

COMMITTEE	COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE	27 October 2022
TITLE	INTRODUCING THE RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Dafydd Meurig, Cabinet Member for the Environment
AUTHOR	Dafydd Williams, Head of Environment Department
PURPOSE	To approve the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for adoption by the Council Cabinet.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In accordance with the decision of the Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 4 November 2021, a public consultation was held on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) during the summer this year. The document used for the purpose of the consultation is appended, see Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The purpose of the ROWIP is to set high level guidance for the Council's work in the field of countryside access; although there is emphasis on the rights of way network, consideration must also be given to other access assets under the Council's control.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to:
- Report back to the Committee on the outcome of the consultation process
 - Receive further observations of the Scrutiny Committee
 - Receive the approval of the Scrutiny Committee for the ROWIP to be submitted to the Council Cabinet for formal adoption.

2. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The public consultation was held for a 14 week period between June 27 and September 30, 2022. The draft document along with a questionnaire were uploaded to the Have your Say page on the Council website and hard copies were printed for libraries and Council Offices. The consultation was promoted on the Council's social media, namely Facebook and Twitter. Organisations such as Community and Town Councils, the National Park, the Agricultural Unions and representatives of organisations that represent different cohorts of users were contacted directly.
- 2.2 A total of 294 valid responses were received to the questionnaire. The majority (92.2%) of respondents responded as individuals, with 5.8% responding on behalf of an organisation, group or business.
- 2.3 The full results of the consultation can be seen in the Appendix 2 report, "Gwynedd Council Rights of Way", which has been prepared by the Research and Analysis Team.
- 2.4 The results fall into two categories, namely:
- a. Response to the seven questions asked in the questionnaire; the questions were based on the Statements of Action deemed by the Service as the most contentious and with the biggest implications in terms of staff resources and work budgets. Appendix 3 summarises the responses received to the seven questions; it can be seen that the majority of responses corresponded with the Statements of Action.

b. Observations by respondents; it is encouraging that so many observations have been received and a selection of them can be viewed in the Appendix 2 Report. There are some prominent themes:

- Observations about specific cases for example closed or blocked footpaths.
- Suggestions for footpaths that could be developed, especially multi-use paths.
- Lack of resources to maintain the network and the Council's failure to meet its statutory duty to maintain and protect rights of way.
- Individuals and bodies eager to volunteer to maintain and improve footpaths.

2.5 The Service will consider the observations and it is anticipated that they can be used to assist with the work of drawing up work programmes.

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 I believe that the response to the consultation reflects a desire among Gwynedd residents to have access networks that are safe and accessible for use by all cohorts of users.

3.2 The response, although not unanimous, shows a general satisfaction with the direction and content of the ROWIP. There is room to modify the wording of a few clauses and to improve the layout and format of the document but I am of the opinion that further changes are not needed unless the Scrutiny Committee has recommendations on specific matters.

3.3 The challenge facing the Department as it proceeds to implement the ROWIP must be acknowledged and it is inevitable that effort and resources will have to be prioritised over the next few years. Nevertheless, it must be ensured that the following Statements of Action are given priority to ensure that the core objectives of the ROWIP are realised.

High Priority Statement of Action	Period
3b . Update the Rights of Way Policies document in order to reflect the levels of current resources and changes in land use.	By October 23
c. "Reassess footpath categories to create a network that better reflects the needs of the County's communities. "	The first stage will be to establish and trial a way of working before the end of 2023

4. RECOMMENDATION

4.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to approve the

- Environment Department to prepare a final version of the Right of Way Improvement Plan and to incorporate any recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee.
 - Council Cabinet to adopt the Right of Way Improvement Plan.
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Gwynedd Rights of Way Improvement Plan (Public Consultation Document)

Appendix 2: Public Consultation Results Report

Appendix 3: Questionnaire responses

