

Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Derbyshire

Assessment of Needs

A significant part of the Improvement Plan process has involved finding out what people want. The following report provides a summary of the consultation exercise that was carried out between September 2004 and July 2005.

Local Access Forums

The two Local Access Forums for the County have been actively involved throughout the consultation process from commenting on the content of the questionnaires, helping to circulate the questionnaires and find people to attend the focus groups, to advising on the interpretation of the feedback and survey results.

A sub group comprising members from both the LAF's has been set up to comment on the data, help identify themes and priorities and to advise on how best to "weight" the feedback and results.

Public and Stakeholder Consultation

The main thrust of the public consultation exercise has involved the following:

- A series of questions submitted to the County Council's **Citizens Panel** in September 2004, which resulted in 5000 returns. The Citizens Panel was set up by all the local authorities within the County to provide a representative cross section of 8,000 of the Counties residents who were prepared to answer questions and provide comments on issues affecting local services.
- A **User Survey** aimed at the wider public, including users and non-users alike, which took place throughout December 2004 and January 2005. The survey comprised a series of questions available as a paper copy or to be filled in on-line via the County Council's web site. 10,000 copies were distributed across the County and in neighbouring areas and over 3,000 completed copies were received back.
- A **Key Issues Questionnaire**, which was sent out to the main countywide stakeholders, comprising user groups, landowner groups, the district local access networks, district councils and other key organisations at the end of 2004. 210 responses were received.

- A specific consultation to the **Parish and other local Councils**, which took place during April and May 2005. Over a third of all of these organisations responded.
- The setting up of a series of **Focus Groups** during the summer of 2005 looking at particular topics relating to heritage and nature conservation, the local economy and issues affecting landowners and farmers. A further discussion group was held in May 2006 with the Derbyshire Forum of Local Access Groups to specifically consider the needs of people who are partially sighted or who have mobility problems.

The results from these consultations are summarized both by the type of consultation carried out and then analysed based on the needs of particular users.

By type of consultation

Up to 49% of respondents from both the Citizens Panel and the User Survey use paths at least once a week and up to a further 24% use the paths at least once a month, indicating a high level of usage. This helps to give the results a degree of credibility and assurance that we are listening to people who both use and value the network of paths and trails.

Citizens Panel

The main practical priorities for improving access to paths and trails were identified as follows:

- Providing links which create circular routes
- Creation of new paths to walk along

The main strategic underlying issues were as follows:

- Encouraging routes that support the local economy and tourism
- Providing information about the use of paths in conjunction with public transport
- Ensuring that more consideration is given to issues affecting nature conservation and biodiversity

Respondents were asked what stopped or put them off using paths and trails. The main reasons cited that the authority could do something about (i.e. beyond the responses stating 'not enough time' or 'other' interests) were

- Health reasons

- Paths obstructed or overgrown
- Limited mobility
- Litter/Dog fouling
- Lack of information about where to go/how to get there

The results from the Citizens Panel can be analysed by District and there were some variations in responses between Districts, which will be looked at in more detail in relation to the needs of the different users.

User Survey

The main priorities for improving access to paths and trails were identified as follows:

- Providing short links which create circular routes
- Focus on making the existing network easier to use
- Carry out surface improvements to the existing network
- Provide safer road crossing points
- Provide routes from built up areas that provide direct access to the countryside

The main strategic issues were as follows:

- Ensuring that more consideration is given to issues affecting nature conservation and biodiversity
- Encouraging routes that support the local economy and tourism

Respondents were asked what stopped or put them off using paths and trails. The main reasons cited that the authority could do something about were:

- Surface in poor condition or unsuitable
- Illegal use by motorised vehicles
- Lack of well connected paths to create circular routes
- Paths overgrown with nettles or brambles
- Lack of suitable paths near home

A fuller report of the findings from this survey can be found in Appendix B.

