

2. Introduction

2.1 *What is a rights of way improvement plan?*

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

2.1.2 This requirement demonstrated the government's recognition of the role that the public rights of way network can play in the wider social agenda. Producing the plan requires an authority to take a fresh look at how it manages its public rights of way network and encourages a shift in emphasis from addressing problems, as and when they occur, to a more planned approach.

2.1.3 The ROWIP stems from the authority's existing duties to:

- ❖ Maintain the Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way
- ❖ Ensure that public rights of way are adequately signposted, maintained and free from obstructions

2.1.4 The plan must contain an assessment of the following matters:

- ❖ The extent to which local rights of way meet the present and the likely future needs of the public
- ❖ The opportunities that local rights of way provide for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the authorities area
- ❖ The accessibility of local rights of way to blind and partially sighted persons and others with restricted mobility

2.2 *What are public rights of way?*

2.2.1 The duty contained within the CROW Act refers to "Local Rights of Way", which are defined in sections 60 to 62 of the CROW Act as being the footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways and restricted byways within the authority's area. Also the ways within the authority's area which are shown in the definitive map and statement as restricted byways or byways open to all traffic.

2.2.2 A public right of way is a highway over which the public has a right to pass and repass along a defined route. Rights of way are recorded on an official document known as the definitive map. There are four types of right of way that are shown on the definitive map:

- ❖ Public footpaths (FPs): can be used by pedestrians with usual accompaniments (e.g. dogs, pushchairs).
- ❖ Public bridleways (BWPs): can be used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.
- ❖ Byways open to all traffic (BOATs): can be used by pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and motor vehicles.
- ❖ Restricted Byways (RBs): can be used by pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and vehicles other than those that are mechanically propelled (for example by carriage drivers).

2.3 *What are the benefits of an improved network of public rights of way?*

2.3.1 A rights of way network that is legally defined, properly maintained and well publicised provides benefits for people and communities that reach further than simply recreational and leisure purposes.

2.3.2 Public rights of way are recognised as an important local resource for people to gain fresh air and exercise, to walk the dog, take the children to school, travel to work, or to reach local shops and services.

2.3.3 The rights of way network also provides free opportunities for outdoor recreation. Regular exercise can reduce stress and lead to healthier communities. There are benefits for the rural economy too, as a well-maintained and attractive network can attract visitors to an area. This in turn may deter anti-social behavior, littering, fly-tipping, raise general awareness about the network and assist in maintaining routes.

2.4 *A rights of way improvement plan for Solihull*

2.4.1 The plan that follows has been produced by Solihull Council to meet this new duty and to set out a way forward to guide the Council in the management and development of its public rights of way over the next five years. In producing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan we have carried out consultations to take on board suggestions from members of the public and would now welcome your comments on the plan.