

Rotherham Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Summary



Vision Statement

To develop, promote and protect a borough wide network of rights of way that meet the present and likely future needs of the public for the purposes of open air recreation, exercise and access to local services.

In particular the Rotherham Rights of Way Improvement Plan aims to:-

- Provide a rights of way network which is correctly recorded, easy to follow, free from obstruction and safe to use.
- Develop a network which meets the needs of local users and visitors to the borough whilst retaining the character of the countryside.
- Make the most of access opportunities to enable the network to be accessed by the widest possible audience, with particular regard to those with mobility problems.
- Increase opportunities for sustainable travel, for leisure and access to work, school and local services.
- Ensure that proposals and schemes are prioritised and implemented to meet the needs and aspirations of the population to deliver maximum benefit within available resources.
- Promote and encourage respect and understanding between path users and occupiers in order to minimise conflict.

1.0 Legislative Framework

- 1.1 Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, highway authorities must prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) by November 2007, which must then be updated every ten years.
- 1.2 A Rights of Way Improvement Plan must assess:
 - 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 for exercise, and other forms of outdoor recreation and the enjoyment of the authority's area;
 - The accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.
- 1.3 In order to do this, highway authorities need to consider the whole network of non-motorised routes, not just definitive rights of way. They will need to look at the whole spectrum of users and journey purposes, from disabled access needs to routes to open access land. There are many other routes and sites that are used by the general public for informal countryside access that are not recorded as definitive public rights of way.
- 1.4 The Government have indicated that ROWIPs will be an important step in working towards a more integrated and sustainable transport network. As a result ROWIPs have been identified in statutory guidance as becoming a distinct strand of the Local Transport Planning process with full integration expected from 2010 onwards.

2.0 Geographical Context

- 2.1 The Rights of Way Improvement Plan will cover the entire borough of Rotherham.
- 2.2 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough is situated in South Yorkshire and covers an area of approximately 118sq miles. It shares boundaries with the boroughs of Doncaster, Barnsley and Sheffield and with the Counties of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. The borough incorporates a varied pattern of landscapes from dense industrial and residential areas to extensive areas of open countryside.
- 2.3 The land use patterns have largely been shaped as a direct result of the topography and geology of the area. Large areas of the Don Valley and Rother Valley have been extensively industrialised. Other areas in the borough have been subject to industrialisation mainly as a result of coal mining in the villages and satellite towns surrounding Rotherham town centre.
- 2.4 Despite the borough having a rich industrial heritage, 70% of its area is made up of land of a rural nature. The most extensive areas of countryside are situated to the east and south of the town and in an area to the north of the town centred around Wentworth. These areas are predominantly comprised of arable farmland and pasture land with pockets of deciduous woodland.

- 2.5 The countryside in the borough absorbs much of the recreational pressure from the surrounding built up areas. The borough's 400km of definitive rights of way play a significant part in the public's enjoyment of the wider countryside. The network is also part of the local transport infrastructure and provides paths away from busy roads linking residential areas and the local countryside. Local rights of way are both a significant part of the borough's heritage and a major recreational and transport resource.
- 2.6 In addition to the public rights of way network, the public have access to a number of linear routes and countryside sites. Towpaths, permissive paths and environmental stewardship paths all increase opportunities for members of the public and visitors to access attractive areas of countryside. The borough also contains a number of sites which provide the public with further recreational opportunities namely Council owned woodlands, green spaces and country parks at Ulley, Thrybergh, and in the Rother Valley.

3.0 The Process

- 3.1 The process of developing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan has been influenced by a number of factors, including the statutory ROWIP guidance, the highway authority's statutory duties and powers, Countryside Agency advice and wide ranging stakeholder consultations with Rotherham Local Access Forum, statutory agencies, path user groups, landowners and parish and town councils.
- 3.2 The Rotherham ROWIP identifies and evaluates the needs of various users and summarises the current levels of public rights of way and recreational countryside access provision.
- 3.3 The statutory guidance states that the ROWIP should not focus on detailed site specific assessments, but draw broader, generic conclusions, which are then the focus of a "statement of action" for the management of local public rights of way and for securing an improved network of paths, with particular regard to the matters dealt with in the assessment.

4.0 Implementation

- 4.1 Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Rotherham Borough Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, but not to implement it. However, developing and publishing a ROWIP will enable the Streetpride Service to seek external funding for access improvements. Such funding would be in addition to existing central public rights of way funding which is used to undertake statutory duties.

5.0 Statement of Action

- 5.1 The assessments which have been undertaken have enabled a number of conclusions to be reached about the overall strengths and weaknesses of the local rights of way network and identified where action is required. These conclusions

and the information gathered from the assessments forms the basis of the statement of action.

