



RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2010 - 2020

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

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1. Overview

“Local rights of way are both a significant part of our heritage and a major recreational resource”. (DEFRA 2002).

- 1.1 West Berkshire possesses a rich network of linear routes and areas of land, away from roads, which are available for use by the public. This document refers to these collectively as the ‘access network’. This Rights of Way Improvement Plan sets out the District Council’s aims to improve the access network for the enjoyment of all its users.
- 1.2 The access network comprises ‘Definitive’ public rights of way; cycle tracks; routes permitted for use by landowners; informal routes used by the public; and land open for public access. Some remote rural roads are also similar in character to these other forms of linear access.

This Rights of Way Improvement Plan sets out the District Council’s aims to improve the access network for the enjoyment of all its users.

The value of the access network

- 1.3 An improved and promoted network of public rights of way and other access routes carries benefits to quality of life at many levels:
- Use of rights of way as alternatives to transport by car improves air quality and road safety, reduces emissions, and eases congestion.
 - The access network offers a huge opportunity for people to enhance their quality of life in other ways, for instance, by taking exercise in a pleasant and traffic-free environment, and by using the rural network to observe the natural environment and other features of interest.
 - The access network is an important local amenity, especially in rural areas, where other facilities might be limited.
 - The access network offers opportunities for learning about wildlife, conservation and the workings of the countryside. Such opportunities attract local and rural income from visitors to an area such as West Berkshire, the majority of which comprises an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. That same network of ‘green lanes’ has the potential to be better managed, so as to increase its value for biodiversity.
 - Travelling through communities other than by private car increases people’s appreciation of their local area, and benefits social cohesion.
 - Finally, there are the unquantifiable but fundamental benefits to mental and spiritual renewal and relaxation.

The access network in West Berkshire

- 1.4 Public rights of way are recorded in legal documents called the Definitive Map and Statement. They are all highways, for the purpose of 'passing and re-passing', only.
- 1.5 **There are 1183 km (735 miles) of public rights of way in West Berkshire, compared to a Council road network of 1272 km (790 miles). Public rights of way are made up of the following:**
- **61% public footpaths**, over which the right of way is on foot only.
 - **17% public bridleways**, for use by the public on foot, bicycle and on horseback or leading a horse.
 - **8% restricted byways**, used as for bridleways but with the addition of non mechanically-propelled vehicles, thereby giving a right of access for horse-drawn carriages.
 - **14% byways open to all traffic**, for use by all the above plus vehicular traffic, with the *main* use being by walkers and horse-riders. Vehicles must be taxed and insured, in the same way as for roads.
- 1.6 The Cycle Tracks Act 1984 allows new cycle tracks to be created, and Definitive footpaths to be converted to cycle tracks. Cycle tracks created in this way are highways but are not recorded on the Definitive Map and Statement. Cyclists may be required to share with other users.
- 1.7 Landowners sometimes allow the public to access their land, or linear access routes across their land. Such 'permissive access' may be formalized in an agreement, entitling the owner to Government Stewardship grants. Landowners have registered a total of 21km (13 miles) of linear permitted access with the District Council, and there are many more routes and areas provided for the public under the Stewardship grant schemes.
- 1.8 Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 created 'open access land', which in West Berkshire comprises registered common land and certain areas of heathland and downland. It covers 1.7 % of West Berkshire (1207 hectares). People may walk, run or sight-see on this land, but must act responsibly and with consideration for others, and between 1 March and 31 July, or at any other time in the vicinity of livestock, dogs are only allowed if on a short lead. There may be local restrictions.
- 1.9 Finally, there is the access which has no formal recognition, and which is used habitually by the public, perhaps by local agreement with the landowner. Linear access used by the public 'as of right' may acquire the status of a public right of way.

The duty to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

- 1.10 West Berkshire District Council (the 'District Council' or 'Council'), as highway authority, has a statutory duty to maintain its public rights of way in a suitable condition for the public use which is

- made of them. In 2000, the third National Rights of Way Condition Survey, undertaken by the Countryside Agency, indicated that no highway authority in England had met the target for all rights of way to be properly maintained by the year 2000.
- 1.11 Nevertheless, the Government aims to achieve an improvement in defining, maintaining and publicizing the rights of way network. A statutory duty was introduced by section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, for each highway authority to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, covering all its area.
- 1.12 Rights of Way Improvement Plans are important means by which local authorities will identify the changes to be made, in respect of management and improvement, to their rights of way networks in order to meet the Government's aim of better provision for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and people with restricted mobility. In producing the Improvement Plan, the District Council is required to do the following:
- Assess the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public.
 - Assess 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 the enjoyment of its area.
 - Assess the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially-sighted people, and others with mobility problems.
- 1.13 The assessment should include access in a broad sense, by considering the Definitive Map in conjunction with the wider highway network; for instance roads, cycle tracks, permitted routes, open access land and other land with permitted access and habitually-used routes.
- 1.14 The Rights of Way Improvement Plan must also include a statement of the action the District Council proposes to take to improve the network of rights of way and its management, having particular regard to the items listed above. Once the Improvement Plan has been published, the Council is required to review and, if necessary, amend and republish the plan at intervals of not more than ten years.

