

Committee	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date	14 March 2017
Title	Review of Rights of Way Improvement Plan
Cabinet Member	Councillor Dafydd Meurig
Purpose	Update the Committee regarding the work of reviewing and updating the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 It was reported to this Committee on the 22nd of September 2016 of the intention to review and update the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) The Committee's decision was to:

- Support the intention to review and prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Gwynedd and that the Regulatory Department identifies methods of pooling resources for this work.
- That the Department contacts the Welsh Government to impress upon them to fund the review.
- That the Cabinet Member submits a progress report to the Scrutiny Committee in approximately 6 months' time.

1.2 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on what has been undertaken and to request the Committee's observations.

2. THE PROCESS OF PREPARING A NEW RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND THE PROGRESS THUS FAR

2.1 In the report on 22 September 2016, it was noted that the process of reviewing and preparing the RoWIP would follow the guidelines produced by the Welsh Government. The Guidelines give guidance regarding what is required to be undertaken under two main headings namely, Statutory Matters and Supplementary Matters.

Statutory Matters

- The extent to which the local rights of way satisfy the public's requirements now and in the future.
- The opportunities offered by local rights of way for physical exercise and other recreational activities and to enjoy the outdoors in the authority's area.
- How accessible are local rights of way for blind or partially sighted persons and for others with mobility difficulties?

Supplementary matters

- Evaluate to what extent the previous RoWIP was achieved
- An evaluation of the network's current condition and its history.
- Opportunities to contribute to the objectives of Active Travel, Well-being objectives and towards achieving other plans and priorities.

2.2 I can report on progress thus far by referring to the above, but firstly I need to refer to the requirement to inform bodies and agencies such as Community and Town Councils, Neighbouring Authorities, Natural Resources Wales, Farming Unions, the Ramblers of the Council's intention to review the RoWIP. This task will be undertaken during March.

Engagement and identifying needs

2.3 The guidelines place an emphasis on the need to engage in order to receive the views of the public on the condition and use of the existing rights of way network. It is also necessary to ask how the network can be improved to meet with future requirements. In due course, it will be possible to input the recommendations to improve and adapt the network in accordance with the Action Plan, however, it is inevitable that these will have to be prioritised and evaluated against the financial position.

2.4 When undertaking engagement it is necessary to reach as wide an audience as possible rather than depend on the comments of interested organisations be they walkers, horse riders, cyclists or off-road drivers. There will be an opportunity for them to submit their views during the review period. With the support of the Communications and Engagement Team, it is proposed to present a questionnaire on the Council's website as well as targeting some specific parties. Due to the restrictions regarding consultation with the public prior to the 4th of May election, we will have to wait until after the election before we can commence consultation. **See Appendix 1, for the draft questionnaire and the Committee's comments on its contents are welcomed.**

Evaluate to what extent the previous RoWIP was achieved

2.5 The current RoWIP comprises 43 actions to be achieved over the Plan's life time. Of the 43 identified additional resources will be required if 28 of the actions are to be achieved. It was considered that it would be possible to undertake 15 actions with the resources available at the time of the Plan's adoption in 2007. Each one of the 43 actions will be evaluated, however, the work was commenced by looking at the 15 that did not require additional resources, a summary of the actions and what has been achieved is submitted in Appendix 2.

Evaluation of the network's condition

2.6 Although the evaluation of the network's current condition is supplementary it is necessary to seek a picture that reflects the current condition of the County's rights of way. It is not practical to try to inspect the whole network which is approximately 3,500km long, even with specific staff it has not been possible to inspect more than 35% of the network at the time of preparing the original Plan. Therefore it is necessary to look at alternative inspection methods making use of the latest technology namely:

- Make use of the information available by the National Park
- Countryside Unit Staff to undertake the inspections.
- Use of data already on the CAMS system (digital mapping system used by the Countryside and Access Unit)
- Take advantage of the Ramblers Pathwatch campaign, the organisation encourages their members and others to use a phone or tablet app to inspect paths. The information is currently being forwarded to the Council and this can then be transferred directly to the CAMS system.
- Information is requested from Community and Town Councils, this will be done as part of the follow-up to engagement undertaken last year regarding changes in the arrangements to reimburse path maintenance costs

2.7 In the report on 22 September 2016, reference was made to the need for additional resources towards the review. The Welsh Government will not commit additional finance towards the review, however, the RoWIP grant programme will continue and the Council if it wishes can use part of the grant towards reviewing the Plan.

2.8 It is worthwhile emphasising that the RoWIP will be prepared jointly with Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA) and that it is an important part of the joint-working arrangement being developed between the Council and the Park Authority in the field of countryside access. **In Appendix 3, a draft of the Joint-Working Principles between both bodies is submitted and the Committee's observations on the contents of the document are welcomed.**

3. NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 These are the main steps and work areas over the next 6 months.

- Continue to gather information regarding the condition of the network and commence the work of analysing this information.
- Jointly with SNPA to identify the resources needs
- Collaborate with the Communications/Engagement Unit to identify the best methods of engagement to reach the widest possible audience. Complete the questionnaire and conduct a public consultation during May and June.
- Continue to evaluate the previous RoWIP.
- Look at how the RoWIP overlaps with legislation, plans and other policies.
- Towards the end of the period (approximately September) the task of reaching conclusions based on information to hand will commence and to formulate a direction for the new RoWIP.

3.1 To receive the Committee's support on the next steps together with any further comments.

3.2 To submit a progress report within six months' time.