

The Dorset Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2012 – 2021 review and timetable

Background

The Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW 2000) places a duty on local authorities to prepare Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs) setting out their strategy for improving the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and wider outdoor access network in their areas.

RoWIPs do not override the authority's current statutory duty to maintain Public Rights of Way. However, Rights of Way Improvement Plans are the prime means for the Local Highway Authority to identify and prioritise actions and plan for the improved management and development of the countryside access network. The Dorset Rights of Way Improvement Plan is the authority's long-term management strategy for the PRoW and wider access network.

A RoWIP consists of two parts:

- The assessment that considers the current strengths and weaknesses of the access resource for legitimate walking, horse-riding, cycling, horse-drawn carriage driving and vehicular use, how easy it is to use by people of all needs and abilities including people with visibility and mobility impairment and the opportunities to develop and improve the access resource to meet people's needs today and in the future.
- The Action plan that lists the work and resources needed to realise these opportunities and develop an improved access network.

An improved and effective outdoor access network benefits a range of social, economic, and environmental issues that affect our lives today and in the future. These include:

- Climate change - helping to address carbon emissions
- Sustainable transport - enabling people to walk, ride and cycle reducing motorised travel for local journeys.
- Green infrastructure – contributing to this ecological network in both rural and urban areas
- Social inclusion – providing local path networks where people enjoying the outdoors and travelling at a casual pace have an opportunity to meet and see members of their local community.
- Health & Wellbeing – providing treasured greenspace where people can get outside and experience nature to relax and unwind, build in a little informal exercise or more formal physical activity.
- Natural environment & landscape – protecting it through sensitive management & maintenance and managing footfall
- Cultural heritage – conserving and protecting paths and their infrastructure contributing to local character and sense of place.
- Local economy - Making places attractive in which to work and live.
- Tourism - Providing a leisure facility for both residents and visitors
- Land management – agriculture – environmental conservation – forestry – providing opportunities for diversification – experience and education.
- Planning & development- building in invaluable greenspace, corridors for people and wildlife.
- Diversity & equality – enabling the breadth of the local community young, old, disabled people and ethnic minority groups to access and enjoy their local areas and further afield.

The review Process and timetable

Each RoWIP lasts for 10 years then it must be reviewed to determine if the existing plan is still current or if a new plan needs to be written. Dorset Council is now in the process of carrying out a review of its Dorset Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2011-2021. The review will be informed through the assessment process which involves evidence gathering, research and consultation. The timetable for delivery is:

May – December 2021

- Evaluate the current ROWIP assessment & Action plan – relevance today, what can stay the same/needs updating, achievements, barriers.
- Carry out research & Information gathering
 - Analysis of asset condition & character
 - Analysis of available data & information
 - Identify current management, maintenance, issues, resources, opportunities & threats
 - Evidence gathering from organisations, groups and public
- Interpretation of research and information gathering and comparison with current RoWIP

January – February 22

Drafting of the new the ROWIP 2022-32

March – June 22

- Public consultation on new Plan
- Input consultation responses into the new plan

July 22

- Approval by Dorset Council Cabinet
- ROWIP 2022- 32 published