Assessment 1 Availability of access to the countryside

- Conclusion*
- Some countryside sites do not connect well with the rights of way network.
 - A fragmented public rights of way network limits countryside access opportunities in some areas of the borough and this has created a high level of latent demand for additional routes.

- Key Action*
- Identify and list the key sites requiring improved links to the surrounding network of rights of way. Investigate, prioritise and instigate options for securing improved access to poorly served sites.
 - Collate and prioritise requests for additional public access opportunities to identify missing links in the network of local rights of way.
 - Identify and develop access opportunities to land included on the Maps of Open Country and Registered Common Land with particular regard to Throapham Common.

Assessment 2 - Routes to support tourism and regeneration

Conclusion **Tourism** - There is a demand for further traffic free multi user routes

- Key Action*
- Carry out feasibility study for the development of a single traffic free route of the Rotherham Section of the TPT southern link suitable for all classes of user.
 - Identify, develop and promote links from the TPT into surrounding urban centres and tourist destinations.
 - Identify and prioritise strategic routes between urban centres for utilitarian and leisure use. (See Also Key Actions 7)
 - Develop and promote the Cuckoo Way and community link paths.
 - Carry out feasibility study of creating additional linear access beside waterways – River Rother from Rotherham Town Centre to Rother Valley Country Park.

Conclusion

Regeneration - The reclamation of former industrial sites often provides notable improvements to non motorised users.

There is considerable scope to develop access in conjunction with Housing Market Renewal with particular regard to Key Routes.

Key Actions

- Work with the Planning & Transportation Service and other stakeholders to maximise opportunities provided by reclamation projects.
- Work with farmers and other stakeholders to maximise access opportunities offered by farm diversification.
- Identify and prioritise 'Green Corridors' and links to 'Key Routes' in the Rawmarsh Housing Market Renewal Area. Carry out a feasibility study of identified routes and establish detailed costings.

Assessment 3A

The opportunities for walkers

Conclusion

- There is considerable scope and demand to develop pedestrian facilities on the urban fringe and in rural areas.

Key Action

- Identify, develop and promote pedestrian routes, especially on the urban fringe. (See Also Key Actions 4)
- Identify opportunities to provide additional pedestrian access to the areas highlighted in the assessment as having limited pedestrian facilities.

Assessment 3B

The opportunities for horse riders

Conclusion

- The network of routes available to horse riders is very limited.

Key Action

- Identify, develop and promote bridleway links, creating off road routes especially in areas with a high density of livery stables.
- Develop and promote strategic eastern and western bridleway routes.
- Produce an index of desired and missing links for potential creation as permissive routes a part of the Environmental Stewardship scheme.

Assessment 3C The opportunities for carriage drivers

Conclusion ➤ There is no meaningful network of routes available to carriage drivers.

Key Action ➤ Identify, develop and promote the use of Quiet Lanes to the benefit of all non motorised users.

Assessment 3D The opportunities for cyclists

Conclusion ➤ The facilities available to cyclists are limited especially in rural areas.

Key Action ➤ Identify opportunities to develop and where possible create cycle routes with particular regard to those routes connecting the urban fringe with rural areas.

Assessment 3E The opportunities for recreational motoring

Conclusion ➤ There is no meaningful network of routes available to recreational motorists.

➤ The public awareness and utilisation of the network of unsurfaced public roads is often low.

Key Action ➤ Carryout a condition survey of UCRs and unmetalled adopted highways.

➤ Work with stakeholders to identify and manage legitimate vehicular use of the countryside and the rights of way network.

➤ Compile a list and digital map of all rural un-metalled Unclassified County Roads.

Assessment 3F The opportunities for users with limited mobility

Conclusion ➤ The rights of way network is generally inaccessible to wheel chair users.

➤ The presence of stiles severely limits the accessibility of the network.

➤ There is an absence of accurate information to enable disabled users to make informed decisions of the

accessibility of the network.

Key Action

- Carry out an access audit of the rights of way network and principal access sites.
- Improve access across the rights of way network, adopted footpaths and public open space by using least restrictive access guidance.
- Identify, prioritise and carry out works on strategic routes to upgrade to full accessibility standard.
- Produce 6 'Easy Going Trail' Leaflets (Least Restrictive Access) (See Also Key Actions 10).
- Publish disabled access information for inclusion in the Public Rights of Way Web Page.

Assessment 4

Routes from population centres, circular routes and the use of public transport.

Conclusion

- There is a strong public demand to develop a variety of circular routes on the urban fringe.
- There is a public desire to make greater use of public transport as a means of accessing the countryside.

Key Action

- Develop integrated public transport and public rights of way information to expand and promote the network for utilitarian and leisure use.
- Identify and develop key routes on the urban fringe with the aim of providing additional access opportunities. (See Also Key Actions 3A)

Assessment 5

Routes to ameliorate the affects of major roads.

