

1. Executive summary

Public rights of way offer a unique resource, which provides opportunities for exercise, recreational activities, and access to facilities and the countryside in general.

The network of rights of way within Solihull is predominately made up of routes located in the two former rural districts of Solihull and Meriden. In total there are currently some 131 miles (211 km) of recorded public rights of way in the borough.

The majority of these routes are recorded as public footpaths however there is a small but well used network of public bridleways (paths that cyclists, horse riders and walkers can use) within the Borough.

Demand for the services that the network provides increase each year. Consequently, prompted by the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, the 2001 outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease, the drive to promote sustainable transport and the public's increasing desire to utilise and explore the network, the profile of rights of way has increased considerably over recent years.

In 2000 the government introduced (through the CROW Act) a new duty for councils to produce and publish, in collaboration with the local community, a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan'.

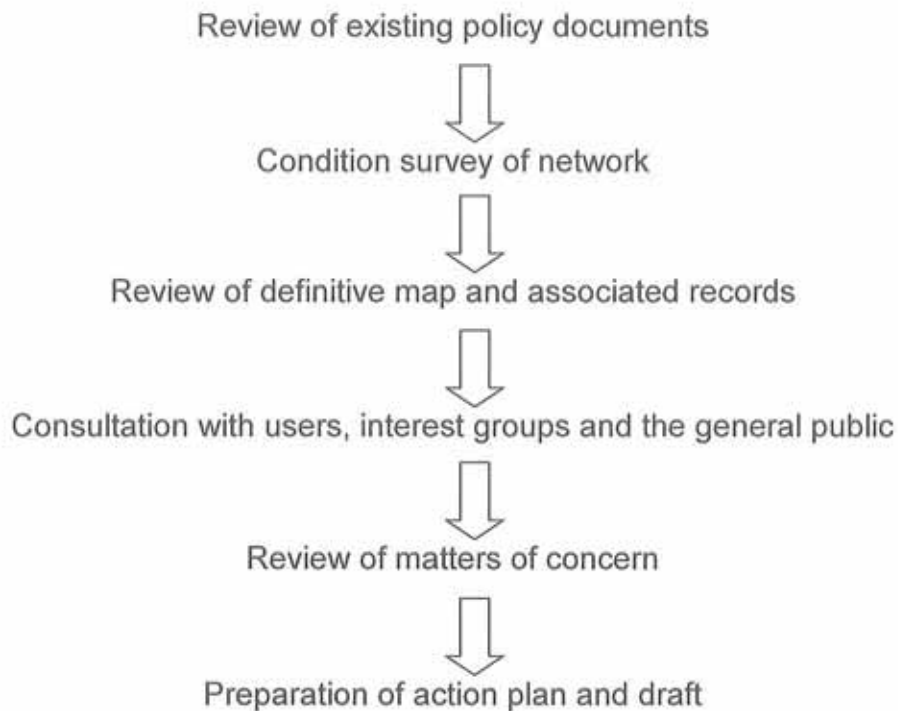
A Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a document in which highway authorities set out their plans for improving the network of public footpaths, bridleways and byways in their area.

It is a statutory requirement and an important part of the process of making the countryside more accessible for everyone.

In developing a rights of way improvement plan for the borough we have carried out various assessments and surveys to help us better understand the

current state of the network on the ground and the needs and demands of current and future users.

The stages undertaken as part of this process are shown below.



As part of the process of preparing a rights of way improvement plan, local highway authorities are required to prepare a statement of action. The statement of action brings together the information and issues collected in the assessment and consultation stages of the plan. These issues have been grouped into seven themes.

- Signage
- Network Maintenance
- Promotion and information availability
- Practical Access
- Creating network links
- Road Crossings
- Records

For Solihull, we have developed an action plan based on the seven themes. This plan sets out the list of actions that we intend to take to improve the path network and provide greater opportunities for the users of those paths.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans are intended to be aspirational. The plan therefore includes a number of proposals for improvements to the rights of way network that it will not be possible to implement immediately.

No additional government funding or resources will be made available for implementing the statement of action, therefore the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will need to make links to a wide range of strategies (primarily the Local Transport Plan) in order to realise many of the future opportunities for funding.

An annual report will be produced containing details of progress that has been made towards the objectives in the plan. It is anticipated that as the Plan will eventually be incorporated into the LTP, reports on the delivery of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will be included within LTP Annual Progress Reports.

A review of the ROWIP will be carried out after five years in 2012.