

RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN REVIEW 2008-09

1. Background

In 2000 the government, through the Countryside and Rights Of Way Act, introduced a new duty for councils to produce and publish, in collaboration with the local community, a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (ROWIP). This would be a document in which highway authorities set out their plans for improving the network of public footpaths, bridleways and byways in their area. It would be a statutory requirement and an important part of the process of making the countryside more accessible for everyone.

Buckinghamshire's ROWIP was subject to four district based public consultation exercises in October 2007 and was endorsed in March 2008 at the Policy Advisory Group Meeting and signed off by the Cabinet Member. As part of the development of this plan, a statement of actions and an associated action plan was created, directly related to our statutory duties and priorities derived from the public consultation. These then set out actions that we propose to take to improve access within the County.

2. Summary

The Improvement Plan is available for the public to download from the Council's website. The plan targets eight themes of work in the overall action plan which includes thirteen objectives:

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

Each of the objectives has a number of actions assigned, each with specific timescales - some over the entire ten year span of the strategy. During the first year a number of actions toward these objectives have already been achieved. These include to:

- Deliver a consolidated Definitive Map, every 5 years – in 2008, 2013 and 2018. A fully updated Definitive Map was published in April 2008.

- Begin work on a web based interactive map available on the Buckinghamshire County Council website. This is underway.
- Undertake further consultation research into rights of way and open access land. This was completed in June 2008.
- Deliver an annual programme of work funded by the Local Transport Plan. Works completed in 2008 to a total of £35,000.
- Improve information on rights of way promoted routes via the Buckinghamshire County Council website - completed July 2008; website now features information on each promoted route which will be progressively updated over the next 3-5 years as appropriate.
- Continue work on maintenance, improvements, Definitive Map orders, green infrastructure, partnership projects and health walks actively being progressed as set out in the document.

The following sections summarise progress in each of the eight themes.

Theme 1: 'Mapping the Network', focuses on the Definitive Map

The new consolidated Definitive Map and Statement was published in April 2008 and continues to be one of the most up to date in the country. It is currently available electronically through 'BucksMaps', which will be improved in order to become interactive and user-friendly. The new map contains all the Parish boundary changes. This is publicly available as before and has been released to parish & district councils, libraries and area offices.

Copy extracts of the Definitive Map can be provided to interested parties, normally at a resolution of 1:10,000. There is usually a charge for this service.

The team continues to reduce the number of map anomalies, currently recorded at 159, down from 163 last year. Anomalies are also resolved on an ad hoc basis during map investigations made by the team.

Modification and diversion orders were made in a variety of locations throughout the county, as well as the creation of Rights of Way by landowner dedication. In certain locations village green status was granted.

Definitive Map Modification Orders. Eight applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders were received in 2008/9. Five applications were determined during the year, all of which were determined within 12 months of receipt.

Six applications remained outstanding at the end of the year, including claimed footpaths in High Wycombe, Shabbington and Whitchurch; claimed BOATs in Iver and Twyford; and a claim to downgrade a Bridleway to Footpath in Ashley Green.

BOAT applications. Chesham BOAT Public Inquiry - A long-standing issue relating to three bridleways in the Chesham area has been resolved. The Council had received applications to upgrade these routes to BOAT. These were initially rejected and the applicants successfully appealed against this decision. The Council was subsequently directed to make Orders to upgrade the routes. Once the Orders were publicised, over 300 objections were received and the matter was referred to the Secretary of State. The Council was one of the objectors.

A public inquiry held on 2 December 2008 at Burnham Football Club was attended by many local residents. The applicants did not speak in support of the Orders and the inquiry lasted less than an hour. The inspector's decision was issued on 2nd December 2008. The inspector declined to confirm the Orders and hence the routes remain as bridleways.

Two further BOAT Orders (which the County Council made having considered that there was sufficient evidence to indicate BOAT status) were challenged and public inquiries have been arranged in 2009/10. The routes are in Drayton Parslow and Great and Little Kimble / Ellesborough.

