li> <li>• Support the work of the Local Access Forum</li> <li>• Increase the opportunity for volunteer working within rights of way work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continually measure the effectiveness of the Forum's advisory duties.</li> <li>• Develop local community priorities through the GC2C programme</li> <li>• Monitor the number and value of volunteer hours directly involved in Rights of Way work</li> </ul>	<p>Quarterly LAF meetings</p> <p>Annual monitoring of volunteer contributions</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Continued local community input and volunteer work will be essential</p>

**GLOSSARY**

ANGST	Accessible Natural Green Space Targets
AVDC	Aylesbury Vale District Council
BCA	Buckinghamshire Community Action
BCC	Buckinghamshire County Council
BHS	British Horse Society
BS	British Standard
BVPI 178	Best Value Performance Indicator No. 178
CA 1968	Countryside Act 1968
CAONB	Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CCB	Chilterns Conservation Board
CDC	Chiltern District Council
Common Land	Land with rights of Common as described in the Commons Act 2006
CROW 2000	The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
DMMO	Definitive Map Modification Order
DMS	Definitive Map and Statement
GI	Green Infrastructure
GIS	Geographical Information System
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HA 1980	Highways Act 1980
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
LTP	Local Transport Plan
Modal Shift	Describes the cultural change towards the use of another form of transport.
NERC 2006	Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
Open Access	Open Country where people have the right to roam as designated under the CROW Act 2000, section 1
P3	Parish Paths Partnership
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PPO	Public Path Order
RDPE	Rural Development Programme for England
ROWIP	Rights of Way Improvement Plan
RTRA 1984	The Road Traffic Regulation Act
SBDC	South Buckinghamshire District Council
SDF	Sustainable Development Funds
Structures	Structural assets of the rights of way network including, gates, stiles, bridges and signs
TAMP	Transport Asset Management Plan
TCPA 1990	Town and Country Planning Act 1990
WCA 1981	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
WDC	Wycombe District Council
WHO	World Health Organisation

For more information on Rights of Way please write to:

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