Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Rights of Way Improvement Plan
2016–2026

*Making the countryside and its Rights of Way
more accessible and available to all*

This document is a Rights of Way Improvement Plan under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It supersedes the 'Solihull MBC Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007' and all previous policies contained within that Plan.

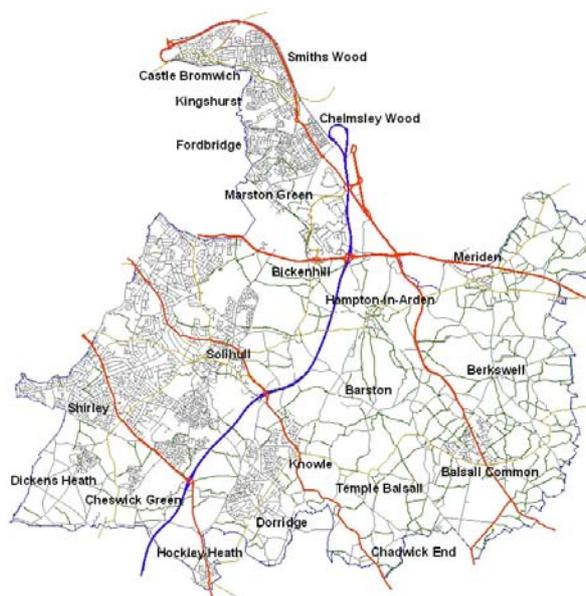## Contents

1.0   Background, Introduction and Overview

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

1.2   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 250km of recorded public rights of way in the borough. The majority of these routes are public footpaths which run through rural countryside on natural unsurfaced routes. There is however a small but well used network of public bridleways (paths that cyclists, horse riders and walkers can use) within the Borough, as well as a number of semi-urban and urban paths within villages and on the urban fringe which can play an important role in providing connectivity to local facilities and the adjacent countryside.

1.3   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'. This 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.

1.4   The first rights of way improvement plan (ROWIP 1) for Solihull, prepared under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CROW Act), established a framework for rights of way and countryside access work over the five years from 2007 to 2012. The second

ROWIP will be known as the 'Solihull MBC Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2016' (herein called 'the ROWIP' or 'ROWIP 2').

1.5   In developing ROWIP 1 we carried out comprehensive 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. As part of the review and publication of ROWIP 2 we have undertaken further assessments and surveys in order to update the information previously collected.

1.6   The aim of ROWIP 2 is to consolidate and streamline the aspirations of ROWIP 1 and provide a set of realistic and achievable objectives for the future taking into account a combination of customer needs, statutory obligations and financial/resource restrictions.

1.7   As part of the process of preparing ROWIP 1 we prepared a statement of action. The statement of action brought together the information and issues collected in the assessment and consultation stages of the plan. The issues were grouped into seven themes.

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

1.8   ROWIP 2 uses the same seven themes and 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.

1.9   Rights of Way Improvement Plans are intended to be aspirational. ROWIP 2 therefore includes some proposals for improvements to the rights of way network that it will not be possible to implement immediately.

1.10   No additional government funding or resources will be made available for implementing the statement of actions; therefore ROWIP 2 will continue to need to make links to a wide range of other strategies in order to realise many of the actions identified.

1.11   A review of the ROWIP will be carried out after ten years in 2026.

Introduction to Solihull

1.12   Situated at the southerly edge of the West Midlands conurbation, the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull borders Birmingham in the north and west, Worcestershire in the south and west, Coventry to the east and Warwickshire in the south.

1.13   Much of the Borough's population of 210,000 centres in the north on the communities of Castle Bromwich, Chelmsley Wood, Fordbridge, Kingshurst and Smith's Wood and to the south in the towns of Solihull and Shirley.

1.14   Also in the Borough are the villages of Knowle, Balsall Common, Dorridge and the smaller rural villages of Barston, Catherine de Barnes, Cheswick Green, Hampton in Arden, Hockley Heath, Meriden, Tidbury Green, and Temple Balsall. The most notable new community in the Borough is just to the west of Shirley, where the village of Dickens Heath has been built and continues to grow.

1.15   The Borough is bordered by the M6 and the M40, whilst the M42 divides the urban centre of the Borough from the rural south and east. Similarly, the A45 divides the south from the north of the Borough. Due to its location between the two conurbations of Birmingham and Coventry, many people's perception of Solihull is that of an urban area, however, almost two-thirds of the Borough's area of 17,832 hectares is greenbelt.

1.16   The plan below shows the relative location of towns and villages in the borough as described above. The plan additionally shows the extent of the registered rights of way network (shown in green) available within the borough.

Solihull's Countryside

1.17   The large proportion of Solihull's area being countryside plays an important role in shaping its image and character. It provides an attractive setting for many of the towns and villages and its accessibility is important in enhancing the quality of life enjoyed by residents.

1.18   Solihull's countryside also plays an important role in a wider strategic planning sense. Its designation as greenbelt restricts the outward expansion of the West Midlands conurbation and prevents it merging with the City of Coventry.

1.19   Of particular significance is the narrow band of green belt known as the 'Meriden Gap', located between the eastern edge of Birmingham and Solihull and the western outskirts of Coventry. This area has the potential to provide excellent opportunities for recreation for local people as well as the surrounding urban populations. The rights of way network could play an important role in providing sustainable access to facilities as well as offering a recreational facility in its own right.

1.20   With increasing personal mobility there have been greater demands on the countryside for informal activities such as walking and horse-riding, but also for more formal sporting uses. These developments have not had a detrimental impact on the countryside but have tended to draw more people into the countryside by car. Inconsiderate parking and damage to verges can affect local people and cause complaints from residents.