Decisions relating to appeals against the County Council's rejection of applications for BOATs in the Great and Little Missenden, Stowe and Maids Moreton areas remained outstanding at the end of the year.

Village Green Applications: Five Village Green applications were received in 2008/9. In total eight applications were determined during the year, five of which (i.e. 62.5%) were determined within 12 months of receipt. This figure is lower than the 2007/8 baseline of 100% due to applications having to go to Public Inquiry, which can lengthen the determination process. Six applications remained outstanding at the end of the year.

Village greens were registered at Gosling Grove, Downley and at One Tree Meadow, Beaconsfield, under Section 15(8) of the Commons Act 2006, which provides for voluntary registration by a landowner. A village green was also registered at Plomer Green Lane, Downley.

Five village green applications have been rejected: Exchange Street, Aylesbury; Brae Hill, Brill; Candlemas Mead, Beaconsfield; land at Ludgershall and Windmill Hill, Princes Risborough. In each case, it was considered that not all of the statutory criteria had been met. The Brill and Princes Risborough decisions followed public inquiries. However, a second application to register land at Windmill Hill based on twenty years' user is under consideration.

There are currently six village green applications in progress – Barn Meadow, Amersham; Daly Way, Aylesbury; Station Road, Marsh Gibbon; Coppice Farm Road, Tylers Green; Bloomfield Cottages, Bellingdon; and Burtons Wood, Little Chalfont.

Common Land Searches: 99% of Common Land Searches were responded to within 2 days. With the current economic downturn and with fewer houses being sold, the number of requests received reduced from 1766 in 2007/8 to 1093 in 2008/9.

Public Path Orders: 10 Public Path Orders were dealt with and completed in the year. 15 Public Path Orders are currently outstanding.

Theme 2: 'Looking after the Network' - focuses on maintenance and enforcement

A great achievement this year has been to make available maintenance issue reports on the council's website. Since January 2009 progress updates of reported issues have been available to view by the public, detailing the problem type and officer actions. Issues remain on the website for 6 months after they have been resolved so the public can view what action has been taken.

One ROW Liaison Group Member has said...

"The availability of reported issues on the website is, for me, the biggest step forward in open government in my lifetime".

The teams continue to scrutinise the Rights of Way database with the aim of updating it on a regular basis. We are reasonably confident that the information contained in our database is as accurate a reflection of the structures on the ground as it can be, given the changing nature of the network.

We have also achieved a 36% reduction in outstanding issues on the database, from 1,565 in 2007/08 to 997 in 2008/09.

The Group has managed to secure improvements to 483 structures, including the removal of 289 stiles. The total number equates to 4.3% of structures either removed or improved for easy access during the year. This includes over 100 removed as a result of the Council managing the Chiltern Society's Donate-a-Gate scheme.

Case Study:

Flackwell Heath - Partnership work with the Chiltern Society and Chepping Wycombe and Little Marlow Parish Councils achieved the replacement of 14 stiles around Pigeon House Farm, Flackwell Heath. The work was undertaken by the Chiltern Society Path Maintenance volunteers over a number of weeks in March 2009, with Chepping Wycombe Parish Council funding the gates through the donate-a-gate scheme and the County Council matching their 7 gates. The improvements resulted in two new Simply Walk groups making use of the improved access.



Flackwell Heath 2007



Flackwell Heath 2009

The Priority Matrix and reporting issues

The Priority matrix has been used to prioritise issues for a number of years and this is intended to give officers a framework for targeting work but also seeks to give the public a reasonable expectation of when individual problems will be addressed. The

percentage of reported issues dealt with within priority matrix timescales is 76% (against a target of 75%), an increase over the previous years figure at 68%. Due to the time it can take to contact landowners, the higher priority issues have not always been resolved within the very short 15 day target time in many cases.

The County Council tries to make reporting an issue on the network as simple as possible. There are forms on the website and issues can be emailed directly via the Rights of Way mailbox. However, by far the highest number of reports are received by post.

