

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY DIRECTOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

<b>TO:</b>	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE		
<b>DATE:</b>	9 JANUARY 2020	<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	7
<b>TITLE:</b>	RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN - UPDATE		
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, adopted as part of the Local Transport Plan in 2007, and the steps needed to review and update the Plan to reflect current and future use.
- 1.2 Appendix A - Questions for Rights of Way Improvement Plan Consultation

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Sub Committee agrees to undertake consultation informing the development of the next Rights of Way Improvement Plan, as set out in this report.
- 2.2 That the Sub Committee notes feedback from the consultation will be reported back to a future Sub-Committee meeting.

#### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Section 60 and 61) places a duty on Local Authorities to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan and ensure it remains up-to-date.
- 3.2 Reading's first Rights of Way Improvement Plan was adopted in November 2007 as part of our second Local Transport Plan (2006-2011), following the publication of a Decision Book report, and has remained an adopted strategy under successive Local Transport Plans which aim to encourage walking, cycling and public transport use for local journeys.
- 3.3 The Rights of Way network has been considered and integrated into the Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure Plan that was submitted to the Department for Transport, following approval at Strategic Environment Planning and Transport Committee in November 2019. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan will be available for consultation in Spring 2020 as part of the statutory consultation on the emerging Local Transport Plan.

## 4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Reading's first Rights of Way Improvement Plan was developed and adopted in 2007 after the Countryside and Rights of Way Act placed a duty on Local Authorities to produce a Plan. The purpose of the Plan was to:
- undertake an assessment of the rights of way network, consisting of public footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways and byways, to ensure it meets present and likely future needs;
  - ensure the network is accessible to those with mobility restrictions; and
  - review opportunities provided by the network to support exercise, other open-air recreational activities and enjoyment of the area.
- 4.2 Local Authorities are required to review the plan after no more than ten years, and at regular intervals after, to ensure the Plan remains relevant. As part of this process, Local Authorities are expected to undertake a further assessment to ensure the Plan continues to achieve its purpose and to subsequently review the Plan and take a decision whether to amend it.
- 4.3 A number of public rights of way have been improved, or complemented, throughout the period of the existing Rights of Way Improvement Plan, including the opening of Christchurch Bridge, the installation of lighting in Kings Meadow, surface improvements, significant riverbank strengthening works along the River Kennet and private sector contributions towards improvements to the width and surface footpaths on the network. Evidence from the annual cordon count shows that investment along routes connecting residential areas with the town centre and other employment sites has led to increases in the number of people using the network and how it is used.
- 4.4 In order to fulfil our duties and ensure the Plan remains fit for purpose, it is proposed that an online survey is undertaken to enable us to assess whether the existing Plan reflects current and future use, as described in the Act and outlined above. The proposed survey, included in Appendix A, will collect information on how people currently use the network, including frequency, purpose, mode of travel and barriers to use. In parallel to the consultation, assessments on the public rights of way network will continue to be undertaken, including consideration of proposed developments sites and potential improvements which could be funded or delivered through private developers. In addition to the above, we will also seek information on any unclaimed rights of way that could be investigated and included as part of the network.
- 4.5 Details of the consultation will be shared with local user groups, including the Mid-West Berkshire Local Access Forum (who act as an advisory body on rights of way issues), Access and Disabilities Working Group, Older Peoples Working Group, Cycle Forum and the Cleaner Air and Safer Transport Forum. Other statutory and non-statutory stakeholders will include Thames Path Management Group, Canals and Rivers Trust, Thames Valley Police, Sustrans, neighbouring Local Authorities, community groups and landowners.
- 4.6 The results of the consultation will be reported back to a future Sub-Committee and a recommendation made on whether to amend the existing Plan. If the decision is taken to amend the Plan, a draft strategy will be prepared, published and promoted in two or more newspapers as set out in Section 61 of the Act. Feedback on the draft Plan will be considered and incorporated, as appropriate, before a final Plan is reported to Committee for adoption.

4.7 If it is deemed not necessary to update the existing Plan, the reasons will be reported to the Sub-Committee along with the results of the consultation and a recommendation to republish the existing strategy.

## **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

5.1 The development and delivery of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan helps to deliver the following Corporate Plan Service Priorities:

- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe.

5.2 The Rights of Way Improvement Plan also contributes to the following strategic aims:

- To Develop Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley
- To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

## **6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

6.1 Consultation on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will initially consist of an online survey, which will also be available in paper copy, seeking to establish how the network is currently used and whether it is likely to serve future needs. This information will be used to make an assessment on whether to amend the existing Plan.

6.2 Details of the consultation will be shared with local user groups (including the Mid-West Berkshire Local Access Forum, Access and Disabilities Working Group and Older Peoples Working Group), key stakeholders such as neighbouring authorities, Thames Path Management Group and the Canals and Rivers Trust and statutory consultees, including the Environment Agency and landowners.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken when a decision has been made on whether to amend or republish the strategy and will be reported to Sub-Committee alongside the consultation results.

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Our transport strategy is focused on encouraging the use of sustainable transport, walking and cycling as attractive alternatives to the private car. The development and delivery of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, as set out within this report, forms part of this overall transport strategy, which has achieved considerable success in recent years including bus usage in Reading being the third highest in the country outside of London, having increased by 23% since 2010, and around 35% of trips into Reading town centre being made by pedestrians and cyclists.

8.2 Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total emissions. Significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is therefore vital in order to respond to the Climate Crisis declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

## 9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Section 60 and 61) places a duty on all Local Highway Authorities to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan and to ensure it remains up-to-date.

## 10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Costs associated with undertaking the consultation will be met through existing transport revenue budgets.

## 11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Map of Rights of Way Network: <https://my.reading.gov.uk/myreading.aspx>

11.2 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2007):  
[https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10480/Rights-of-way-improvement-plan/pdf/Rights\\_of\\_Way\\_Improvement\\_Plan\\_Final.pdf](https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10480/Rights-of-way-improvement-plan/pdf/Rights_of_Way_Improvement_Plan_Final.pdf)