2. Vision

- 2.1 A 'Vision' in the context of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is 'an inspirational and believable picture of the future'.

West Berkshire's vision for its access network:

'To enhance the opportunities for society, and its environment, to benefit at all levels from the public access network in West Berkshire'.

3. West Berkshire's approach to creating its Rights of Way Improvement Plan

3.1 The overall approach to creating the Improvement Plan has been as follows:

- A. To carry out, including via consultation, a thorough assessment of the extent that the current access network meets the present and likely future needs of the public. **Appendix 1.**
- B. A record progress to date on work to maintain and improve the access network. **Appendix 2.**
- C. To record the District Council's statutory duties and powers in relation to the provision of public access. **Appendix 3.**
- D. To set the Rights of Way Improvement Plan in a wider policy context. **Appendix 4**
- E. Based on A to D above, to identify general themes for improvements needed, and to formulate a series of targeted objectives, which will achieve improvements to the access network and working practices, whilst maintaining and improving the delivery of the Council's statutory duties.

3.2 The District Council's work on public rights of way to date has been largely governed by the strategy document the 'Milestones Statement', which sets out measures to achieve a legally-defined, properly-maintained and well-publicized rights of way network. This Improvement Plan will contain proposals to continue with and improve this work, and will therefore supersede the Milestones Statement.

4. The themes for improvement

- 4.1 Out of the wide consultation emerged a clearer picture of the profiles of both users and non-users of the access network. There was a very high number of separate general proposals for improvements to the provision of public access, site-specific proposals for improvements, and additional access routes. As part of their work to identify the site-specific improvements, some consultees scrutinized the Definitive Map in great detail to identify anomalies and potentially useful changes and additions.
- 4.2 By using the details of the consultation responses, the Council's own experience and statutory duties, best practice, and the wider policy context, a series of clear themes for improvement have emerged.

A well-maintained access network

- 4.3 There is a need to improve surface maintenance, signposting, and vegetation clearance along public rights of way, whilst retaining the character of the network. The number of unauthorized interferences with public rights of way needs to be reduced.

A legally recorded public rights of way network

- 4.4 Applications for path orders need to be processed more quickly.

An environmentally-sustainable access network

- 4.5 Improvements need to be made to preserve and enhance the biodiversity and historic character of public rights of way.

Providing information / promoting the use of the access network

- 4.6 An increase is needed in the availability of access information and promotional material, along with an exploration of a greater use of a wider range of formats, to compliment relevant work carried out by others.

Education / encouragement of responsible behaviour

- 4.7 There is a lack of understanding amongst certain people of their responsibilities and rights when using the access network. Such information must be disseminated much more effectively.

Development of new and improved access

- 4.8 New or improved access should be sought where there is a proven need, to include links between population centres and facilities, including schools, and improved equestrian access away from busy roads.

Physical improvements to the access network

- 4.9 There are a number of positive steps that can be taken to make physical improvements to the network, ranging from destination signposts and surface works, to improved gate latches.

Improving accessibility for all users

- 4.10 There is a need to improve the provision and promotion of access for groups which either do not presently use the access network, or who possess restricted mobility.

Working with partners

- 4.11 The Council should improve its effectiveness by efficiently aligning its activities and aspirations with relevant activities and aspirations of others.

Improving working practices and customer care

- 4.12 Various steps can be taken to improve the efficiency of the Council in terms of delivering improvements to the access network, and its communication with the public about matters of access provision.

Funding

- 4.13 The Council should investigate opportunities for external funding for access projects.

Monitoring and continued consultation

- 4.14 Circumstances are always changing, and mechanisms are needed to ensure that the Improvement Plan remains effective and relevant.

5. Objectives

5.1 By using the details of the consultation responses, the Council's own experience and statutory duties, best practice, and the wider policy context, a series of objectives have been developed under each theme. These objectives are listed in the Action Plan below, with additional explanatory notes where needed or helpful.

5.2 The columns of the Action Plan table are explained here:

'ROWIP reference'

5.3 Each objective has been given a consecutive reference number, prefixed by 'ROWIP'.

'Rights of Way Improvement Plan themes and objectives'

5.4 The main theme appears as a heading, and below in bold are listed the objectives, with explanatory notes where needed.

'Priorities'

5.5 These are denoted by colour-coding in the table. Red and green codes apply to objectives which have not yet started in earnest. Red objectives are for attempted completion in years 1 to 2 following adoption of this Improvement Plan. Green objectives are for attempted completion in years 3 to 5. A third category of 'ongoing' applies to objectives which, by their nature, are ongoing activities, where work has already started.

