

ORIGINATING DIVISION: Highways and Transportation/PROW Capita

REPORT TO: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Planning and Highways Committee

DATE: 21st January 2016

TITLE: Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2015-2025

WARDS: All

COUNCILLORS: All

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present a 2015-2025 Lancashire wide Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) to the Council's Planning and Highways Committee in order that a decision may be taken to approve or not approve the plan.

2. BACKGROUND

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a statutory requirement for all local highways authorities to undertake an assessment of need and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) that identifies key issues and sets out proposals for improving the network and wider access for their areas. Working with Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council have developed a new 2015-2025 10 year plan which establishes the key development areas and activities for the Borough's 450km Network of Public Rights of Way and access land.

The plan has been through various development stages and a consultation exercise. A consultation report has been produced and considered within the final report draft.

Please refer to accompanying Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Consultation Report.

3. DETAIL

The first Lancashire Rights of Way Improvement Plan was produced in 2005 in response to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which placed a duty on Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, as a highway authority, to set out a strategy for improving its network of Public Rights of Way and wider access. The current RoWIP covers the administrative areas of Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Council and Blackpool Council, as does this revised plan. In line with statute plans must be reviewed no longer than ten years after publication and work has been underway on the preparation of a revised draft for consultation, a copy of which is attached for information.

In preparing the plan Council officers have undertaken as 'assessment of need' and in order to do this have sought the views of a wide range of organisations such as parish and town councils as well as groups including those representing the needs of the blind and visually impaired and disabled groups such as the disabled ramblers. Additionally we have considered the findings from relevant studies and research, a key one being the Natural England Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey. This has helped us to identify key issues and priorities and to formulate the actions required to address these.

The RoWIP consists of two parts; an 'assessment of need' and a 'statement of action'. The 'assessment of need' considers the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public; the opportunities provided by local rights of way (and in particular by footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways and restricted byways) for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and enjoyment of their area; the accessibility of local rights of way to blind and partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems. It considers the strengths and weaknesses of the current network and wider access opportunities and aims to identify the key issues and priorities related to this. It also considers the needs of a wide range of people using information gained from surveys, consultations and research. The 'statement of action' sets out our proposals or actions for improving rights of way and wider access in Lancashire and these have been grouped into a series of themed headings. These are listed below:

1. Condition and connectivity of the wider access network
2. Education and information provision
3. Twenty to thirty minute walks
4. Multi user routes
5. Encourage community involvement in improving wider access
6. The Definitive Map and other records

The RoWIP is a strategic plan and does not override the authorities' statutory duty to maintain Public Rights of Way. Furthermore although there is a statutory requirement to publish a RoWIP there is no such requirement to implement it; this was intended to allow improvement schemes to have access to grant funding not available for statutory maintenance of the public rights of way network. It also acts as the primary guide for the authorities to identify and prioritise actions and plan for the improved management and development of the access network. This plan includes actions that are achievable in current and future work programmes within current budgets as well as those that are aspirations for the future as resources and opportunities allow.

Officers have worked closely with the Lancashire Local Access Forum (LLAF) throughout the assessment of need phase with LLAF members assisting with the identification of issues and actions. Annual reports will be prepared and presented to the LLAF outlining progress against actions.

Please refer to appendices A and B for details.

4. THE LAW

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a statutory requirement for all local highways authorities to undertake an assessment of need and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). Plans must be reviewed no longer than ten years after publication.

5. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Planning and Highways Committee recommends approval of the the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2015-2025 to the Council's Executive Board.

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| <u>6. CONTACT OFFICER</u> | James Daplyn Ex. 3525 (PROW) |
| <u>7. DATE PREPARED</u> | 25 th December 2015 |
| <u>8. BACKGROUND PAPERS</u> | a. Rights of Way Improvement Plan
b. ROWIP Consultation Report |