1.21   There are a number of strategic projects and initiatives that are currently being developed and which have the potential to significantly impact on the rights of way network over the next 10-15 years. Key to the future success of the network will be engaging with and influencing such initiatives in order to not just mitigate against any potential impact, but also identify opportunities to improve the network. Doing so will enable us to target existing constraints as well as making much needed improvements to route layouts and physical construction for the benefit of future users. Examples of such initiatives are UKC, High Speed Rail 2, Birmingham Cycle Revolution and the Local Plan Review.

Scope of the ROWIP

1.22   ROWIP 2 intends to provide a review of the Council' first ROWIP (ROWIP 1) and set objectives for the future maintenance and improvement of the local rights of way network.

1.23   As stated above ROWIP 2 builds upon the intelligence and data gathered in the production of ROWIP 1, much of which is still considered to be relevant. In order to avoid duplication and repetition, reference may be required back to ROWIP 1 for some data etc.

2.0   The policy and legislative context

2.1   The Rights of Way Improvement Plan must be set within the context of other relevant plans and strategies at national and local levels. This section details the way in which national, regional and local strategies feed into the actions proposed by this plan.

Legislative framework

2.2   The requirement to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan was introduced by Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The legislation required highway authorities to publish a plan which considers local rights of way (defined as including cycle tracks but excluding footways) in the context of;

a)   the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public,

b)   the opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the authority's area,

c)   the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems,

d)   such other matters relating to local rights of way as the Secretary of State (as respects England) or the National Assembly for Wales (as respects Wales) may direct, and it further requires the Authority to publish;

i.   an authority's assessment of the matters specified above, and

ii.   a statement of the action proposed to be taken for the management of local rights of way, and for securing an improved network of local rights of way, with particular regard to the matters dealt with in the assessment.

Government Guidance

2.3   In addition to the primary legislation, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published statutory guidance for ROWIPs in 2002. This guidance was primarily aimed at the production of an authority's first ROWIP but remains in force.

2.4   A Natural England Good Practice Note on ROWIPs and LTP integration states that 'The new Local Transport Plan (LTP) guidance recognises the role of active travel solutions such as walking and cycling'.

2.5   Guidance produced by the Department for Transport (DfT) states that 'Local transport authorities may wish to integrate the appropriate ROWIP(s) with their LTP'.

The National & Local Policy Context

2.6   A detailed overview of the National and Local Policy context was included in ROWIP 1 and can be viewed here: http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/LeisureParksEvents/ROWIP.pdf

It includes reference to the following policy documents. Please refer to ROWIP 1 for further information on these:

National Policy Documents

   a)   Walking and Cycling: An Action Plan (DfT)
   b)   The Future of Transport: A Network for 2030 (DfT)
   c)   Choosing Health: Making Healthier Choices Easier (White Paper) (DH)

Local Policy Documents

   a)   Local Transport Plan (LTP)
   b)   Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

2.7   In addition to the Policy and Plans identified as part of the ROWIP 1, it is acknowledged that there are a number of important local emerging documents or documents published after ROWIP 1, which ROWIP 2, and in particular its associated action plan, will need to feed into and influence in order to promote and support the delivery of improvements to the network. These include:

Local and Regional Policy Documents

   a)   Solihull Local Plan and Local Plan Review.
   b)   Solihull Connected
   c)   UKC
   d)   Solihull Green Infrastructure Study
   e)   Birmingham Cycle Revolution

3.0   Stakeholders and their needs

3.1   The statutory guidance for producing ROWIPs states that authorities should consult widely about the needs of all users and potential users of the rights of way in their areas in order to identify what improvements they should make to their network. This was undertaken as part of the production of ROWIP 1. Further consultations have been undertaken in preparation ROWIP 2 with questionnaires being made available electronically to users, land managers and parish councils. Of the 176 Stakeholders engaged, a total of 38 users, 15 Parish Councils and 8 land managers responded by completing the questionnaire.

Public/Path Users Consultation

3.2   Of the public/users who completed a questionnaires just over half of those who completed the questionnaire were aged 55 of over with a further 35% being aged between 35 and 54. Of these 94% predominantly used it for walking and the remainder for cycling. A substantial majority of those who completed the user questionnaire (93%) had visited Solihull's countryside for leisure purposes in the preceding 12 months, with a majority visiting more regularly than once a month, with most visits lasting for more than one hour. Just over half of the users (55%) commenced their journey by car suggesting their use was not particularly local to their home, whereas just over a quarter commenced their journey on foot suggesting they stay closer to home. This notably corresponds with the percentage of users (below) who visit the countryside to walk their dogs.

3.3   Reasons given for visiting the countryside and using the path network were:

- Exercise (85%)
- Enjoy the Countryside (81 %)
- Enjoyment of the activity itself (walking cycling etc) (58%)
- Dog Walking (30%)
- Member of a club or organisation (21%)
- Bird/wildlife Spotting (15%)
- Access facilities (15%)

3.4   Just under 85% of users expressed the view that they preferred circular walks, with 34% expressing a preference for using promoted/leafletted routes, in addition 56% of users preferring walks to sites of natural beauty or historic interest. In terms of facilities when out in the countryside, car parking, refreshments and places to sit/rest/picnic were of the greatest importance followed closely by toilet facilities. However approximately one third of users preferred a more remote countryside experience without any facilities.

3.5   A quarter of those who completed the questionnaire considered that it was reasonably easy to find out information about local walks and rides, however 50% of people considered that it was not that easy to do so. Three quarters of the respondents found information relating to where they can go on maps; and half of them also used online facilities as well as walks leaflets and books. Approximately 20% of respondents had taken part in organised events.

