

Summary of feedback received as part of consultation of draft version of rights of way improvement plan

Theme 1 - Signage

In total, 17 responses were received in support of the actions identified in theme 1

Specifically comments were made in support of the intention to develop a programme of installing fingerposts with destination and potentially distance information on the fingers (Action 1c).

In addition to supporting the proposed actions in theme 1, the following suggestions were made;

Consider the feasibility of developing range of waymarks tailored to the needs of individuals with visual impairments and to assist in the reporting of faults and obstructions. This suggestion has been integrated into the plan and linked with action point 4h.

Investigate feasibility of developing range of waymarks tailored to children. This could be linked to circular promoted walks on a treasure hunt theme. It may be possible to link this suggestion to the point above and although it has not been included, as a specific action will be considered when we look at actions to promote the network, identified in Theme 3.

Encourage use of warning signs on roads where horse and cycle use is common or crossing likely. This is particularly relevant to horse and cycle traffic.

Theme 2 – Network Maintenance

14 responses were specifically made in support of actions identified in theme 2.

10% of the responses received highlighted that increasing the frequency of the programme to control vegetation on routes should be treated as priority with multiple references being made to respondents encountering overhanging vegetation obstructing routes.

As important, respondents felt that a prime focus for the authority should be to continue taking enforcement action against instances of non-compliance of legislation. This course of action is supported by the authority and has been set out as a priority in the action plan under points 2G and 2I.

In addition to the enforcement responsibilities of the authority, a number of responses were received supporting action point 2e, which seeks to remove stiles where possible. Following feedback action point 2e has been linked to action point 4e which seeks to encourage landowners to remove stiles.

Action 2i, which looks to ensure that the rights of way network is not negatively effected by development has been supported by both the Warwickshire Rural Community Council and the Heart of England Way Association. Both organisations have highlighted the importance of ensuring that the network is retained and if possible improved as a result of proposed developments effecting the network. In light of their comments this action point has been strengthened.

Theme 3 – Promotion and Information Availability

A general theme from the feedback received indicated that there was considerable support for the proposals outlined in theme 3. In total 25 responses were made in support of actions outlined in this section. In particular the development of circular routes centred on village locations and improving the quantity of jointly published promotional material were felt to be of particular importance and it was requested that this was priority.

Additionally it was requested that information should be made available predominately through leaflets with support from the internet rather than the other way round. This presents problems in relation to updating information and ensuring that content is up to date, however given the strength of feeling of respondees, this is felt to be of importance.

The National Farmers Union also highlighted that further information is needed to educate users and not just landowners on best practice. Further information was requested on walking with dogs and further promotion of the countryside code. It is expected that this promotion should be integrated into future walking literature and so has been integrated in to action 3a, 3b and 3e.

It was noted that the walks books produced by the borough (the blue and red booklets) were highlighted as good practice in a number of responses.

Theme 4 – Practical Accessibility

In total 27 references were made in support of this theme. It was clear from the feedback received that people felt that the work that had already begun on improving the accessibility of the network for all classes of users should continue and be expanded in line with the proposals outlined with this section of the action plan.

In particular the installation programme to upgrade existing furniture, through the use of kissing gates was highlighted to be of significant importance. The use of gates has been highlighted in the proposed action plan under point 4e as a quick win. The support that has been shown for this course of action illustrates that the prioritisation of this issue is justified.

It is noted that this action should be linked to action 2h (information fact-sheet for landowners) which may assist in encouraging the exchange of stiles for

gates by clarifying the range of structures available and the advantages they offer over traditional wooden stiles.

The installation of gates will wherever possible follow the nationally recognised guidance on structures and accessibility known as 'Gaps, Gates and Stiles' as referenced in action 4a of the plan. This was supported in a number of responses including those from Berkswell and Balsall Parish Councils

It was highlighted in responses to the consultation that the health benefits of utilising the rights of way network, has not been significantly explored in the plan. It is clear that the network does offer many opportunities for exercise and healthy living and that improvements to surfaces and drainage of rights of way, particular on urban and village fringe locations may encourage more people to walk or cycle to work. In light of this feedback, further reference to improving surface conditions to encourage greater use of routes has been integrated into action 4h

Exploring the health benefits of the network links strongly with theme three of the action plan. It is envisaged that our work promoting the network and encouraging use will have an indirect health benefit. Additionally it is intended that we will continue to support the work of the Solihull Sports and Physical Activity Network as well as existing groups such as the Solihull Discovery Walks who promote the health benefits associated with walking and physical exercise.

Theme 5 – Creating Network Links

In total 32 of the responses received indicated that they were in support of this theme.

Specific issues highlighted as a priority included action 5b and 5d which involve identifying opportunities to improve and expand the existing routes with a particular emphasis on providing links to create a more joined up and usable network. This course of action will be developed alongside actions identified in theme 4 where a requirement to improve surface conditions to encourage greater use of network by all users was highlighted.

Specific routes have been highlighted by the Solihull Cycling Steering Group, Berkswell Parish Council, Balsall Parish Council and a number of riders and riding groups in the borough. Where appropriate these suggested routes will be used as the basis to which to make the improvements highlighted in the various schemes within the action plan.

Following comments from a number of respondees including the Warwickshire Rural Community Council it has been recognised that further use of and reference to, where possible, be made to the opportunities that unclassified road and quiet lanes provide in rural areas to link sections of footpath, bridleway and byway together. These routes often provide a setting similar to that of a right of way where the lack of vehicular traffic competing for space

can create safe and inviting alternatives for Walkers, Cyclists, Horse Riders and Carriage Drivers over the traditional road network. These opportunities will be noted within the proposed improvements outlined in Themes 5 and 6 where creating links and crossing points to support the current network have been highlighted for attention. The point will be added specifically to point 6b which looks at opportunities provided by verges on the network and was also highlighted in responses as a supported priority.

It was highlighted in a number of responses that the Kenilworth Greenway and the access opportunities it provides in the Berkswell and Balsall Common area have not highlighted in the plan and should be. In light of the feedback it is intended that a new action to support the work of the Friends of Kenilworth Greenway and seek to formalise cycle and equestrian access onto the Greenway at Berkswell should be added to this theme.

It should be noted that in addition to the support received for this theme a number of responders indicated that they felt it was too specific and that funding for rights of way improvements should be spent on routes for walkers as these would benefit the biggest group of users.

We will continue to work to ensure that the entire network is open and accessible to all. A large percentage of funding made available annually for rights of way in the borough is and will continue to be spent on the footpath network. Improvements to public bridleways and surface conditions generally will benefit many users and will help to provide an integrated network, which meets the needs of all users. Consequently the actions highlighted in this theme have not been amended in response to this specific feedback

Theme 6 – Road Crossings

10 of the responses received highlighted actions within theme 6 as a priority.

Of the highlighted actions, responses showed that action 6a and action 6b (identifying areas where road crossings were an issue and creating links through improvements in Highway verges) were highlighted as a priority.

In response to feedback requesting further tie-in between the public rights of way network and the opportunities offered for travel on foot, horse and cycle by unclassified roads and quiet lanes, action 6b in this theme has been expanded to include reference to these routes.

Theme 7 – Records

6 references to supporting the actions highlighted in theme 7 were reported

It is noted that although the number of respondents highlighting this area of work as a priority was minimal, both the Warwickshire, Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum and the Local Ramblers Association highlighted this element of work in their feedback as a priority. Following research into the history of the authority's definitive map and statement and the identified works

required in order to handle predicted future work loads it is suggested that these actions should remain as a priority for the borough.