Conclusion

- Many roads which have to be crossed or traversed are unsafe for non motorised users.

Key Action

- Undertake safety audits to identify improvement works. Investigate options to secure funding and safety improvements.
- Identify and list highway margins suitable for use by non motorised traffic. Prioritise according to safety benefits and investigate options to secure improved access and funding.

Assessment 6 The current rights of way network

- Conclusion*
- In areas the definitive map and statement does not accurately depict the nature and location of public use on the ground.
 - There is potential for the Lost Ways Project to add certain identified routes to improve the connectivity of the network.
- Key Action*
- Identify and prioritise the status of claims considered to offer the greatest potential benefit to the network. Where appropriate make DMMOs to add additional public rights to the definitive map.
 - Prioritise and manage the review of the Definitive Map to enable the completion of the definitive map and statement by January 2026.
 - Utilise the data gathered during the PROW condition survey to identify the areas where the definitive map differs from the network of routes physically used by the public.

Assessment 7 The availability of routes to local facilities

- Conclusion*
- Scope exists to develop and improve the network of urban definitive rights of way.
 - Whilst the standard of urban adopted footpaths is high, scope exists to improve the network to encourage usage.
 - There is a latent demand to develop strategic routes between built up areas to enable local journeys.
- Key Action*
- Identify, develop and promote strategic routes between urban centres for utilitarian/ leisure use.
 - Identify, develop and promote safer routes to school. Every school in the Borough must have a school travel plan in place by April 2011.

Assessment 8 The availability of routes through and around heavily developed areas

- Conclusion*
- Urbanisation and development often blights the non-motorised network of routes, especially on the urban fringe.
- Key Action*
- Work with the Planning & Transportation Service and

developers to ensure that the rights of way network remains relevant to local use and demand.

- Identify and prioritise urban routes which require upgrading to meet the utilitarian and recreational needs of users.

Assessment 9 The condition of the network

Conclusion

- Users would like to see more resources targeted to the maintenance and enforcement of the public rights of way network.
- The lack of waymarking and signage in some areas is a barrier to countryside access.

Key Action

- Adopt a regime of improved maintenance of the rights of way network, especially on those routes used by users with limited mobility or the visually impaired. To include increased seasonal overgrowth clearance and replacement of path furniture.
- Implement a programme of refreshing public rights of way signage throughout the borough.
- Adopt the protocols outlined in the Enforcement Policy and the Ploughing and Cropping on Public Rights of Way – Code of Practice.

Assessment 10 The publicity of the network and countryside access

Conclusion

- There is a high public demand for additional promotional information and in some cases the lack of information prevents potential users from enjoying the countryside.
- There is a lack of information regarding the wider network of public access.

Key Action

- Produce 1 digital format door step e-walk each year.
- Produce 1 digital format door step e-ride every 2 years.
- Produce 6 Easy Going Trail Leaflets (Least Restrictive Access).
- Devise and publish closer look health walks for each door step walk route.
- Continue to develop the Rotherham Rights of Way Web Page.

- Work with the Rotherham Local Access Forum to maximise the development of countryside access and to encourage usage.
- Produce 5 closer look door step walk translations in additional languages as appropriate.
- Produce “A plain speaking guide” - A common sense guide to countryside access.
- Publish disabled access information for inclusion in the Public Rights of Way Web Page.

6.0 Prioritising & Identifying Actions

- 6.1 It is clear that the implementation of many of the identified key actions will require the allocation of substantial resources. This is especially the case for key actions requiring the addition or amendment of public rights of way.
- 6.2 There are however, some actions which may be delivered within a shorter time scale and within current resources. These actions are likely to be delivered within a shorter period of time as their implementation does not rely on identifying additional external funding. In broad terms the improvements which Rotherham Borough Council and its partners can best make progress on delivering are those within its control.
- 6.3 In prioritising the key actions, emphasis will primarily be placed on;
- Ensuring that the current rights of way network is well maintained and available to path users.
 - Ensuring that the definitive map and statement is up to date and accurately reflects the physical network used by the public.
 - Ensuring that the Disability Discrimination Act is implemented wherever reasonably possible.
 - Developing the network of multi-user routes.
- 6.4 Other factors which will be considered when prioritising improvement schemes competing for the same source of funding will include the nature of the route, the benefit to users and social inclusion, source of the improvement request, cost and the current standard of local facilities.

Contacting Us

Email **andrew.savage@rotherham.gov.uk**

Telephone **01709 822932**

Fax **01709 373987**

Post **Rotherham MBC
Streetpride Service
Bailey House
Rawmarsh Road
Rotherham
S60 1TD**

Internet **www.rotherham.gov.uk/prow**