'Benefits'

5.6 These are described in terms of the main policy areas that the objective would help to implement. Appendix 4 gives more details.

'Reduce, manage or invest'

5.7 In order to ensure that the District Council is making the best use of resources, an assessment for each objective has been made of whether the activity involves a reduction in resources, improved management of existing resources, or the investment of additional resources.

'Risk'

5.8 The assessment of risk is the likelihood of failure of each objective.

‘Resources’

5.9 This lists the organizations or individuals who would be involved in implementing the objectives.

‘Funding sources and scale’

5.10 Appropriate types of funding sources are listed. These do not include possible additional external funding, because to seek such funding in the future is in itself an objective of the Improvement Plan. An indication of cost of completion of each objective is given, as such:

- £ Under £5000
- ££ Between £5000 and £50,000
- £££ Over £50,000

For ongoing objectives, the figure refers to the annual cost.

5.11 Many of the objectives are not aimed specifically at one type of access user over another. Different types of access are used by people for varied reasons and in varying ways. The following table lists some of these, and when implementing the objectives of this Improvement Plan, the aim will be to cross-reference with each other, to make sure that all users have been considered and accommodated where possible.

Access examples	Journey examples	Travel modes / user examples
Public footpath	Work	Foot
Public bridleway	Education	Cycle
Restricted byway	Recreation	Horse
Byway open to all traffic	Access to services	Mobility vehicles
Cycleways	Exercise	Mechanically-propelled vehicles
Unclassified roads		Carriage
Wide road network		All abilities
Quiet Lanes		All ethnicity
Permissive access - linear		Runners
Permissive access - land		Dog walkers
Rights of way along towpaths		Buggies
Statutory open access land		Blind / partially-sighted
“De facto” routes		Restricted mobility of all kinds
		Children

ACTION PLAN

Important notes concerning implementation of objectives appear at the end of this table

KEY:

- PROW = 'public right(s) of way'; WBC = 'West Berkshire District Council'; AONB = 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'
- An indication of cost of completion of each objective is given as such: £ Under £5000 ££ Between £5000 and £50,000
£££ Over £50,000
- Benefits: SSC: West Berkshire Sustainable Community Strategy; AONB: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan; *Cultural Strat.*: Cultural Strategy; *Protect Public*: objective protects the public; LTP: Local Transport Plan; *Efficiency*: objective will result in efficiency savings. Refer to Appendix 4 for explanations of policies quoted in the Action Plan.
- Priorities are colour-coded: **High Priority** (guide: years 1 to 2) **Medium Priority** (guide: years 2 to 5) Uncoloured: Work already started and ongoing

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
A well-maintained and safe access network						
Produce a strategy to reduce the instances of laying of unauthorized tarmacadam surfaces on PROW and a policy to set out the District Council's approach to tarmacadam on PROW.	ROWIP 1	Protect public Efficiency	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Carry out a complete condition survey of all Definitive PROW at least every ten years.	ROWIP 2	Protect public Efficiency LTP	Invest	Medium	WBC Volunteers	Revenue Capital ££

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Investigate the feasibility of a limited scheme to remunerate landowners for carrying out repair, maintenance and improvement works on PROW.	ROWIP 3	Efficiency LTP AONB	Manage	Medium	WBC Landowners	Revenue Capital £
Review measures to ensure that landowners maintain all hedges adjacent to PROW so as to prevent obstruction of PROW by overgrowth.	ROWIP 4	Efficiency LTP AONB	Manage	Medium	WBC Landowners	Revenue £
Formally adopt the draft policy governing the maintenance of PROW used for access to residential properties, farms and other private land or establishments.	ROWIP 5	Efficiency LTP	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Produce a design and consultation protocol for the repair, replacement and installation of bridges on PROW.	ROWIP 6	Efficiency LTP	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Review PROW sign and waymark designs to reduce future instances of fading and unauthorized relocation or redirection.	ROWIP 7	Efficiency LTP SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £(£)
Remedy all unresolved PROW signage defects by the end of April each year.	ROWIP 8	LTP SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC Volunteers	Revenue Capital ££
Produce a prioritization scheme for physical works, vegetation clearance and enforcement on PROW.	ROWIP 9	Efficiency LTP	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
A legally-recorded PROW network						
'Consolidate' and publish the Definitive Map and Statement in a clear and useable format.	ROWIP 10	Cultural Strat. SSC	Invest	Low	WBC	Revenue ££