3.6   With regard to the future availability of information 84% of users expressed a preference for it being made available on line, although only 54% considered that this should be something provided on the Council's website. 39% would like information to be made available at libraries, 13% via local newspapers and 10% via local shops and pubs.

3.7   The most common reasons for not using the path network more frequently were a lack of knowledge where to go and poor path conditions, however similar numbers expressed the view that they used it to the full extent they would wish to, or that they simply did not have the time to use it more than they did. Notwithstanding this, over 80% of users said they would be likely to use visit the countryside more frequently if access was improved.

3.8   Of the types of problems that were most likely to put people off from using the countryside, the following problems featured most prominently:

- Overgrown paths (70%)

- Fast roads to cross (43%)

- Crops growing across a path (38%)

- Having to walk along roads to link paths (30%)

- Sharing routes with vehicles (30%)

3.9   Other issues included, but were not restricted to dogs (26%); inconvenient stiles (23%); passing through fields containing livestock (23%); missing signs and waymarkers 20%; walking through farmyards (20%); and paths enclosed by fences (20%).

3.10   The following potential improvements to access featured most prominently in the survey responses:

- Less dog fouling (42%)

- Fewer Obstructions (33%)

- More dedicated routes (30%)

- More shared use routes (27%)

- Better signage (24%)

3.11   Other improvements included, but were not restricted to, better pavements (24%); better verge maintenance (21%) and more car parking (21%).

Town and Parish Council Consultation

3.12   Of the 15 Parish Councils who responded five had a nominated councillor who monitors their local rights of way. About half of the Councils considered that the extent of the current network was about right with the majority of the remainder being of the opinion that the network of footpaths, bridleways and cycle tracks needs to be extended. The majority considered that the availability of a workforce or volunteer group along with better access to maps showing public rights of way would encourage their greater participation in maintaining, improving and promoting local paths.

3.13   There was a general consensus that public rights of way are an important feature for local people, but that there was not enough information about them available to the public. Only one Parish Council felt that the overall condition and signage of the local rights of way network was very good, with six Parish Councils considering it to be adequate and five to be in a poor state.

3.14   Problems relating to undergrowth and overgrowth were the most regularly encountered issues over the preceding 12 month period, with surface issues and difficult gates following closely behind. Concerns were also expressed about poor sight lines at junctions with roads and having to cross busy roads when using the path network.

3.15   With regards to improving the rural rights of way network, Parish Councils considered that improved surfacing and roadside signage were the highest priority, followed very closely by the replacement of stiles or barriers with gates or gaps; and the reinstatement of paths through crops or following ploughing. They further considered that public confidence in paths being in a good condition was the most important factor in encouraging their greater use. Other measures to encourage greater use included the provision of more general information leaflets; safe places to park; and public confidence in not getting lost/a feeling that paths were safe to use.

3.16   In terms of more urban/utility paths increased signage was considered to be the highest priority for improvement, complemented by improvements to surfaces; more vegetation clearance; better lighting; and the provision of more litter and dog mess bins

3.17   On the matter of the future development of the local rights of way network, Parish Councils considered that linking up existing routes to create more usable circular routes, and the exchange of redundant paths for new useful ones, were the highest priorities. Diverting paths

away from farm yards and private residences; the creation of new footpaths and the upgrading of footpaths to bridleways (along with appropriate compensation for the land owner) were also considered to be beneficial. The general administration of the Definitive Map (albeit a statutory duty) was considered a lower priority than other issues.

3.18   Other issues that Parish Councils considered should be reviewed within ROWIP 2 included:

- The fast tracking of problems notified by the Parish Council;

- Increased/improved enforcement where there are persistent problems;

- The amenity of some routes deteriorating as a result of a proliferation of obstacles and fencing and no effective counter to this.

- The disparity between routes – some are well maintained and attractive, whilst others suffer from unnecessary and obstructive stiles, agricultural disturbance, and a lack of trimming;

- All weather footways to link villages and cycle paths suitable for families.

3.19   Other possible 'quick wins' or longer-term objectives of local importance to the right of way network included:

- Upgrading the network of permissive paths on farmland near Balsall Common to public rights of way,

- The publication of the Definitive Map on the Council's website, along with a published set of policies covering various aspects of Rights of Way management.

- Better promotional leaflets in libraries and a dedicated section on Council website for easy to print-off walks that indicate the ability level of users access and quality of surfacing

- The re-designation of The Old Kenilworth Road for all users including bikes.

Land Managers Consultation

3.20   Of the eight land managers who responded, three were owner occupiers, three were managers, one a tenant and one other. Five managed private estates, one a family farm of less than 500 acres, another a family farm of over 500 acres and one other. Two of the farms/estates had pubic access elements included in Countryside Stewardship style schemes, two had public access along disused railways, one had permissive paths and another has other public access arrangements.

3.21   The farms and estates are spread out over 10 town and parish council areas with an equal but predominant mix of arable and pasture (for livestock). The land also extended to smaller amounts of equine pasture, parkland (open to the public), parkland (private), sporting land (golf, fishing, shooting) and woodland.

