

Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2018



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1. Introduction

The Isle of Wight's public rights of way network is a vital and highly valued resource. It provides a base for freely available leisure activities which contribute towards improved health and wellbeing, and a network of sustainable travel options supporting both the rural economy and tourism.

The 530 miles (850 km) of the network consists of 330 miles (530 km) of public footpaths, 170 miles (270 km) of public bridleways and 30 miles (50 km) of byways open to all traffic. The total length is comparable to that of the Island's road network. Rights of way are predominantly used by walkers, horse-riders and cyclists. A relatively small number of routes (the byways) may be used by drivers of horse-drawn carriages and other vehicles. As well as its importance for utility journeys (travelling from place to place), the network plays a key role in enabling residents and visitors to access, explore and enjoy the Island's diverse landscape and natural environment.

A large proportion of the population regularly make outdoor leisure visits. In 2014-2015, 59% of the adult population visited the natural environment at least once a week¹, with walking being the most commonly undertaken activity. Health and exercise is a major motivating factor for such visits, along with dog walking. It is widely agreed that regular exercise provides a sense of wellbeing, and reduces the risk of chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, asthma, stroke and some cancers.

The benefit-cost ratios of schemes that invest in walking and cycling show that such programs regularly offer high and very high value for money². Walking and cycling can also boost the local economy with cyclists contributing £3 billion to the British economy in 2010³ (an average of £230 per cyclist per year), and visits to the countryside generating an average spend of £6, rising to £18 for a visit to the coast⁴.

As well as its importance for utility journeys, the network plays a key role in enabling residents and visitors to access, explore and enjoy the Island's diverse landscape and natural environment

¹ Natural England's Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), 2014-2015 headline report

² Department for Transport's 'Investing in Cycling and Walking' report, March 2015

³ London School of Economics 'The British Cycling economy' by A Grous, 2011

⁴ Natural England's 'Visits to coastal England' MENE report, 2016

2. Overview of the Plan

The Isle of Wight Council recognises the importance of maintaining and improving the network of public rights of way, and the publication of its first Rights of Way Improvement Plan in 2006 (the 2006 Plan) has been authoritative in decisions taken over the last ten years. A thoroughly researched document, the 2006 Plan provides a detailed analysis of issues relating to the network and the needs of different types of users. An array of potential improvements were identified, which has assisted the Rights of Way Service in directing its resources towards achieving the main aims and objectives of the 2006 Plan, as and when opportunities arose.

A comprehensive reassessment of rights of way and review of the 2006 Plan was undertaken by the Isle of Wight Council during 2016. The results of that process show that the main aims of the 2006 Plan are still appropriate for meeting the public's current needs from the network, and that much of the detailed information contained in it remains relevant today. The 2006 Plan, as originally published, is therefore to be retained as active policy with this document functioning as a policy update to incorporate new information gained during the 2016 review process. This update to the Plan also responds to the significant changes, since 2006, to the way that local government operates and the more limited resources currently available. It reflects the priorities of the public and stakeholders, and will allow the focusing of resources to where they will have most benefit.

Taken together, this document and the 2006 Plan fulfil the Isle of Wight Council's duty to publish and review a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, as provided for by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Analysis of the information gathered during the review process has enabled the identification of four main policy areas, as set out in the remainder of this document, which will guide the management and improvement of rights of way on the Isle of Wight throughout the next ten years (2018-2028).

This update reflects the priorities of the public and stakeholders, and will allow the focusing of resources to where they will have most benefit

3. Results of the Assessment & Review

The rights of way reassessment and review of the 2006 Plan took place between June and September 2016. The primary purpose of the assessment was to find out how well, in general, the rights of way on the Isle of Wight meet the needs of the public, whether the opportunities provided by the rights of way are appropriate for all user types, and how accessible they are to people with disabilities. The assessment was mostly undertaken through on-line surveys of the public and with a range of stakeholders such as parish councils, government bodies, and user groups. Hard copies of the surveys were available and provided on request. The Isle of Wight Local Access Forum and local stakeholder groups were engaged with directly.