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Each year to complete the processing of the annually-agreed list of applications for modification orders and path orders.	ROWIP 11	Efficiency LTP SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue ££
Produce a published prioritization scheme for dealing with applications for modification orders and applications for path orders.	ROWIP 12	Efficiency	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Carry out risk assessments for trees within PROW and formulate a prioritized plan of action to ensure the safety of PROW users.	ROWIP 13	Protect public Efficiency	Invest	Medium	WBC Volunteers	Revenue ££
Consider appropriate legal mechanisms to recognize acquisition of cycling rights along urban public footpaths.	ROWIP 14	Efficiency LTP	Invest	Medium	WBC Volunteers	Revenue ££
An environmentally-sustainable access network						
Investigate methods to prevent fly-tipping and littering of PROW and also improved methods for clearance of litter and fly-tipping when instances occur.	ROWIP 15	Protect public Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Meduim	Low	WBC AONB National Trails Office Volunteers	Revenue ££
Investigate improved sustainable procurement practices.	ROWIP 16	SSC AONB	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Introduce improved environmentally-sustainable working practices, which also protect and enhance biodiversity and historic landscape and features.	ROWIP 17	SSC AONB	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Providing information / promoting the use of the access network						
Increase the availability of PROW / access information and promotional material and explore greater use of a wider range of formats, to compliment relevant work carried out by others.	ROWIP 18	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC AONB Access user groups Parishes	Revenue Capital ££
Support parish councils, parish plan groups, and others, to increase the range and availability of promotional material for PROW / access.	ROWIP 19	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Low	WBC Parishes AONB	Revenue Capital ££
Education / encouragement of responsible behaviour						
Produce published material to provide information about PROW / access and about the responsibilities of PROW users, landowners and other bodies.	ROWIP 20	Protect public AONB	Invest	Low	WBC AONB	Revenue ££
Produce a formal policy for the management of vehicular use and vehicular surfaces, with the aim of improving the condition of PROW used by recreational vehicles.	ROWIP 21	Protect public Efficiency LTP AONB	Manage	Low	WBC AONB	Revenue £
Implement procedures to remove unsuitable PROW from published satellite navigation routes.	ROWIP 22	Protect public LTP	Manage	Medium	WBC AONB	Revenue £
Continue to contribute access information to the “Greenways” newsletter.	ROWIP 23	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Explore opportunities to work with schools within the National Curriculum to increase understanding of the role of access within the countryside and the responsibilities of citizens.	ROWIP 24	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Manage	Medium	WBC Landowners AONB	Revenue ££
Development of new and improved access						
Seek to promote, improve and create (where necessary) safe and commodious links between, within and around population centres, rural and urban facilities, attractions and transport interchanges.	ROWIP 25	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Landowners AONB Parishes	Revenue Capital S.106 ££(£)
Seek to promote, improve and create (where necessary) suitable routes to school and consider an increased maintenance programme for these routes.	ROWIP 26	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Low	WBC Landowners AONB Parishes	Revenue Capital S.106 ££(£)
Seek greater partnership with businesses, landowners and partners, to secure the provision of additional permissive or Definitive access for all users.	ROWIP 27	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Manage	Medium	WBC Landowners AONB Parishes	Revenue Capital S.106 ££
Increase the provision of suitable equestrian routes where existing provision is low or fragmented, and where demand is high, especially routes which facilitate riding to and from livery yards without the need for horseboxes.	ROWIP 28	Protect public LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Landowners AONB Parishes	Revenue Capital S.106 £££

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Develop circular interlinking equestrian and cycle routes around settlements (“community circuits”) which also link to longer rides.	ROWIP 29	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Landowners AONB Parishes	Revenue Capital S.106 £££
Investigate increased access for equestrians and carriages on West Berkshire-managed commons.	ROWIP 30	SSC Cultural Strat.	Invest	Medium	WBC Access user groups	Revenue Capital S.106 ££
Physical improvements to the access network						
Research and implement mechanisms to realign the road user hierarchy in favour of non-motorized transport modes, especially walking (Local Transport Plan 2, policy WI9).	ROWIP 31	Protect public LTP	Invest	Medium	WBC	Revenue Capital S.106 £££
Work with partners in rural areas to identify opportunities for improving the safety of the physical environment, in particular for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders (Local Transport Plan 2, policy RSI 7).	ROWIP 32	Protect public LTP	Invest	Medium	WBC AONB Landowners	Revenue Capital S.106 £££
Implement measures to ensure that all gates on equestrian routes are easily-openable from horseback, using best practice gate and latch designs and gate configurations. Consider the installation of mounting blocks where dismounting cannot be avoided.	ROWIP 33	Protect public LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Landowners Parishes AONB	Revenue Capital ££