The average time taken to complete a works order has been 72 days.

During the year, 524 kilometres of paths were cleared of surface vegetation.

Case Study: Aston Clinton

Numerous complaints from horse riders reported Buckland Bridleway 1 and Aston Clinton Bridleway 2 in dangerous condition. The route was heavily overgrown and the surface was muddy and poached.

To allow more light onto the path the overgrowth was cut back and 200 metres was resurfaced. To achieve this, a layer of terram matting was laid at 2.5 metres width and hardcore and planings overlain on top.

Local concern over potential vehicular use was addressed by installing two Kent gaps, which allow walkers, horse riders, cyclists and carriage drivers, but provide a deterrent to cars.

The improvements were much appreciated by local riders and the British Horse Society.



Before



After

Bridleway improvements in Buckland.

Volunteers and the Chiltern Society

A high level of volunteer work was undertaken in 2008/9. The Chiltern Society Path Maintenance Volunteers continue to show great commitment, with 1,610 hours

recorded. In addition, the Ramblers' Association members provide a high number of unrecorded hours surveying paths and reporting issues. They have stated their work has been made easier with fewer problems on the network than in the past.

The target to 'Sustain top quartile BVPI performance' (paths 'easy to use') at its 2007/8 level of 78% was exceeded in 2008/9 at 80%.

Summary of maintenance carried out between April 2008 and March 2009

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	Total
Alignment	Path Off Line - resolved issue	63
Clearance	Clearance - carried out	524km
Bridge	Installed or repaired	93
Finger/post	Installed or repaired	374
Fly Tipping	Fly Tipping - removed	10
Gate	Gate repaired or installed	190
Intimidating or Misleading	Intimidation - resolved	21
Intimidating or Misleading	Misleading Sign - removed	19
Obstruction - resolved	Barbed wire	16
Obstruction - resolved	Barrier - Fencing, wall or other	202
Obstruction - resolved	Electric fence	30
Obstruction - removed	Fallen Tree	184
Obstruction - resolved	Ploughing and Cropping	165
Other	Delivery of materials	58
Other	Miscellaneous issues resolved	113
Stile	Installed or repaired	283
Stile	Stile To Gap	53
Stile	Stile To KG	159
Stile	Stile To PG	77
Terrain	Path Erosion - resolved	44
Terrain	Path Surface problem resolved	173
Waymark Post	Installed/Repaired	271
Consultations	All Planning Applications Assessed	596
Chiltern Society	Volunteer Hours whole county	1610 hours
Improvements	To aid mobility access-county	483
Number on Database	No. of Job Sheets issued	2374
Number on Database	Average time to complete an order	72 days
Number on Database	No. of issues os 31/03/08	1565
Number on Database	No. of Issues os 31/03/09	997

National Trails

The Council works in partnership to maintain the County's two National Trails with the National Trails Team based at Oxfordshire County Council. Major bank and bridge repairs, as well as surfacing works, were completed in 2008/9 upstream of Marlow on the Thames Path. Extensive clearance work around the Eton rowing lake at Dorney and surface repairs to the Ridgeway near Bledlow were also undertaken.

On the Ridgeway an emergency closure was placed on this section of byway at Bledlow due to large badger sett appearing. As this happened during the breeding season, the sett could not be filled at the time, but a licence was granted by Natural England for 'removal of spoil heaps' laying of metal plates over affected areas and levelling the surface'. The works have been undertaken and the emergency closure lifted. The site will be reinvestigated during the summer of 2009.

Enforcement

Sites where significant enforcement action was taken included:

- Turville Footpath No.2A where large illegal entrance gates were removed.
- Iver Footpath No.20 where gates were removed.
- Chalfont St Peter Bridleway No.34 where gates were removed.

Theme 3 – ‘Creating new links’ - focuses on strategic access improvements.

Strategic access improvements help to deliver a more integrated and accessible rights of way network. As opportunities arise, areas of footpath and bridleway fragmentation can be established and dealt with when funds allow. A partnership approach to funding is continually being sought.