3.22   The most significant problems encountered in relation to public access were:

- Loose Dogs
- Deliberate trespass
- Inadvertent trespass
- Anti-Social behaviour
- Stock worrying
- Litter

3.23   Other problems encountered to a lesser degree included intrusion of privacy, misconceptions over the 'right to roam', illegal use by vehicles, inconsiderate parking, dog fouling and stock getting out

3.24   In terms of increasing the public's awareness of their responsibilities land managers consider the following would assist:

- Greater promotion of the Countryside Code
- The provision of information boards
- Better leaflets and printed material
- Increased use of the press and media
- Improved online information
- Working with schools and the local community

3.25   Land managers consider that the following factors would most discourage them from providing greater public access:

- Negative impact on wildlife/countryside
- Enough public access already
- Occupier's liability issues & additional responsibilities for path maintenance etc
- Disruption to normal business activities
- Regard for privacy
- Legal reasons (e.g. land ownership status/restriction etc)

4.0   Overview of the Current Situation & Assessment of the Network

Extent of the Network

4.1   The majority of Solihull's 131 miles (211 km) of recorded public rights of way are situated in the less populated areas of the Borough. In addition there is an urban network of rights of way that is not currently recorded on the definitive map and statement and consequently the full extent is unknown. Nearly all the routes recorded on the definitive map are public footpaths; there are currently only 7 miles (11 km) of public bridleway within the Borough. The proportion of the network recorded as public bridleway is therefore 5% - much lower than the national figure of 17%.

Resources

4.2   The public rights of way network is currently (2015) overseen by 2 members of staff with a revenue budget of £46,430.

Recording of the Network

4.3   The definitive map provides a legal record of public rights of way. It shows where paths run and who has the right to use them. The definitive map gives a snapshot of the state of the rights of way network at one particular date in the past; this is known as the "relevant date" of the map. The definitive map is accompanied by a document, the definitive statement, which includes a written description of routes and details of their widths. If a route is shown on the definitive map and statement, this is conclusive evidence that the public have the right to use it, even if in practice it is blocked or has not been used for many years.

4.4   Solihull Council has a legal duty to keep the definitive map up to date and to make it available to the public.

4.5   There is a modest backlog of applications to modify the Definitive Map (16 as of December 2015).

Condition of the Network

4.6   Solihull Council has a legal duty assert, protect and (for the majority of routes) maintain public highways, including public rights of way.

4.7   Historically the Authority has monitored the accessibility of the network using the former Best Value Performance Indicator 178 for rights of way. This measured the overall percentage of paths considered to be "Easy to Use" which may be defined as:

a) Signposted or waymarked where they leave the road in accordance with the authority's duty under s.27 of the Countryside Act 1968, and to the extent necessary to allow users to follow the path.

b) Free from unlawful obstructions and other interference, (including overhanging vegetation) to the public's right of passage.

c) Surface and lawful barriers (e.g. stiles, gates) in good repair and to a standard necessary to enable the public to use the way without undue inconvenience.

4.8   Based upon a 12.5% sample survey, the data suggests that 71% of the network met this definition for the period 2014/2015. The table below shows previous year figures based upon the same nationally recognised survey methodology.

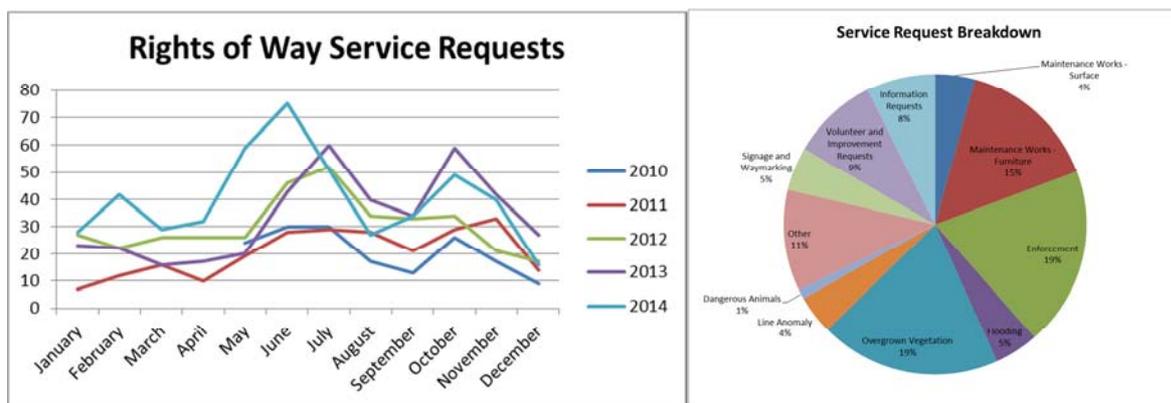| Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Percentage of Network "Easy to Use"	41%	48%	60%	67%	70%	75%	75%	73%	78%	75%	71%

4.9   ROWIP 1 forecast an improvement in the overall condition of the network, seeing targets of 70% for 2007/08; 75% for 2008/09; and 80% for 2009/10.

4.10   Whilst it has not been possible to achieve the ultimate target set, the level of accessibility of the network has improved significantly over the last 10 years and has since 2008/09, shown a consistent level of accessibility on or above 70% and is consequently considered to be generally in a good condition. Moving forward, this form of annual surveying will no longer be undertaken as a result of the resource implications in peak service request periods. It is anticipated that the use of handheld asset management tools will allow a more complete picture of network condition to be obtained and updated. It is intended that this will assist and inform our future works programming and resource utilization

Service Requests

4.11   Throughout 2014 the Council received 482 service requests relating to the public rights of way network, of which 462 had been investigated and brought to a conclusion. Ninety two of these issues related to obstructions on the network, twenty seven to broken path furniture (stiles/gates etc) and 13 to signs and waymarking requests. Other work on the network included the clearance of seasonal vegetation from 96.8 km of public rights of way. A full

breakdown of service requests by month received and request type is shown in the charts below.