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Increase the numbers of PROW signposts indicating destinations, distances and local attractions.	ROWIP 34	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Parishes AONB	Revenue Capital ££
Improve the signage of PROW in and around West Berkshire's countryside sites.	ROWIP 35	SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Low	WBC Volunteers AONB	Revenue Capital £
Implement measures to improve signage and promotion of all permitted access.	ROWIP 36	LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Landowners AONB DEFRA	Revenue Capital S.106 ££
Implement measures to improve management and promotion of open access land and links to and from access land.	ROWIP 37	SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Landowners Parishes AONB	Revenue Capital S.106 ££
Improving accessibility for all users						
Identify routes and circuits which are suitable for promotion for use by those with restricted mobility, including within countryside sites. Promote and sign the routes in terms of grading and carry out works, where needed.	ROWIP 38	Protect public LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Volunteers Access user groups AONB	Revenue Capital £££
Continue to provide buggies, for those with restricted mobility, at West Berkshire countryside sites.	ROWIP 39	SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue Capital ££

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Continue to improve the accessibility of structures on rights of way, and introduce and implement new incentives for landowners to do likewise.	ROWIP 40	Protect public LTP SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Manage	Medium	WBC Landowners AONB DEFRA	Revenue Capital ££
Implement improved promotion of access to the PROW / access network for Walking the Way to Health participants.	ROWIP 41	LTP SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Medium	WBC	Revenue Capital ££
Establish greater dialogue with ethnic minority groups, children and young people and groups which traditionally do not visit the countryside, to produce an action plan to encourage and maintain participation.	ROWIP 42	SSC Cultural Strat.	Invest	Medium	WBC AONB	Revenue ££
Support measures to provide shower, clothes-drying and cycle-parking facilities at schools, work places and other destinations, to encourage non-car transport.	ROWIP 43	LTP SSC Cultural Strat.	Invest	Medium	WBC Businesses AONB	Revenue Capital S.106 £
Audit car park barriers on the access network, and seek to ensure that access is possible for horseboxes, where appropriate.	ROWIP 44	Protect public LTP AONB	Manage	Low	WBC Volunteers	Revenue ££
Seek new car parking, cycle parking and horsebox / trailer parking on the access network, where there is a potential need.	ROWIP 45	Protect public SSC Cultural Strat. AONB	Invest	Medium	WBC Landowners Parishes AONB	Revenue Capital S.106 ££

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Working with partners						
Provide support, where needed, to other bodies whose aspirations compliment those of this ROWIP.	ROWIP 46	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Medium	WBC	Revenue Capital S.106 ££
Encourage parish councils to use their full range of powers where appropriate and support the appointment of parish council public rights of way officers.	ROWIP 47	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Medium	WBC Parishes	Revenue £
Arrange formal rights of way training for parish public rights of way officers, parish plan teams and voluntary groups.	ROWIP 48	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Invest	Manage	WBC Parishes	Revenue £
Continue to provide support and direction to voluntary groups and to encourage the participation of volunteers of all ages in access work.	ROWIP 49	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Medium	WBC Volunteers	Revenue Capital ££
Support the access work identified within parish plans and 'Area Visions'.	ROWIP 50	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Invest	Medium	WBC	Revenue Capital S.106 ££
Improving working practices and customer care						
Create a comprehensive PROW / access library incorporating controlled copies.	ROWIP 51	Efficiency	Invest	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Use all appropriate internal District Council communication channels to inform relevant parties of developments in PROW / access work.	ROWIP 52	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Improve the efficiency and speed of use of available legal powers in relation to PROW.	ROWIP 53	Efficiency	Manage	Medium	WBC	Revenue £
Improve awareness of land management priorities and procedures amongst District Council PROW staff.	ROWIP 54	Efficiency AONB	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Liaise more closely with West Berkshire's Planning and Transport Strategy group, and other planning consultees, so as to benefit the PROW / access network.	ROWIP 55	Efficiency LTP	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Funding						
Investigate the feasibility of a grant scheme for access work by parish councils, parish plan groups and others, taking into account funding already available.	ROWIP 56	Efficiency	Invest	Medium	WBC Parishes AONB	Revenue Capital £
Seek to involve community and special interest groups in funding and delivering small access schemes.	ROWIP 57	Efficiency	Manage	Medium	WBC Parishes Volunteers AONB	Revenue Capital S.106 £
Investigate opportunities for external and grant funding for PROW/ access projects.	ROWIP 58	Efficiency	Manage	Medium	WBC	Revenue £
Monitoring / continued consultation						
Continue to receive and consider requests for improved access, and to incorporate them into an annually-updated list of requests for specific access improvements.	ROWIP 59	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
The Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum to advise on implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.	ROWIP 60	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC Local Access Forum	Revenue £

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) themes and objectives	ROWIP Reference	Particular benefits of the objective	Reduce, manage or invest	Level of risk	Resources	Funding sources and scale (£)
Learn and listen to views of others, at the same time seeking and implementing best practice in relation to PROW / access work.	ROWIP 61	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Implement an effective internal method of recording good practice and lessons learnt in PROW / access work, for the benefit of present and future staff.	ROWIP 62	Efficiency	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £
Produce an annual progress report on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan Action Plan.	ROWIP 63	Efficiency SSC Cultural Strat.	Manage	Low	WBC	Revenue £

Notes concerning implementation of selected objectives

ROWIP 2: additional data to be gathered will include: improvements needed to route marking; basic tree safety survey; disabled access audit; locations of signposts subject to fading or unauthorized alteration; checks on advisory notices, e.g. restricted byways.