Growth Areas. One of the main areas of work this year has been to liaise with partners working on the new growth areas around Aylesbury and Milton Keynes. Close working with colleagues in Strategic Planning, Transportation and Aylesbury Vale District Council ensured Rights of Way were included in discussions to achieve an integrated network of routes. In addition, the Rights of Way Group contributed to planning responses on large applications around Buckingham, Leighton Linlade and Little Horwood.

Green Infrastructure. An important area of work has been to contribute to Green Infrastructure (GI) work, where Rights of Way and the Local Access Forum continue to be represented on the GI Consortium. Countryside access is a key component within GI, which seeks to gain better access by linking places and spaces together. Examples include work on the Whaddon and Salden Chase initiatives around Milton Keynes. Here, access improvements around potential growth areas were highlighted and improvements proposed to ensure s.106 monies could be fully realised.

Open Access. Disabled access work associated with a funding award from Natural England was completed in 2008/9. Gates at Turville Windmill, Pitstone Hill, Burnham Beeches and Black Park Country Park were installed, providing disabled mobility vehicle access.

Developer Contributions. Significant added value was achieved as a result of s.106 developer contributions. At Little Marlow Gravel Pits, Thames Water money funded improvements to footpaths around the former gravel pits site. New path surfaces, gates and bridges now allow better access for mobility vehicle users and mothers with pushchairs. This now forms part of a circular walk along the Thames Path to Little Marlow and around the gravel pits lake.

Safer Routes to School. Through a partnership with the Council's Transportation Service 'Safer Routes to School' initiative and Edlesborough School, a scheme was completed to improve access along Bridleways No. 1 Edlesborough and No. 3 Ivinghoe. The route had been in need of significant improvement for some time. The brief was to make the field-edge path accessible all year round to walkers with pushchairs who use the route to accompany children to school, as well as enhancing horse and cycling access. The new 1800m long path was well-received by the community and there was an official opening in September 2008. The scheme cost £39,000, funded through the Local Transport Plan.



New surfacing near Edlesborough Church.

New routes and missing links – bridleway. Discussions began with horse riders in the Chilterns AONB to identify and prioritise the most important missing links in the bridleway network. These have been collated and discussions commenced with local landowners. Potential sources of funding are also being sought. Similar contacts have been made with Little Horwood Rights of Way Action Group, Naphill Common Preservation Society, Lane End Parish Council and a number of landowners.

New routes - cycle route and bridleway. The Haddenham to Thame cycle and equestrian route has still to be realised as there has been no success trying to upgrade the small section of footpath to bridleway on the favoured route through Scotsgrove Mill. Other routes have been investigated, in particular a route north of Tythrop House, to determine whether or not this had been recorded correctly on the Definitive Map where it turns into a bridleway at the Oxfordshire boundary. This proved inconclusive. A feasibility study in 2007, commissioned by Transportation, remains on file ready for funding opportunities. This may be possible as Oxfordshire County Council this year put the scheme forward as a priority out of possible housing growth around Thame.

Theme 4 – ‘Knowing where to go’ - focuses on Marketing the network of routes

The Council aims to provide improved information on rights of way and countryside access through a variety of methods.

The family of routes promoted by leaflets is being upgraded and renewed to improve our ability to market our promoted routes and the attractions the county has to offer. Some existing leaflets date back nearly 20 years and are in need of a refresh. This work is underway as a key priority to increase public use of the network and we will be seeking more resources to complete this project. Once refreshed the publications, which are currently available on the Rights of Way area of the County Council’s website, will be updated made available to download by the public.

There are now a significant number of leaflets downloadable from the website, including 54 walking, 7 cycling and 5 riding routes. The quarterly Simply Walk programme is also now online, as well as being available in libraries and doctors’ surgeries. In addition, the Bernwood Jubilee Way booklet has been distributed to Tourist Information Centres, county and district council offices and public libraries.