A good volume of responses was received to the public survey, which was promoted via press release, social media, user groups and Visitor Information Centres. The survey was designed to be quick and easy to complete using tick-box responses. Many respondents chose to add optional comments, which provided for more detailed understanding of their views.

Selected stakeholders were invited to complete a more in-depth survey. This again could be completed using tick boxes, with space available if respondents wished to make additional comments. Those stakeholders who completed the survey provided useful feedback with most making a number of well-informed comments.

Key stakeholder groups⁵ were further engaged with on an individual basis, with opinions being sought on updates to, and prioritisation of, the detailed suggestions provided by them and included in the Appendices of the 2006 Plan.

In summary, the main findings of the assessment were:

- Public rights of way on the Isle of Wight generally meet the needs of the public, and are thought to have improved between 2006 - 2016
- Walkers are well-served by rights of way; the needs of other user groups are less well met
- People with specific needs, including disabilities, are most in need of better provision
- There is adequate access to all land types, including woodland⁶
- The 7 main aims identified in the 2006 Plan are still relevant today and have now been prioritised in the following order:
 - i. Maintaining a high quality rights of way network
 - ii. A programme of achievable improvements
 - iii. Network development to benefit as wide a range of users as possible
 - iv. Improving access for people with mobility difficulties
 - v. Promotion of the network as an option for sustainable journeys
 - vi. Promoting countryside access for health and leisure
 - vii. Promoting countryside access to new users
 - viii. If additional funding becomes available, the most welcomed schemes would be those that contribute to the creation of a strategic non-vehicular network⁷, or provide utility routes
 - ix. Promoted long-distance trails are well used and highly valued

An Assessment Report, which includes responses in full and a detailed analysis of the results of the assessment, has been published.

⁵ The Isle of Wight Local Access Forum, IOW Bridleway Group, IOW Ramblers, IOW Cyclist Group

⁶ In June 2014 Government specifically requested that authorities assess whether there is a need for more access to woodland and other land types

⁷ The strategic non-vehicular network comprises frequently used urban paths and routes to school, coastal path and beach accesses, main promoted routes between settlements and popular leisure routes, including those that link to places of interest

4. Rationale for Delivery

This second Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a stand alone document that serves to update the 2006 Plan. The two documents, together, set out a framework for the management of public rights of way on the Isle of Wight. The information gathered during the review process undertaken by the Council in 2016 has led to the identification of distinct new policies. These policies, which are set out below, cover the seven main aims of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan - as identified in the 2006 Plan and validated by the 2016 assessment; the seven aims are listed in section 3. The policies are intended to be used to guide the work of the Council and its partners towards achieving an improved rights of way network on the Island; they reflect the identified priorities of the public and stakeholder organisations consulted during the review process.

Within each main policy area, specific actions have been identified. These actions, in conjunction with the broad aims and detailed projects described in the 2006 Plan, set out the principles for the management of rights of way on the Isle of Wight, and for the improvement of the network as opportunities arise, over the next decade. The Appendices to the 2006 Plan list several suggestions for new and improved links – these suggestions were updated by the relevant stakeholder groups during the review process, and the revised suggestions are listed in Appendix 6 of the Assessment Report.

The Isle of Wight Council has to take a financially sustainable approach to its Rights of Way management work. In doing so, regard will be given to those areas of work that have been given the highest priority during the assessment and review. Adherence to the policies in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will allow available resources, including those that are externally funded, to be focussed in a way that allows investment in the rights of way network to be targeted where it will have most benefit.

The funding allocated to the Public Rights of Way Service will continue to be used for the delivery of routine maintenance and improvement work programmes. It is certainly desirable that the Service improves the network and undertakes all the actions described in the Policies section below. However, at current funding levels only a partial delivery of these aspirations is assured. It must be acknowledged that without a huge increase in resources it is not possible to achieve every improvement described in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Many of the projects and schemes identified in the 2006 Plan will require partnership working with other organisations. Whilst the main function of the Plan is to guide the work of the Service and inform its decisions, it should also be regarded as a source of inspiration and potential projects that may be tapped into as and when funding streams become available.