ROWIP 7: designs should respect the sensitivity of the landscape.

ROWIP 9 : base the priorities on statutory duties, and the aspirations in this ROWIP. To include items for regular maintenance, e.g. surface-dressing and maintenance of ditches and drains.

ROWIP 10: “consolidation” of the Definitive Map and Statement refers to the process of incorporating all legal changes into a newly-produced Map and Statement. As many known errors in the documents as possible need to be rectified prior to consolidation.

ROWIP 11: the list is to be agreed in advance by Council members with the advice of officers. Applications for modification orders are requests by the public for rights of way to be included in the Definitive Map and Statement. The District Council has a statutory duty to process such applications. Applications for path orders are requests for diversion, extinguishment or creation of rights of way and the Council may accept or reject these at its own discretion.

ROWIP 12: to include a consideration of an appropriate approach to unofficial changes to routes which have been generally accepted by the public.

ROWIP 17: work within the context of the biodiversity action plan and European Habitats Regulations 2007. Relevant procedures would include: vegetation clearance; the provenance of surfacing materials and their compatibility with local aesthetics, soil type and geology; surface repair specification and the need to reduce surface water run-off entering watercourses, and to accommodate future flash-flooding events and other effects of climate change. Also, the need to ensure that works are consistent with historic landscape characterization. Measures are needed in order to comply with the European Habitat Regulations.

ROWIP 18: examples of formats for promotional material: web sites, which also link to relevant work of others; layers on electronic maps; other electronic means; on-site weather-proof leaflet holders.

Examples of active promotion: local businesses and shops; village notice boards and newsletters; user group magazines; local papers and books; churches; museums; libraries; surgeries; leisure centres; gyms; attendance at shows and other events; Tourist Information Centres; Yellow Pages; CLIVE bus; school visits to farms; farm visits to schools/landowners to talk to schools; business and school travel plans; wardens on site to give advice; supporting, where possible, programmes of themed educational guided walks; considering the use of “footfall counters” to gauge demand for and use of routes; actively seeking improved transport services for recreational users; seeking the views of PROW users via regular liaison meetings; considering the use of “drop-in” surgeries; reports to the press; contact with Neighbourhood Action Groups; improved publicity for WBC work done; considering mailing of all households.

There is also a need to use imaginative means to introduce new perspectives regarding perceptions of the countryside. One example of how this might be achieved would be through links to the arts. Such approaches may also be beneficial for people who do not at present visit the countryside.

Particular emphasis to be made to the following, in promotional material: routes leading from local attractions or centres of population to the surrounding countryside; routes suitable for equestrians, cyclists, the unconfident, pushchairs, families, runners and those with restricted mobility; opportunities for healthy exercise; routes linking centres of population and facilities; provide a clearer indication of the ease of use of each route; increase the confidence of infrequent or non-users; show all available access, e.g. permitted paths, open access land, land provided by other bodies, other highways; information to enhance understanding of the countryside and encourage responsible behaviour; locations of facilities and small car parks, including those suitable for horseboxes and trailers; sustainable transport and principles of sustainable tourism; close working with tourism providers; use of marketing techniques and consumer profiling; themes and themed days out.

When checking for other relevant material produced by others, care must be taken to include information which is provided only on web sites.

ROWIP 19: provide guidance along the lines of the District Council's own objectives for promotional material, as appropriate.

ROWIP 20: particular emphasis to be placed on: where people may or may not go and their responsibilities are as highway users, including dog walkers; information about how to report irresponsible or illegal behaviour; responsible car parking in the countryside; respect for livestock and countryside property. Consideration might also be given to informing land managers of relevant information and good practice via short e-mailed articles and newsletters.

ROWIP 21: use of PROW by vehicles has the potential to cause surface damage, which reduces amenity value for others. Such a policy might include the production of promotional material, to indicate the locations of sustainable surfaces suitable for vehicular use, to explain the rights and responsibilities of vehicular users and to indicate locations for vehicular use other than on PROW. Mechanisms for management of vehicular use should follow DEFRA's 2005 guidance "Making the Best of Byways", which in essence states that education, surface improvements and police liaison should be undertaken before the use of traffic regulation orders is considered. Some measures might include securing the help of residents along the lines of West Sussex's "Path Watch" scheme; requests for voluntary reductions in vehicular use at certain locations; attendance at Neighbourhood Action Group meetings and use of neighbourhood wardens; selective use of CCTV and on-site surveillance at locations of particular problems; more effective dissemination of information, including erection of on-site notices, and requests that landowners refrain from using PROW as accesses where possible.