The website now includes information about open access which shows open country, dedicated land and registered commons, with maps for selected areas of open access land. Work started this year to sign the open access areas in Buckinghamshire, starting with the 10 largest sites which are already promoted on the website. Through the Best Value Performance Indicator surveys (BVPI) the team ensure that all signage and way marking is in line with our policies.



Turville Windmill open access area.

The website has been improved both in terms of its content, quality of information and features. Network maps of public rights of way can be accessed using Bucks Online which provides dynamic maps of the county with the ability to display many information categories. Further work on a more user-friendly interactive mapping system is planned.

Theme 5 – “Looking after you and the Environment” - links rights of way to environmental and health issues.

The Simply Walk project, hosted by Buckinghamshire County Council, is aimed at giving relatively inactive people an opportunity to improve their health within their local community, get some fresh air, meet new people and improve their sense of well-being. The scheme is funded by a partnership comprising of BCC, District Councils and the Primary Care Trust.

The adoption of the Simply Walk project has helped to increase the use of the existing access networks and impact positively on levels of health, particularly related to reducing levels of obesity and coronary heart disease with positive effects on mental health and social well-being. Walkers are encouraged to walk at their own pace and walking in a group provides a safe environment for people who might be worried about walking on their own.

The ‘Simply Walk’ programme of health walks has seen another encouraging year with walks now set up in 14 of the 19 local community areas, with more planned. Walks are led by trained volunteer walk leaders, many of whom are retired. They contribute an enormous amount of time and effort to Simply Walk, which now attracts over 900 walkers in any given period, many of whom are regulars. All the walks are free and no booking is required for anyone wishing to join in.

The project retains sustained partnership working, with a range of funding partners and community based volunteers all engaged in driving the project forward. The project is currently funded by 8 key partners to the value of £32,000 which accounts for approximately 71% of existing running costs of £45,000. Additional resource has been sourced from within the Rights of Way team for assistance with data inputting since January 2009.

Throughout the year, there has been growth in the number and range of walks, walk leaders and total walkers. It’s been a very successful year, despite no additional funding:

- The project hit the fourth quarter target of 600 engaged walkers (an engaged walker walks at least 3 times in a quarter).
- There are now 2856 members on the database.
- 49 walks had been set up by March 2009, an increase over the target of 45 walks; with coverage in 14 of the 19 GC2C areas.
- As well as facilitating volunteer-led community walks, Simply Walk is involved with family walks and other health walks. New walks have been set up in partnership with organisations such as: ‘Sure Start’ (Buggy Walks); mental health teams (walks for service users); Cameron House, Chesham (a walk for people with learning disabilities); and a new volunteer-led walk from the disability centre in Princes Risborough.
- 63 walk leaders were trained in 2008/9, exceeding the target of 40.
- Most walks are over flat terrain, and some offer different length routes.

Many walkers have found Simply Walk a great way to fill the hours, meet other people and make new friends, while undertaking a healthy, enjoyable activity. The full walks programme, can be viewed on the BCC website. The countywide programme of walks is promoted quarterly, both on the website and also via hardcopy leaflets distributed to partners and other interest groups.

For the second successive year, Simply Walk achieved accreditation with Natural England's 'Walking the Way to Health' scheme.

Simply Walk offers walks throughout Buckinghamshire



Chalfont St Giles to Chalfont St Peter



Walks for all ages and abilities

The Big Walk: The Simply Walk co-ordinator was also active in setting up a challenging 6km walk around the grounds of Hughenden Manor Park as part of 'The Big Walk' to raise money for the national charity Mind and OBMH Charitable Funds in order to fund a local Bipolar Self Management Training Course, as well as promoting the benefits of walking for good mental health and physical wellbeing. Nearly 100 people took part in the walk on 23rd March.

Theme 6 – Rights of Way for Everyone - focuses on ‘access for all’

One of the key performance priorities is aimed at improvements to the network to assist those with mobility difficulties. Such improvements will not only help those who have to use a wheel-chair but also parents with push-chairs and anyone who might have difficulty climbing a stile, resulting in a greater number of able people to use the network.

