

What did we find?

The public consultation process showed that the public rights of way network (PROW) in this county is viewed primarily as a recreational resource but highlighted how important the network is in accessing essential services. The most popular activities are cited as walking and cycling, although horse riding is a popular activity in Nottinghamshire, arguably higher than the national average.

The assessments suggest there is particular demand for circular walks and rides close to where people live. Where people do travel further a field the most popular locations are the honeypot areas of Sherwood Forest and Clumber Park.

Walkers, riders and cyclists are classified as vulnerable road users and their primary requirement is to be in a 'safe' and traffic free environment. Where the rights of way network meets the road network PROW users usually have to cross at road level with no traffic light controls or refuges, and in rural areas footways and managed verges are sporadic.

Some of the key problems faced by users and land managers of the rights of way network include:

- *Poor waymarking and signage* – can cause problems with identifying the status and following the correct line of a public right of way
- *Obstructions* – non reinstatement of cross-field paths after ploughing, non removal of crops, overgrown vegetation etc are all deterrents to usage
- *Difficulty in negotiating structures* – many stiles and gates are in states of disrepair and gates have latches that are difficult to open
- *Poor connectivity of the network* – many potential circular routes involve crossing busy roads or a high percentage of road walking.
- *Lack of off-road provision for cyclists and equestrians* – limits the possibility of identifying circular rides without the need for riding along busy roads
- *Litter, control of dogs and dog fouling* – lack of respect for the countryside and public rights of way network causes concern for landowners and deters users

Key issues

There are various pressures and changes which contribute in trying to manage a modern day rights of way network, for example, changes to farming practices, increased residential and business development, an increasing number of definitive paths and an increasing population. Because of these pressures there is a need to manage the existing network more efficiently,

pro-actively and objectively. The County Council needs to prioritise its limited resources and work more strategically to provide long term improvements.

At the heart of the document is the desire to provide 'access for all'. The assessments found a number of barriers, both perceptual and physical to people with disabilities. Some of these barriers are due to the geology and topography of the county and are very difficult to remove. However, there are a number of local, 'simple' tasks which can be achieved, such as replacing stiles with kissing gates. Any 'accessibility' improvements to the network equates to better access for everyone regardless of their needs.

The ROWIP highlights the high number of applications for definitive map modification orders (DMMO) i.e. adding new routes or recording higher rights over paths already included in the definitive map and statement. Also the CROW Act 2000 sets a deadline of 1st January 2026 for applicants to claim rights of way created before 1949 using documentary evidence (this includes all applications submitted as a result of the Lost Ways project¹). Therefore this cut-off date means the number of DMMO applications is going to grow significantly. Additionally within the definitive map there are an estimated 700 'map anomalies' to be resolved. The ROWIP sets out procedures to deal with the high number of applications and discusses the need for further resources.

Rights of way are often affected by planning and development. It has been found that planners and developers do not always fully consult or take into consideration the needs of all PROW users. Often users end up with a token number of badly designed paths when development takes place. The Plan points to the need for Access for All, 'designing out' crime and nuisance and providing an attractive path, certainly not any less convenient than the original line of the path.

There are a number of sites and routes across the county offering informal recreational opportunities over and above the definitive rights of way network. The type of access varies from large 'Open Access' sites designated as Open Country (CROW Act 2000) to small routes owned by private landowners. Permissive routes can be beneficial to all users in providing missing links in the PROW network, offering recreation in the County's large forestry areas for families and groups and providing safe routes from the busy road network. However, the Plan found that there is a general lack of information as to where these permissive routes and sites are.

¹ The CROW Act 2000 set a deadline of 1st January 2026 to register forgotten 'historic' rights of way on the definitive map. By historic it means those that were in existence before 1949. The government gave the job of co-ordinating this work to the Countryside Agency.

The wider community plays an important role in helping the County Council achieve its aims and objectives in managing Nottinghamshire's rights of way network. The Authority works with a number of organisations and individuals on the Parish Partnership Scheme, Farm Partnership Scheme and general voluntary tasks improving rights of way. Benefits are wide ranging and it's an effective way of assisting both the Council with its responsibilities and helping farmers and landowners with their responsibilities.

Rights of way maintenance and an up-to-date definitive map are fundamental in 'keeping paths open and available for the public to enjoy'. Nevertheless, the Plan recognises that the promotion of the network is essential in highlighting the opportunities, increasing usage and maximising the potential of rights of way for both recreational and utility type journeys.

Policy and procedures

One of the most important considerations in developing the ROWIP for Nottinghamshire is to ensure that it addresses key themes and complements the aims and objectives of existing county plans and strategies. As with other local level strategies, the aims and objectives of the ROWIP have been designed to assist delivery of core national and regional policies identified in Planning Policy Guidance and Regional Spatial Strategy. The ROWIP complements Nottinghamshire's Local Transport Plans (LTPs) and it is the intention to fully integrate the ROWIP with the LTP by 2011.

The preparation of the ROWIP has also offered an opportunity for the Authority to prepare and present a summary of the key rights of way issues taking into account both established and new legislation and working practices. These are supplemented by a series of policies relating to network improvement, community and partnership working, definitive map and planning and development. They will guide the Authority, land managers and all stakeholders in the maintenance and management of public rights of way in the county.

What happens next?

Under the CROW Act 2000, the Authority has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, but not to implement it. Accordingly, no additional funds have as yet been allocated to Highway Authorities for this purpose.

The Statutory Guidance makes reference to the concept that the ROWIP will become a distinct chapter of the Local Transport Plan. The aims, objectives and actions of the ROWIP will contribute to those of the LTP and will form the basis of the work funded through the LTP's Integrated Transport Measures programme.

The Statement of Action will become critical in business planning to which specific improvement works can be attached.

The County Council will report progress through annual progress reports and work with the Nottinghamshire Local Access Forum in identifying key issues and priorities.

The actions in the Plan are ambitious and challenging but with the backing of national and local government, key organisations and agencies, land managers and the general public they are attainable. Many of the actions are dependent on further resources and funding. However, by encompassing the ethos of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, by providing best value, many of these actions are achievable.



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