Promotion of the Network

4.12   The promotion of recreational walking has increased over the past decade, and has been supported with the development of a range of short walks both in the open countryside and in many of the Boroughs parks. These walks are supplemented by a series of led walks undertaken throughout the year by Solihull Striders and Strollers and Discovery Walks in association with the Neighbourhood Ranger Team and Solihull Active Brand (and promoted on the Council's website). Together these form an important resource to encourage walking in the borough and make walking accessible to individuals who may not have had the confidence or experience to enjoy many of the more rural routes available in the borough. In addition to these walks, a range of cycle promotion activity has been developed in conjunction with our stakeholders and is supplemented by led rides, training and advice provided by the Authority as part of its Solihull Switch initiative.

5.0 Statement of Action

5.1 As part of the process of preparing a rights of way improvement plan, local highway authorities are required to prepare a statement of action. This statement should be developed using the information collected in the assessment and consultation phases of the plan. The statement of action and its associated 'action plan' is the most important part of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan as it 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.

5.2 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 Solihull Connected) in order to realise many of the future opportunities for funding. Possible sources of joint working and funding opportunities have been included within the ROWIP, however, this is by no means and exhaustive list.

5.3 Statutory guidance states that the statement of action should stem from the Council's assessments. This has been achieved by drawing from the views which resulted from the consultations with users and others with an interest in public rights of way, and setting these within the opportunities and constraints identified in the assessment of the rights of way network and of the legal record – the definitive map.

5.4 The statement takes into account issues identified in ROWIP 1 and builds upon these taking into account factors such as:

- progress that has been made since the publication of ROWIP1;
- changes is service priorities and funding;
- staff resources; and
- intelligence collected during the ROWIP 2 consultation process.

5.5 For ease of reference, and as with ROWIP 1 this Statement of Action is structured around the following sections:

Issues identified:
- Key and detailed points raised from consultations;
- Issues raised from an assessment of the condition of the physical network and
- Matters relating to the legal record of rights of way

Themes for guiding action:
- Groups of issues, which can allow the targeting of action to address general needs, or those raised by specific stakeholder groups.

5.6 The themes form the basis of the action plan. The action plan will help to prioritise and guide the Council's work over the coming years.

Issues identified

Key and detailed points raised from consultations:

Subject	Issue
Signing	Lack of signs. Lack of waymarking. Users wandering off the line of the path due to inadequate waymarking.
Maintenance	Concerns in some cases about insufficient maintenance.
Surfacing	Muddy surfaces. Drainage problems.
Obstructions	Problems with furniture e.g. locked gates, barbed wire across stile. Obstruction on routes from ploughing/crops. Overhanging vegetation sometimes a problem. Undergrowth should be cut more often.
Stiles and gates	Stiles difficult to negotiate Stiles not maintained.
Information provision	Interest from users in information being made available in leaflet/guide format and on the internet. Interest in provision of information boards.
User responsibility	Concern about uncontrolled dogs and about gates being left open.
Accessibility for those with limited mobility / those with pushchairs	Few routes available. Interest in more circular routes. Problems related to type of furniture – can't cope with stiles and some kissing gates. Different abilities mean that there is a need for different sorts of routes. Need to identify routes that are potentially accessible to people with a disability.
Safety	Some concern from illegal use of routes. Some concern for personal safety e.g. lack of lighting. Concern about crossing busy roads. Need for speed limits on some rural roads that link paths. Problems with stock in fields crossed by paths.
Extension of the existing network	Not enough bridleways, both for horse riding and cycling. Paths need to be better connected to cut down road walking. Permissive paths to complete circular routes.
Participation	Willingness for local Parish and Town Councils to engage in the network improvement process.
Accessing the network	Safe parking needed at start of some routes.

Points raised by user type:

Walkers	Urban
	Better pavements Less litter Dog fouling
	Rural
	More circular routes Stiles are not easy to use Support for a policy to improve accessibility through the removal of stiles and installation of kissing-gates where appropriate. Paths can be obstructed and overgrown. More frequent cutting needed Steps could be taken to make problems easier to report Safety Fear of getting lost. Breaking up of the network by main roads
	Dog Walkers
	Lack of dog litterbins.
Horse Riders	Shortage of bridleways. Not enough off-road riding opportunities.
Cyclists	More traffic free routes across parkland and open spaces. More linked routes. Suitable surfaces (e.g. not stony or sandy). Continuity of cycle routes
People with limited mobility	Replacing stile with gates / gaps
Non-users	Confidence that paths will be found to be in good condition Better promotion through good quality circular trails and accompanying leaflets
Town and parish councils	Making a local network more attuned to the needs of the local population Development of support scheme to assist parish councils Access to grants to allow local action over path improvements
Owners and managers of the countryside	Dogs running loose Stock escaping Walkers and other users wandering off the path Greater provision of information / promotion of the countryside code

Issues identified by analysis of the physical network

5.7   An assessment has been undertaken of available data held by the Authority relating to the condition of the network and the nature of problems reported etc.

5.8   Issues identified through this process were:

- It is estimated that 90% of the network is now signposted and waymarked. However due to wear and tear, as well as deliberate damage, there is a need for an ongoing programme of sign replacement and upgrading.

- Surface condition, and particularly undergrowth, continues to be an issue on certain rural routes. It is the council's responsibility to cut back and keep down vegetation growing from the surface of rights of way. The Council has developed a mowing programme to tackle undergrowth on public rights of way and in 2014 this resulted in clearance work being undertaken on 96.8 km of paths. This programme is expanding annually, however it is recognised that the current programme of 2 cuts a year is not enough to keep certain paths clear throughout the year. Further funding will be needed, potentially from external sources, to significantly increase the number of routes cut and or/their frequency.