There is a particular need to work with the planning system. It is intended that the Plan be used as the basis for stated and agreed policies about creating missing links in the network, and making improvements in accordance with the aims of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, when planning applications are sought. Such locally agreed policies should complement and augment the provisions of national planning policies⁸ and relevant Government guidance on rights of way⁹.

⁸ Contemporaneously the National Planning Policy Framework - paragraph 75 and others

⁹ Contemporaneously Rights of Way Circular 1/09 - particularly section 7



5. Policies & Actions

POLICY A:

Maintaining a high quality rights of way network

Objective

To maintain a high quality rights of way network in an efficient manner, recognising the current resource constraints and those in the foreseeable future.

Summary

The Rights of Way Service will continue its efficient and best value working practices in order to use its resources most effectively. It will continue to use volunteer assistance, joint working partnerships and third party funding, and will improve on and develop these working practices.

Key to Symbols used in Action Tables

















Additional staff or consultant time is required for delivery of action – number of symbols depicts relative additional resources required.



Additional investment, e.g. grant funding, is required for delivery of action – number of symbols depicts relative additional resources required



POLICY A: ACTION TABLE

AREA OF WORK	ACTION	ADDITIONAL RESOURCE REQUIRED	
		STAFF	BUDGET
A1 Routine Maintenance	i. Continue to deliver annual maintenance and improvement projects within current, limited, budget / resource (as allocated in the period 2012-2017) and utilising best value contractors <i>Result: Network maintained at current level</i>		
	ii. Deliver major works programme including resurfacing and furniture/structure replacement <i>Result: High quality rights of way network</i>		
A2 Vegetation Clearance	i. Continue with existing summer strimming and winter clearance programmes <i>Result: Network kept substantially open</i>		
	ii. Support additional vegetation clearance programmes by partners, e.g. user group working parties, and volunteers <i>Result: Accessibility improved, better visibility, paths reinstated to full width</i>	 + volunteers	
A3 Signage Maintenance	i. Continue existing signage programme, i.e. relating to reports of missing or dilapidated signage <i>Result: Ongoing ad hoc improvements</i>		
	ii. Introduce a proactive signage replacement programme in conjunction with a full annual survey (see Action A4 below) <i>Result: Efficient programme for repair / replacement of all signage as informed by full network survey (to include signage condition)</i>		
A4 Network Survey	i. Continue reactive inspection regime and rely on partial network surveys e.g. IW Ramblers Association Defect Reports and Big Path Watch reports <i>Result: Defects repaired on a reactive basis</i>		
	ii. Introduce annual full network surveys by volunteers <i>Result: Full asset register, full picture of state and condition of network, improved and economical maintenance programme</i>	 + volunteer surveyors	
A5 Protection and Enforcement	i. Continue proactive approach towards landowner cooperation including good communication and offering assistance to landowners in connection with stiles and gates, explaining other statutory duties and helping to resolve conflict / Promote landowner cooperation through joint IWC, NFU and CLA publications / Take enforcement action when appropriate <i>Result: Continuation of good working relationships with all key partners</i>		
	ii. Introduce robust enforcement action programme and use when necessary <i>Result: Fewer obstructions and more open and accessible network</i>		
A6 Work with volunteers, third party funding, and joint working and partnerships	i. Continue working with existing user group work parties, Town/Parish Council partnerships, and funding streams e.g. HF Holiday improvement grants and IWRA 'Donate a Gate' Scheme <i>Result: Retention of additional external resources for network maintenance</i>		
	ii. Develop and support additional volunteer working parties <i>Result: Additional assistance in maintaining network at no monetary cost to the service</i>		
A7 Definitive Map Work	i. Continue maintenance of Definitive Map at current level, including provision of an up-to-date (non-definitive) network map for public viewing on Council's website <i>Result: Provision of accurate information to the public and landowners</i>		
	ii. Undertake a full review of Definitive Map 2000 in preparation for publication of new edition <i>Result: Numerous Definitive Map anomalies resolved, improved ease of access to accurate information, and up-to-date Definitive Map ready for publication</i>		
A8 Changes to the network*	i. Continue with current, limited, level of response to landowner requests for diversion orders <i>Result: Limited network change in response to demand, and some landowner dissatisfaction</i>		
	ii. Review application fees, and respond to higher number of landowner requests for diversion orders <i>Result: Increased landowner satisfaction, and more rapid network change. Cost-neutral processing of order applications</i>		