Donate-a-Gate works within the Chilterns AONB: The team continues to support the work of the Chiltern Society and the Chilterns’ Conservation Board, with involvement in the Chiltern Society Donate-a-gate project. The project replaces stiles in the central Chilterns area with more accessible gates funded by the public. Members have contributed over £23,000 through this scheme over the past three years. The 117 donors have had gates installed and inscribed plaques mounted, with more coming forward. This work contributes to the council’s annual target to remove at least 250 stiles per year.



A donate-a-gate, with donor (in hat) and Chiltern Society volunteers in Lane End.

The success of the scheme has prompted us to consider running a similar scheme beyond the Chilterns AONB, possibly advertising to the public on our website where we have secured agreement to remove stiles and inviting individuals, organisations or parishes to sponsor these gates.

Disabled Access Work: More open access sites are now accessible to mobility vehicles Disabled access work associated with a funding award from Natural England was completed in 2008/9. Gates at Turville Windmill, Pitstone Hill, Burnham

Beeches and Black Park Country Park were installed, providing disabled mobility vehicle access.

A new disabled access walk suitable for mobility vehicles was completed in May 2008 linking Chalfont St Giles and Chalfont St Peter. The project was a partnership between the two parish councils, The Chiltern Society's Path Maintenance Volunteers and the County Council. The improvements were launched with a walk attended by John Elfes, Chairman of the Local Access Forum, Sir John Johnson and members of a new Simply Walk Group. The route is being considered by the Disabled Ramblers for their 2009 walks programme.

Brenda Harris, a former local access forum member representing disabled access, suggested the creation of a circular walk for disabled users along the Thames Path and around the Marlow Gravel Pits site. This was completed in the summer of 2008 with new gates, bridge ramps and surfaces.

A partnership between Rights of Way Group, Chepping Wycombe Parish Council and the Chiltern Society Path Maintenance Volunteers helped install 14 new gates to create a stile free walk around Pigeon House Farm and the Crooked Billet at Flackwell Heath.

Ed Tamkin, Local Access Forum member representing disabled access, has surveyed 6 routes around the south of the county for mobility vehicles and wheelchairs. These will be available as downloads on the website next year.

The Group has managed to secure improvements to 483 structures, including the removal of 289 stiles. This equates to 4.3% of structures either removed or improved for easy access during the year.

Theme 7 – The Corporate Agenda - focuses on wider Corporate Strategies

Local Transport Plan. The Rights of Way network and improvements to the network can help to meet Local Transport Plan (LTP) objectives by linking to the delivery of shared priorities for transport, such as road safety, accessibility, congestion and air quality. In December 2008, the County Council published the second LTP2 progress report, a broad-based review outlining progress toward delivering the LTP2. Progress on the RoWIP was reported.

The programme of work funded by the LTP during this time has included the Edlesborough bridleway Safer Routes to School scheme referred to earlier which was officially opened in September 2008. The improvements to the bridleway will allow more families to walk to school rather than use the car and links the residents of Ivinghoe Aston and Edlesborough.

Local Access Forum (LAF). The LAF meets three times per year and continues to provide valuable advice to the County Council and its Rights of Way Group.

Representation has been made to the Buckinghamshire Transportation Service to ensure the need for Rights of Way to be integrated into the Department of Transport's draft consultation LTP3 document.

Members have sought to become more involved in the development of Green Infrastructure (GI). Peter Challis sits on the Buckinghamshire GI steering group and Mark Bailey, the Buckinghamshire GI Manager, gave a talk to the forum in March 2009. He explained that countryside access is a key component within GI, which seeks to gain better access by linking places and spaces together. Gains are being sought particularly in major development areas around Aylesbury and Milton Keynes.