- Issues of ploughing and cropping have been highlighted also. This is a seasonal problem and there is a continued need to target this annually. In order to be effective it is important that action can be taken quickly, and all costs recharged to the offender.

Issues identified by analysis of the Definitive Map & Statement

5.9   Whilst this area of work was generally considered by consultees to be of a low priority, it is noted that it is a statutory duty of the Authority to hold and maintain these documents. The fragmented nature of Solihull's definitive map means that there is a need:

- To produce a single consolidated paper definitive map and statement

- To produce a "path history" for all definitive public rights of way

- To display the above as layers on a GIS.

5.10   An assessment of the backlog of outstanding applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders has been undertaken and whilst not considered to be significant, does need to be progressed.

Themes

5.11   The issues that have been identified through the consultation process and analysis of information held by the Council as part of ROWIP 1 were grouped into a number of themes. These have been continued into ROWIP 2 for consistency with the exception of the 'Record'

theme which has been amended to include Asset Management and reordered as theme 1. This change has been made to ensure that this important area of works is appropriately represented within the Action Plan. A full list of the seven themes is provided below.

1. <u>Records and Asset Management</u>

   Ongoing work to improve the quality and range of information held on the network needs to be continued and expanded. Opportunities to review and develop digital asset management systems in conjunction with the Borough's Definitive Map and Statement, making it available on line, should be explored.

2. <u>Signage</u>

   Visible, accurate and regular signage on the network is essential to encourage use and allow users to follow the correct route. This also has the added benefit of reducing the associated problems of trespass which land managers can experience.

   Opportunities to improve problem reporting and access to information have been identified through the development of waymarks with contact information and website details.

3. <u>Network Maintenance</u>

   Routes that are poorly maintained discourage use and restrict access to users and potential users. Improvements to identified issues, including surface upgrades and restrictive boundary crossings, will significantly improve accessibility of the network to users.

4. <u>Promotion and information availability</u>

   Up to date and accurate information on the network gives users choice and allows them to tailor their use of the network to meet their needs. A lack of information and associated promotion discourages users and potential users from making the most of the countryside. Further publicity of routes with associated walks literature is required to successfully encourage greater use of the rights of way network.

5. <u>Practical Access</u>

   The network available to those with limited mobility can seem restricted. Greater use of the network will only be achieved by improving the accessibility of routes.

   Opportunities to increase engagement with stakeholder groups and particularly vulnerable road users should be explored.

6. <u>Creating network links</u>

   The off-road network available to horse riders and cyclists is limited. By creating or upgrading links between existing routes the value of the network could be considerably improved.

7. <u>Road Crossings</u>

   Crossings over busy roads physically restrict access and discourage use of the wider network. Processes should be put in place to identify and assess these breaks in the network.

6.0 Action Plan

6.1 The action plan identifies ways in which the Council can address the issues identified for each of the themes. The action plan will look at what needs to be done under the following headings:

Research | what additional information or consultation is needed?

Policy | how the Council intends to develop its own policies and procedures

Quick Wins | specific actions that can be taken quickly

Strategic aims | longer term goals where action can be sought over the lifetime of the Improvement Plan.

6.2 The tables in Appendix 1 (Pg 22-28) detail the actions that the Council proposes to take. Each table indicates:

Aim | the goal toward which the Council intends to work

Links | how the aim links in with existing medium term Council Objectives and Priorities

What will be done? | the range of actions proposed to achieve the goal

Priority | the intended timescale for achieving the action:

A: 1 – 3 years

B: 3 – 5 years

C: more than 5 years

7.0 Implementation and monitoring

Implementation

7.1   Rights of Way Improvement Plans are intended to be aspirational. This plan therefore includes a number of proposals for improvements to the rights of way network, that it may not be possible to implement in the current climate.

7.2   The preparation of this plan has been undertaken in a number of phases during which its content and focus has been refined in light of input and feedback from stakeholder groups, users of the network and members of the public.

7.3   The consultation process for the drafting of the ROWIP has helped to refine priorities within the action plan and has had a key role in determining priorities for implementation.

7.4   The Council will need to work in partnership with a range of bodies in order to deliver many of the proposed actions. Additional funding may be required and will be sought from both internal and external sources.

Monitoring

7.5   The Council will produce a report every 3 years throughout the life of the plan. This report will contain details of progress that has been made towards the objectives in the plan. The Local Access Forum will also be invited to monitor progress.

7.6   It is anticipated that elements of this Plan will eventually be incorporated into the Solihull Connected Strategy Plan and reporting on delivery will be included within associated Action Plan progress updates.

7.7   A review of the ROWIP will be carried out after Ten years or sooner if a need is identified.

Appendix 1 - Action Plan of Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2

Theme 1: Records and Asset Management

Aim: Develop and maintain an accurate and up to date definitive map & statement

What will be done?			Priority	Notes
1a	Strategic aim	Investigate and implement digital asset management system to assist in service delivery	A B B C	• Identify opportunities associated with existing corporate and new systems to provide a comprehensive suite of asset management facilities. • Volunteer currently undertaking surveys of network based on BVPI standard. New standard to be developed around existing systems and utilising digital field base digital capture to aid work load planning. • To include information of stile free routes, mowing programme, and headland paths. • Utilise hand held field based technology to assist in work load management and planning. • *Linked to actions 2a, 2b, 2d, 3e*
1c	Strategic aim	Make records available to the NSG in line with best practice	B	• Work with the Street Works Team to ensure records are up to date and available and presented in a suitable format as part of the boroughs National Street Works Gazetteer upload.
1d	Policy	Promote the use of path orders to ratify and make improvements to the network for users	B,C	• Opportunities to resolve long standing issues on network including minor obstructions or anomalies can be resolved through path order progression. • Where benefits for users are clear, promote the funding of orders to facilitate change.
1e	Policy	Develop a policy and procedure to ensure that the definitive map is updated in line with statutory guidance	C	• Develop policy for the management and progression of existing and new definitive map modification orders. • Develop procedure for reviewing and updating the definitive map to ensure that it remains relevant.