ROWIP 27: consider also the potential of the 'Extended Schools' programme.

ROWIP 25 – 30: attention is drawn to the work of the Trails Trust, which obtains funding to compensate landowners and to survey and install routes. The Improvement Plan has the potential to guide access requirements in the new DEFRA Higher Level Stewardship areas. The Forestry Commission has a concordat with the British Horse Society on equestrian access to its woodlands, and all its freehold has been dedicated for open access on foot under S. 16 CROW Act 2000.

ROWIP 26: all to be carried out in the context of school travel plans and other walking / cycling to school schemes.

ROWIP 27: such access would fulfil the following criteria: would provide new routes or access where there is a clear and demonstrated general need or desire; would reduce fragmentation of the network, as a result of natural and man-made barriers; would improve road safety and increase instances of travel other than by private motor transport; where permitted access is provided, would ensure provision is made for its future ongoing maintenance.

ROWIP 28: when providing such routes, it will be important to ensure that they are also suitable for other legitimate public users.

ROWIP 32: the Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership educates drivers, for instance when in contact with non-vehicular users. The Department of Transport has been educating motorists concerning horses on roads. The success of the first West Berkshire “Quiet Lanes” scheme should be monitored and future extensions to the scheme considered.

ROWIP 34: consider also the use of multi-user destination signs.

ROWIP 35: consideration should be given to tailoring such signage to the interests of visitors to the countryside sites.

ROWIP 36: to include both linear access and access to land.

ROWIP 38: standardized signage, consistent with that used by other local authorities, should be sought. The use of Bucklebury Common should be considered, in the light of the Council’s Scrutiny recommendations.

ROWIP 38-39: those with restricted mobility would also include those in wheelchairs, the blind, partially-sighted, people with learning disabilities, people with young children and unconfident or novice visitors. There must be appropriate facilities on the routes, and additional facilities should be sought where there is a proven need. When considering suitable routes, regard will be taken of where needs may be concentrated, for example centres of population, including villages. The work should consider the future creation of a network of long-distance paths suitable for those with restricted mobility. It should also consider providing information on the physical conditions of PROW and locations of facilities and barriers to access, so people may plan their own excursions.

ROWIP 45: to include the implementation of measures to remove all gates and stiles which are not needed for the control of agricultural stock. The standard of accessibility to be sought is to allow for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Suitability of parking sites should be a function of the quantity and quality of the surrounding access network.

ROWIP 50: West Berkshire Council to monitor contents and offer assistance where resources permit.

ROWIP 51: a controlled copy is one which is the up-to-date version, to be replaced when updated or replaced. The library would contain, for example, good practice, literature, legislation, British Standards, links to relevant web sites and standard practices and procedures within the rights of way service.

ROWIP 53: consideration also to be given to more frequent prosecutions and publicity for both these and other legal actions taken.

ROWIP 54: this measure is with a view to achieving more effective dialogue with and co-operation from land managers without recourse to legal measures.

ROWIP 55: this will include: regular rights of way training for planning officers, to be provided by the PROW team; improved input into the strategic planning process and the production of a “topic paper” to govern the allocation of S.106 developer contributions towards access. There may also be opportunities to improve the representation of PROW in published transportation material. Liaison with other major planning consultees also needs to be improved, to ensure consistency of comments where possible.

ROWIP 57: this would include, for example, providing ideas for access network improvements to other organizations, in order to “pump prime” work which could otherwise be a low priority for the District Council.

ROWIP 58: to make use of recent guidance from DEFRA and Natural England.

ROWIP 60: reports will be presented to the Local Access Forum three times per year, or at least once per year.

ROWIP 61: this will come from a variety of sources, including by attendance at regional meetings involving PROW staff; training courses; Local Access Forum advice; site meetings; team meetings and future customer surveys.

ROWIP 63: to be supplied to the Local Access Forum and posted on the web site.

6. Site-specific improvement projects

- 6.1 As a result of the public consultation, many requests for site-specific individual improvement projects were submitted. Broadly, these requests are for practical improvement projects on the ground; for altering the statuses of right of way (i.e. altering the types of users permitted along them); and for adding new routes to the access network.
- 6.2 These requests have come from the public during one short consultation exercise, and whilst they form a good basis to help to plan future work, the list is not exhaustive, and there will be additions and updates to be made as time progresses.
- 6.3 These site-specific requests have been transferred to a digitally-based map as a clearly-defined layer, to be available on the District Council's web site, and already available to all rights of way staff to refer to on a daily basis.
- 6.4 Many of the broad objectives in the Action Plan cannot be implemented without site-specific works taking place on the ground. The District Council will aim to implement the site-specific improvement requests where they are consistent with the broad objectives of the Action Plan (resources permitting). For instance, the site-specific improvement list might be used as starting point for planning an improved and promoted equestrian route.
- 6.5 Reference will also continually be made to the site-specific improvement list during the day-to-day work of the Council, and opportunities to implement requests be taken wherever possible.
- 6.6 The site-specific improvement requests may be implemented through a variety of means. The most likely will be through planning agreements; permitted path agreements with landowners; or through Government Stewardship schemes.
- 6.7 The District Council acknowledges that the site-specific improvement requests are requests from the public, and therefore may have benefits for the public, but any attempts to implement new routes would go through the usual channels of consultation with owners and interested parties.