John Elfes, Peter Challis and Neil Harris attended Buckinghamshire GI Conference at The Green Park Centre on 5th December 2008. There were a number of interesting and thought provoking presentations from a wide range of speakers, with virtually all referring to the need for countryside access.

The Forum expressed its concern during the council's 'Built Environment' process which sought to externalize the Rights of Way service. The Forum thought that this may have led to a reduction in resources directed to countryside access and wrote to the council to ensure that standards of service and continuity within the Rights of Way Group would be maintained. In early November 2008, County Council Members decided that Planning and Environment Services, including Rights of Way work, would not be within the scope of the Built Environment project.

The Council's walking strategy, currently in draft stage, also includes input from the LAF on issues such as mapping, disabled access, highway verges, safe walking routes, funding sources, Parish Plans and vehicle speed limits.

The LAF also commented on Natural England's consultation review on the future of National Trails in England and Wales and gave advice to the Chilterns Conservation Board on the access and transportation elements of the Chilterns Management Plan. In addition, feedback was provided on the Green Infrastructure Strategy, to be launched in 2009/10.

Green Infrastructure. Buckinghamshire County Council is a partner of the Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Consortium (GIC) and in consultation with GIC has produced the Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Feedback was provided by the team on the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy, which contains important access elements and ensures Rights of Way issues are addressed in any growth areas. Although the document operates at a very strategic level, Green Infrastructure is all about linking spaces and places together and access is therefore a key issue. This has been manifested in work on Milton Keynes growth areas around Newton Longville and Whaddon Parishes.

Getting Closer to Communities (GC2C). Close contact has been maintained with officers in the GC2C Team to ensure local members and parish councils are kept abreast of all major works and strategies. The new route between Chalfont St Giles and Chalfont St Peter provides a good example, where the local member was able to attend the launch event and the project was included in the GC2C newsletter as an excellent example of local partnership working.

Theme 8 – Working in Partnership - focuses on local community involvement

Familiar partnerships worth noting include the Simply Walk Scheme and the Chiltern Society.

Simply Walk. The Simply Walk scheme relies very much on partnership working with the volunteer leaders, as well as the funding that is provided from the District Councils and Primary Care Trust.

The Chiltern Society. The Chiltern Society Path Maintenance Volunteers meet once a week throughout the year to undertake maintenance and improvements. They work as contractors to the county council and are paid an hourly rate, clocking-up 1,610 hours last year. Also, the Donate-a-Gate scheme runs as a partnership between The Chiltern Society and The County Council and is assisted by a Chiltern Society volunteer who manages payments and installs the plaques. In addition, the society has a network of Area Secretaries who survey their local patches, report problems and respond to diversion order consultations.

In November 2008, ten Chiltern Society Area Secretaries and five County Council Rights of Way staff met at gate suppliers 'Centrewire' in Oxfordshire for a tour of the display area and to discuss various aspects of partnership working. Areas covered included the British Standard for gates and stiles, reporting of redundant stiles in woodlands and on arable land, waymarking (including white painted arrows), the County Council website for works order tracking, landowner negotiations, and issues regarding problem reports. The meeting was well received and there was support for something similar in future.



Chiltern Society volunteers and Bucks CC staff on a partnership working day at Centrewire.

Parish Councils. Officers continue to maintain relations with Parish Council's through the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme (P3). A high volume of maintenance and improvement works are devolved to the local community, mainly for essential summer clearance. Notable successes include Ashley Green whose programme of gate installations will soon result in a stile-free network for the parish. A proposed Parish Conference, aimed at re-launching the scheme and encouraging greater investment in the network, is under consideration.

As mentioned earlier, officers worked closely with Chepping Wycombe and Little Marlow Parishes on access improvements south of Flackwell Heath, around Pigeon House Farm, providing local funding for 14 new gates through the Chiltern Society's donate-a-gate scheme. In addition, Chalfont St. Peter and Chalfont St. Giles Parishes provided similar funding for their disabled route, with new 4 gates. Linked to this project and through work with a member of Chalfont St Giles Parish Council, a new Simply Walks Group was formed.