Theme 2: Network Maintenance

Aim: To improve overall standards of maintenance of the rights of way network

	What will be done?		Priority	Notes
2a	Research	Survey at least 25% of the total network each year and action identified issues	A, B, C	- Surveys to be logged on an asset management register. - Monitoring to be completed by volunteers undertaking surveys each year.
2b	Quick Win	Continue and develop field edge maintenance programme.	A	*Linked to action 1a* - Develop electronic asset management record of routes cut. - Annually review maintenance programme responding to changes and reports on network condition. - Identify opportunities to reduce the level of ad-hoc maintenance in place of scheduled works.
2c	Quick win	Continue to remove stiles and unnecessary structures from the network	A,B	Ongoing
2d	Policy	Develop a system for the public to report problems.	A B	*Linked to actions 7e and 3a.* - Opportunities to improve associated online information including contact centre scripts to be identified and implemented. - Develop range of waymarks with contact information to aid problem reporting
2e	Policy	Delegated powers of enforcement	A, B	Seek delegation of enforcement powers in relation to typical rights of way obstructions to senior officers in line with proposed new structure.
2f	Strategic aim	Review, publish and promote information fact-sheets for landowners and users giving advice on the management of rights of way. (Based on British Standard 5709 and Rights of Way Act 1990.	A A B B	- Review existing literature and update as appropriate - Annually distribute to landowners with whom we have taken enforcement action over the last 2 years. - Make literature available online. - Work with colleagues in Environmental Crime to identify and develop tactics around dealing with persistent dog fouling on routes.
2g	Quick win	Continue to take legal action against persistent non-compliance with legislation	A	Ongoing.

2h	Quick win	Continue to work with and support volunteer groups that undertake practical, promotional and research work on network	A	• Engage with and contribute to the Authorities Environmental Volunteer Steering group to aid joint working and add value.
2i	Strategic aim	Work with planning officers to protect routes as green corridors through development sites and provide links with countryside.	B B	• Identify and work to implement mitigation and improvements resulting from planning applications which can improve rights of way. • Seek financial contributions from developers to facilitate improvements.
2j	Strategic aim	Identify funding opportunities to support the development of new and reconstruction of existing footpath and footway connections.	A/B	• Develop matrix to prioritise new scheme requests • *Linked to actions 4d, 4f, 4g, 5j, 5k, 6c*

Theme 3: Promotion and information availability

Aim: Promote Solihull's public rights of way for residents and visitors and provide up to date information on the Council's work on rights of way

What will be done?			**Priority**	**Notes**

3a	Quick win	Develop the rights of way information available on the Council's website to aid access to information and problem reporting.	A	• *Linked to action 2d*
				• include information relating to:
				  o Problem reporting
				  o Active/proposed legal orders and path closures
				  o Policy documents
				  o Land and user information leaflets
				  o Access to the Countryside and Carparking

3b	Quick win	Publicise routes following completion of improvement works.	A A	• *Linked to action 3a* • Utilise the councils website and local publications such as Balsall Bugle.
3c	Strategic aim	Promote responsible use of rights of way network and Incorporate this information in to future promotional material.	B B	• *Linked to action: 2d, 3a and 3b* • Implemented, however revision of Councils website in 2014 means that this now requires reviewing. To include information on alley gating.

3d	Strategic aim	Engage with colleagues to add value and promote access to Solihull's countryside.	B A B	• Information to be published via website. • Identify opportunities to work with Solihull Active, Parks and Open Spaces and Healthy Lifestyles. • Work with Switch Solihull to engage with schools and promote routes and opportunity for outdoor recreation to young people.
3e	Strategic Aim	Develop and make available an Interactive Map as part of the Councils drive to promote cycling and walking	A, B	• Utilise the Councils web site to make information on the network more widely available. • *Linked to action 3a.*

Theme 4: Practical Access

Aim: Develop routes that better meet the needs of people with limited mobility

What will be done?			Priority	Action Taken
4a	Quick Win	Follow the policy of 'Gaps, Gates and Stiles on footpaths and Bridleways when repairing or authorising boundary structures	A	• Ongoing. • Ensure that all new gates installed include trombone handle to aid access for all.
4b	Policy	Ensure any newly authorised stiles comply with BS5709	A	• Ongoing. • *Linked to action 4a*
4c	Quick win	Encourage landowners to remove unnecessary stiles and to replace other stiles with gates	A	• Ongoing.
4d	Research	Research the needs of disadvantaged users and develop an action plan to identify ways to encourage usage of the network and routes where surfaces could be upgraded to improve accessibility for all.	B, C	• Support the work of Solihull Switch in the development of a street charter for the borough. • Work to support the implementation of associated actions of the street charter. • Engage with the vulnerable road user group on improvement projects where appropriate. • Undertake a Rights of Way Service Fair Treatment Assessment to capture the needs of all users.