7. Funding and resources

- 7.1 Although the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a District Council-wide function, the lead for the work will in the main come from the rights of way team in the Planning and Countryside Department at West Berkshire Council.
- 7.2 The rights of way team comprises three full-time and three part-time officers, plus technical support, and three full-time Countryside Rangers.
- 7.3 The work of the rights of way service is funded from a mixture of Capital and Revenue budgets. An additional small contribution comes from S.106 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 planning agreements, for improvement works associated with development. The core annual Capital budget held by the Planning and Countryside Department for access schemes is approximately £ 175,000, and this budget delivers the majority of practical improvements to the network. The annual revenue budget is £ 276,000, which includes funds for salaries, equipment and works projects.
- 7.4 Advantage is, or has been, made of occasional offers of grant-aid, for instance from Natural England (for work on open access and National Trails), from the Government (for work following the floods of July 2007), and from the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 7.5 There are many other potential sources of funding for countryside access projects, especially where the involvement of local communities can be demonstrated. The Action Plan here proposes that greater advantage is taken of these in the future.

8. Measurement and management of performance

- 8.1 Performance standards are written statements describing how well a job should be performed, and provide benchmarks against which to evaluate work performance. Whilst a staff job description describes the essential functions and the tasks to be carried out, performance standards define how well each function or task must be performed in order to meet expectations. Criteria for success need to be defined in terms of the four primary indicators of successful performance: quality, cost, quantity and time. Desired outcomes are described in specific, objective and verifiable terms, and formal monitoring of performance will take place via the Council's one-to-one coaching and appraisal processes.
- 8.2 Many of the Improvement Plan objectives will need to be implemented as specific projects, to be programmed concurrently with others. Principles of good project management practice, coupled with performance standards, will be applied to ensure that targets are met.
- 8.3 Until 2007/08, the performance of West Berkshire Council's rights of way service was measured through national Best Value Performance Indicator 178, which required an annual assessment of 'ease of use' of a random selection of 5% of the public rights of way network. Between 2006 and 2010, the result rose from 74% to 86%. The formal indicator BVPI 178 ceased in 2008, but the annual assessment will continue, because West Berkshire Council considers a commodious rights of way network to be a locally important area of delivery.

9. Monitoring and sustainability

Monitoring

- 8.4 The public consultation exercise was, of course, a survey of the public's need at one time only. Some principles behind the objectives will endure, but there is a need to be aware of changes which may affect the relevance of both the objectives in the Action Plan, and the requests from the public for site-specific access improvements.
- 8.5 Proposals for monitoring the progress of implementation of the Improvement Plan, and monitoring the relevance of its content, are contained in the Action Plan. These are:
- Continue to receive and consider requests for improved access, and to incorporate them into an annually-updated list of requests for specific access improvements.
 - The Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum to advise on implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
 - Learn and listen to views of others, at the same time seeking and implementing best practice in relation to public rights of way / access work.
 - Implement an effective project-based internal method of recording current progress, good practice, and lessons learnt in public rights of way / access work, for the benefit of present and future Council staff.
 - Produce, with progress reports, an annually-updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan Action Plan.

Sustainability

- 8.6 The Action Plan advocates the implementation of improved sustainable procurement and working practices, along with an introduction of improved environmentally-sustainable working practices, which help to protect and enhance biodiversity and historic landscape and features.
- 8.7 The implication of this is that all the actions in the Improvement Plan will be monitored for environmental effects. A strategic environmental assessment (SEA) was carried out on Local Transport Plan 2 in 2006, including the Walking and Cycling Strategies, whose broad aspirations complement those of this Improvement Plan.
- 8.8 The SEA noted that, in the Walking and Cycling Strategies, an encouragement of walking and cycling could increase damage within sensitive areas, and care was therefore taken to ensure that walkers and cyclists would be encouraged to keep to dedicated paths and cycleways. Such a problem is unlikely to arise in this Improvement Plan, as it is concerned with dedicated paths, except in the case of statutory open access land and, in rare cases, permissive open access. Statutory open access land will, as a result of this Improvement Plan, be managed in conjunction with landowners, and the statute under which it was created bans any environmentally-damaging behaviour by the public.