* Note: This is affected by the provisions of the Deregulation Act 2015; at such time as this legislation may be commenced it is likely that all applications will have to be processed within a defined timescale.

POLICY B:

Making improvements to the existing network







Objective

To make improvements to the network which benefit as wide a range of users as possible, and which address issues of accessibility for people with mobility difficulties.

Summary

The Rights of Way Service will seek opportunities to improve the network by making it more accessible and safer to use. Practical examples of how this will be achieved include: making improvements to road crossings, such as improving visibility; replacing stiles with gates that are accessible and easy to use; adding 'higher rights', or permissive access, to footpaths so that they become multi use.

POLICY B: ACTION TABLE

ACTION		ADDITIONAL RESOURCE REQUIRED	
		STAFF	BUDGET
B1	Opportunities for making appropriate network improvements will be investigated when undertaking maintenance works. Such improvements will be made when readily achievable, especially when they will result in long term asset management benefits		
B2	An inclusive approach will be adopted when improving existing public rights of way, so that whenever possible routes will be accessible to horse riders, cyclists, walkers and those with visual and mobility impairments. Attempts will be made to remove any obstacles that reduce accessibility for people with disabilities		
B3	When public path orders to make changes to the network are proposed, opportunities to secure improvements to the network will be sought. Such improvements may include safer road crossings, better connectivity, wider paths, better surfacing, and the dedication of higher rights (e.g. to upgrade footpaths to bridleway or restricted byway status)		
B4	When programming routine maintenance and improvement schemes, rights of way that are considered to constitute a route to school, utility route or route within a strategic non-vehicular network will be given a higher regard than other rights of way in the interests of promoting safety and amenity		
B5	Maintenance (non-routine) and improvement of the Long Distance trails will be given a high priority when funding opportunities arise. Work may include replacement/additional signage/waymarking, surfacing (where appropriate) and route changes that improve connectivity or avoid/reduce on-road stretches. The revision of routes in the interests of safety and to enhance the potential of linking trails to provide circular routes will also be prioritised		
B6	Third party projects and proposals that improve the existing network will be supported, and where possible contributed towards. Examples are joint schemes with a Town or Parish Council, and projects funded through grants obtained by key partners		
B7	Applications for grant funding to improve the existing network will be made and supported. This will include the delivery of successful bids. To make and support applications for grant funding relating to improvements to the existing network including the delivery of successful bids		
B8	Agreement of stated policies will be sought with the Council's planning system in order to achieve improvements to the rights of way network in conjunction with the planning application approval process. Developer contributions towards the enhancement of rights of way will be secured whenever possible, for example by way of planning obligations in the form of section 106 agreements and section 278 highway agreements, and the Community Infrastructure Levy if applicable. Developer contributions may provide, but are not limited to: surface improvements; improvement, replacement or removal of structures; provision of new or improved bridges; improved signage, waymarking and interpretation; upgrading of public footpaths to bridleway or restricted byway status. Contributions should cover all associated costs of making upgraded access suitable; this should include commuted sums to cover establishment, management and maintenance*. See also related Action C3		

* Note: Government guidance considers that the effect of development on a public right of way is a material consideration in the determination of applications for planning permission¹⁰, and that planning policies should ensure that public rights of way and access are protected and enhanced with opportunities being sought to provide better facilities for users including by adding links to existing networks¹¹.

