
REPORT TO:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	8 MARCH 2007	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN PARAGRAPH NO:
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	RICHARD GROVES (EXTN. 5738)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	DRAFT RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR DERBYSHIRE 2006-2011	REF: u:\Richard\committees\EDS11
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: EDS

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that the comments set out under the "Conclusions" section of this report be forwarded as the Council's response to the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 To seek a member resolution in regard to the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Derbyshire which is currently being made available for public consultation.

3.0 Executive Summary

3.1 The report sets out the key themes and aims of the Draft Plan and draws conclusions in relation to a number of issues of particular importance to South Derbyshire.

4.0 Detail

4.1 Under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) the County Council has a new duty to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Derbyshire. This will consider:

- The extent to which local rights of way meet the present and future needs of the public.
- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open air recreation and the enjoyment of the local authority's area together with the use of the network by local people as a means to access workplaces, schools and other local facilities.
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and those with limited mobility or other impairments.

4.2 For the purposes of the document the term "local rights of way" includes the following paths and access opportunities:

- Public Rights of Way: Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic.

- Off road cycle tracks.
- Greenways: multi user, easy access off road trails and routes.
- Permissive paths, including those provided through woodlands, parks, estates or along canal towpaths.
- Open access land.

4.3 Extensive public consultation has already taken place and an analysis of the information gained and an assessment of the current access network has resulted in the identification of a number of themes and aims which have formed the basis for the production of a Statement of Action.

4.4 The three key themes are:

- A. Encourage routes that support the local economy and boost tourism.
- B. Give more consideration to matters relating to conservation and biodiversity.
- C. Promote the sustainable use of the network, encouraging healthier and more sustainable travel choices.

4.5 The Statement of Action is organised around five aims as follows:

- Aim 1: Ensure that the existing public rights of way network is open and available for use
- Aim 2: Provide an up to date and widely available Definitive Map and Statement
- Aim 3: Provide a more connected, safe and accessible network suitable for all users
- Aim 4: Encourage greater community involvement in managing local rights of way
- Aim 5: Improve the promotion, understanding and use of the network

4.6 A summary of the needs identified under each of these aims is attached at Annexe A.

4.7 Within each of the aims is a series of proposed actions to deliver the aims and secure improvements to the network. The Statement of Action also provides an indication of the level of resources required, whether the actions are achievable within existing budgets, key partners involved and an estimated timescale to deliver the actions. The Plan states that the delivery of improved rights of way maintenance and enhancement measures is likely to be reliant on partnership working with local groups, parish and town councils.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 The Council operates a full agency agreement for dealing with rights of way maintenance and the removal of unlawful obstructions on the County Council's behalf. This is funded jointly by the District Council and the County Council on a 50/50 basis.

6.0 Corporate Implications

6.1 The Plan has implications for the following themes in the Corporate Plan:

- Safer and Healthier Communities
- You at the Centre
- Prosperity for All
- Rural South Derbyshire

7.0 Community Implications

7.1 The Plan has implications for the following themes of the South Derbyshire Community Strategy:

- Opportunities for all
- Healthy Communities
- A Vibrant Economy
- A Sustainable Environment

7.2 The County Council has local agreements with 145 town/parish councils throughout the County under its minor maintenance scheme. Parishes in the scheme undertake practical work including way marking, clearance of undergrowth and surface repairs, to help improve the rights of way network in their area. The cost of carrying out this work is reclaimed from the County Council. In South Derbyshire this involves Ticknall, Hatton and Coton in the Elms Parish Councils.

8.0 Conclusions

8.1 In overall terms the Improvement Plan is to be welcomed, with specific comments on particular themes as set out below.

National Forest

8.2 It is considered that the National Forest should be accorded a higher profile within the Strategy in recognition of the key role it can play in the improvement and promotion of the rights of way network in the southern part of South Derbyshire. The Forest should be referred to in Section 2.7 which identifies the key agencies that will contribute toward the implementation of the Plan and the National Forest Strategy should be referred to in Section 3, which identifies other related policy documents.

Economy and Tourism

8.3 Recognition of the role of the development, improvement and promotion of rights of way network in the continued growth of sustainable tourism is to be welcomed. This is important throughout South Derbyshire but particularly within the National Forest where the establishment and improvement of rights of way between key attractions and the creation of more circular walking routes will enhance the leisure and tourism offer and encourage access by means other than private car. The proposed further development of the greenway network throughout the district to supplement the already established Derby-Melbourne and Derby-Egginton routes is also to be welcomed as are proposed signage improvements targeting paths where this could benefit local businesses, tourism destinations and other places of interest.

8.4 Proposals for the continued production of walking and cycling promotional and information literature for general distribution are supported as a means of raising the profile of the area as a walking and cycling destination.

Encouraging healthier and more sustainable travel choices

8.5 The Plan recognises the utilitarian role of public rights of way as a means of gaining access to schools, places of work, services and facilities and the role they can play in encouraging travel by means other than the car and encouraging healthier living. To this end the Plan seeks to target rights of way improvements on routes that best address accessibility requirements and/or have the potential to benefit the greatest number of users. This favours routes within urban areas, routes providing direct access between settlements and routes from urban areas into the countryside. The improvement of footpath links to public transport routes will be accorded a high

priority. Among the proposed actions is to seek to dedicate routes that are currently concessionary routes within the National Forest.

- 8.6 The emphasis given to these issues is to be welcomed and is consistent with the aims of the Derbyshire Local Transport Plan, the South Derbyshire Cycling Strategy, the Swadlincote Walking Strategy and healthy walking schemes such as Get Active in the Forest.

Bridleways

- 8.7 Proposals to extend and improve the connectivity of the bridleway network are to be welcomed as it has long been recognised that the bridleway network in South Derbyshire is limited in extent and rather disjointed. There is also concern among horse riders that bridleways and concessionary paths within the National Forest are not particularly well signposted and that more should be done to remedy the situation. It is considered that this should be acknowledged by the Strategy.

Conservation and Biodiversity

- 8.8 The continued commitment to ensuring that the environmental impact of new access projects will be considered from the outset and the assurance that all maintenance methods will be in keeping with the ecological surroundings are to be welcomed.

Definitive Map

- 8.9 The commitment to developing and maintaining an up to date digitised Definitive Map of Derbyshire rights of way, estimated to be completed by 2008/09, is to be welcomed both as a benefit to the public by enabling access to rights of way information on line and as a planning tool, improving efficiency in the identification of routes that may be affected by development proposals.

9.0 Background Papers

Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan
for Derbyshire 2006 – 2011

Derbyshire County Council
December 2006