				• Carry out route audit of footpath SL57 The Monkspath and associated informal paths to identify opportunities to improve access for all users. ○ *Linked to action 2i*
4e	Quick win	Work with existing healthy walking schemes and assist in delivering led walks and activities.	A	• Ongoing.
4f	Quick Win	Surface improvements	A,B	• Investigate feasibility of and improve path surfaces at SL19 – Longdon Road, Knowle and SL22/SL23, Grove Road, Knowle. • Investigate feasibility of and improve path surfaces at M146 – Grange Park, Balsall Common. • Coventry Road footway reconstruction to provide link to the wider rights of way network in this area.
4g	Strategic Aim	Ensure that the need of all users are considered when constructing new routes, ditch crossing and bridges.		• Carry out survey of structures linking popular accessible walks to areas of public open space including, Barston and Earlswood Lakes • Replace steps on footbridge bridge at Dorridge Park and replace with ramp to facilitate wheelchair access.

Theme 5: Creating Links

Aim: Extend the network available for users, with a particular focus on horse riders and cyclists

What will be done?			**Priority**	**Action Taken**
5a	Strategic aim	Support and advise on applications for agri-environmental schemes that include the development of permissive access	A	• Ongoing.
5b	Strategic aim	Develop routes to create links with existing network at Meriden Shafts (specifically to the Packington area).	B	• Review existing scoping plan and seek to engage with local landowners and riders to develop new opportunities. • Linked to action 5d and 5e.
5c	Strategic aim	Work with Solihull Switch to develop and upgrade routes to encourage and	B, C	• Promote the use of the new North Solihull Strategic Cycle Route and develop route signage to aid this.

		enable safe and considerate cycling.		• Identify opportunities to upgrade existing rights of way surfaces to a suitable standard to enable access and encourage wider use. • *Linked to Action 4d*
5d	Policy	Offer reduced fees to landowners who are willing to create new links to improve the path network including missing safe routes for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists.	B	• Opportunity to resolve long term network issues to be identified. • Identify and record opportunities to improve and add to the network. • Where appropriate consider offering compensation to landowners where a proposal adds significant value to the network. • Engage with Landowners at an early stage to ensure that transparency, openness and goodwill are encouraged.
5e	Strategic aim	Promote creation orders and agreements to create links between existing paths or to improve popular walking routes.	B	• Impact on resource and future maintenance responsibilities needs to be fully explored prior to implementation.
5f	Strategic aim	Seek additional routes and improvements to existing routes as part of large development sites.	A B	• Opportunities as part of North Solihull Regeneration to be sought. • Develop mechanism to identify and put in measures to minimise impact of route closures and severance as part of site development.
5g	Strategic aim	Kenilworth Green Way Access.	B, C	• Engage and work with colleagues and stakeholders to ensure access improvements are delivered as part of HS2. • Work to mitigate the impact on any temporary diversions of the route on users.
5h	Strategic aim	Mitigate impact and seek betterment from major schemes within borough	B,C	• Actively engage and seek to influence scheme development including HS2 and UKC to minimise the impact of such schemes on the network • Where feasible, seek betterment as part of such scheme • Develop list of key asks around major development sites for future use.
5j	Strategic Aim	Temple Lane to the Millennium Woodland access	A	• Work with colleagues in planning, the landowner and stakeholders to support the implementation of public access to the Millennium Woodland at Temple Balsall, Balsall. • *Linked to action 2i*
5k	Strategic Aim	Elmdon Road/Birmingham Airport Link	B	• Work with stakeholders to promote and encourage the upgrade of footpath M102 to facilitate cycle access.

Theme 6: Road Crossings

Aim: Improve the safety and availability of public rights of way affected by main or busy roads

What will be done?			Priority	Notes
6b	Research	Identify lengths of highway verge, quiet lanes and the existing unclassified road network that could act as safe links between public rights of way	B	• Assess feasibility and need of a policy for ongoing management and future maintenance. • Research and implement local best practice to assist in development of robust process and procedure.
6c	Strategic aim	Carry out an audit and develop a strategy and procedures for improving crossings over busy roads.	B, C	• Liaise with colleagues in Road Safety to promote the need to facilitate improvements as part of developments on a specific case by case basis. o SL7A at Hampton Lane, Catherine-de-Barnes – Route connectivity associated with visibility at canal bridge.

Theme 7: Signage

Aim: To achieve a situation where all public rights of way are adequately signposted and waymarked

What will be done?			Priority	Notes
7a	Research	Survey at least 25% of the total network of roadside fingerposts each year	A, B, C	• *Linked to action 1a* • Sign locations to be logged on an asset management register. • Monitoring to be completed by volunteers undertaking surveys each year.
7b	Policy	Implement the priority system for signposting public rights of way	A	• *Linked to action 7a* • Signposting works to be undertaken as a single annual contract with works scheduled based upon survey results and service requests.
7c	Quick Win	Where signposts are scheduled for replacement, begin to include destination and distance information	B	• Utilise signposting policy in any decision making process on use of distance and destination information to ensure consistent implementation.
7d	Strategic aim	Achieve a signposted and waymarked network	B	• Investigate options to reduce fingerpost vandalism and damage particularly in conjunction with annual hedge cutting programmes.

				• Achieve a 90% roadside route signage target which will be monitored as part of the annual survey. • *Linked to action 7a.*
7e	Research	Investigate feasibility of developing range of waymarks tailored to needs of users with visual impairments.	A	• Develop in conjunction with development of Solihull Street Charter and through engagement with VRU group in 2016.
7f	Quick Win	Review and revise route waymarking signage to improve communication.	A A,B A	• Carry out audit of current rights of way waymarks. • Consult with stakeholders on range of waymarks and opportunities for variation. • Develop new waymarker to aid public reporting on route issues.