¹⁰ Rights of Way Circular 1/09, DEFRA October 2009, paragraph 7.2

¹¹ National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG March 2012, paragraph 75

POLICY C: Creating new access

Objective

To make improvements to the network which benefit as wide a range of users as possible, and which address issues of accessibility for people with mobility difficulties.

Summary

The Rights of Way Service will seek opportunities to improve the network by making it more accessible and safer to use. Practical examples of how this will be achieved include: making improvements to road crossings, such as improving visibility; replacing stiles with gates that are accessible and easy to use; adding 'higher rights', or permissive access, to footpaths so that they become multi use.

POLICY C: ACTION TABLE

ACTION		ADDITIONAL RESOURCE REQUIRED	
		STAFF	BUDGET
C1	When opportunities arise to create new routes, a key consideration will be that of providing accessibility to as wide a range of users as possible, including those with mobility difficulties		
C2	When opportunities arise to create new routes, routes that form part of a strategic non-vehicular network and/or will be used as utility routes (paths that link communities, schools, services, public open spaces etc.) will be given a high priority		
C3	In conjunction with Action B8, developer contributions will be secured whenever possible to create (dedicate) useful new public rights of way within the development boundary or on land within the control of the developer and to provide new connections to existing and proposed rights of way networks. Contributions sought should include all formation costs/ physical works and commuted sums to cover the establishment, management and maintenance of new routes		
C4	When opportunities arise, applications for grant funding relating to the creation of appropriate new access, including the delivery of successful bids, will be made and/or supported		
C5	High profile schemes will be planned, designed and costed in readiness for any funding opportunities that may arise		

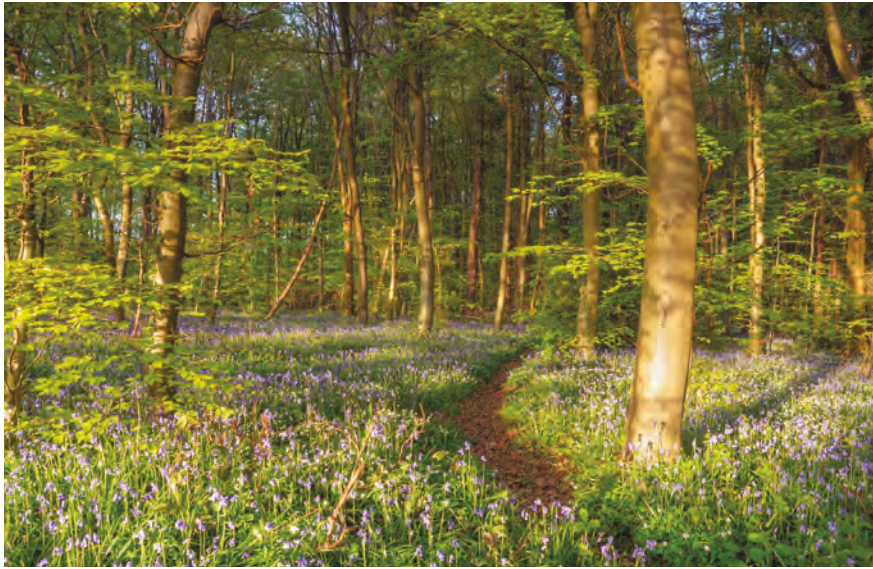


POLICY D: Promotion

The 2016 review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan showed that, whilst desirable, the promotion of rights of way (for sustainable journeys, for health and leisure, and to new users) is considered by users and stakeholders to be of lower priority than the other main aims of the Plan. The four higher priority aims are mostly concerned with the maintenance, improvement and extension of the network; the action tables for Policies A - C, above, set out proposals for achieving the higher priority aims.

With increasing pressure on resources, the Rights of Way Service has been unable to undertake any significant promotion of rights of way and this is likely to remain the case in the foreseeable future. However the Service will support partner organisations that share a common interest in promoting outdoor access for recreation, health and utility journeys, and the Council website will continue to provide information about public rights of way, educational information and links to relevant publications.





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