Key Issues Questionnaire

The main priorities for improving access to paths and trails were identified as follows:

- Provide routes that are accessible for people with mobility problems or who are partially sighted
- Providing short links which create circular routes
- Provide safer road crossing points
- Provide routes from built up areas that provide direct access to the countryside

The main strategic issues were as follows:

- Prioritise routes used for local journeys such as safe routes to schools, shops etc.
- Promoting routes that support the local economy and tourism
- Ensuring that more consideration is given to issues affecting nature conservation and biodiversity
- Promote routes that can be used in conjunction with public transport

Organisations were asked what the most important elements were in providing a well-managed network of rights of way and other paths and trails. These were:

- Good signing and waymarking
- The availability of an up to date Definitive Map
- Focus on making the existing network easy to use
- Good design and maintenance standards for path furniture such as stiles, gates and bridges
- Legally defining, mapping and recording the network

The elements of the network that were felt to cause the most problems were identified as follows:

- The presence of dog fouling, litter or vandalism
- Existing paths failing the 'ease of use' survey criteria
- Illegal use by motorised vehicles
- Poor signing and waymarking of paths
- Poor design and maintenance standards for stiles, gates and bridges
- Lack of availability of an up to date Definitive Map

Parish and Local Council Questionnaire

As well as contributing to the Key Issues Questionnaire, Local Councils were asked to put forward specific suggestions for identifying where there were opportunities to improve the path network (this will help identify where the authority may be able to identify “quick wins” when producing a Statement of Action for the actual Rights of Way Improvement Plan).

The two most requested improvements related to opportunities for carrying out surface improvements and for improving signing and waymarking along existing paths. Other suggestions identified where additional vegetation clearance could be carried out to prevent paths from becoming overgrown and where stiles or gates could be removed to make paths more accessible to those people with mobility problems.

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were held to cover the following topics:

- local tourism and business interests;
- conservation, heritage and woodland management interests
- landowner’s and land manager’s issues.
- the needs of people with mobility problems or the partially sighted

The purpose was to provide an in depth exploration of issues and solutions relating to public rights of way and other access provision throughout Derbyshire. This yielded both new insights into attitudes and opinions as well as complementing data from the other survey work.

Not surprisingly each group reflected the interests and concerns of the group they were representing. So, for instance, the conservation group was concerned about disturbance to wildlife of new open access arrangements and the landowners were wary of bringing more visitors onto their land with the attendant problems as they saw them. However, they were also able to see a wider perspective of public access and didn’t necessarily take a wholly negative stance on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan process. They were able to offer practical and realistic suggestions for improvements to the access network.

The main concerns can be summarised as follows:

- The landowners and managers were mainly concerned about illegal or inappropriate use of paths and the need for 'give and take' in the rights of way negotiation process.
- The tourism people didn't want restrictions on their businesses and wanted a quality product to attract visitors into the area.
- The conservation group wanted to minimize the environmental impact of public access and the effect particularly on wildlife.
- The disability group had issues relating to the lack of information available to disabled people about where they could go, coupled with the limitations on the ground particularly relating to the nature of the path surface and the presence of poorly maintained or badly designed structures.

There was agreement between all the groups that the network itself, particularly in the Peak District National Park, is good and has seen many improvements in recent years. The main gaps are seen as being in the bridleway network and waymarking/signposting or information provision.

The key themes and messages from all the groups were:

- A need to work more with landowners/managers and negotiate reasonable access arrangements
- Work to fill in the missing links in the network (especially bridleways) to create circular routes
- More use by visitors of public transport and encouragement to do so whilst out walking / cycling.
- More help for less confident users especially around signage
- The importance of clear information and the role of education and interpretation
- Tackle illegal and inappropriate use of Rights of Way
- Consider the mis-match between the costs incurred by landowners and income derived from public access
- Ensure even coverage of Rights of Way efforts across the county
- Don't forget that supporting facilities are often more important to the accessibility of a route than the condition of the actual path itself

Assessment of needs of particular users

Walker's needs

70% of respondents from the Citizens Panel said that they enjoyed walking and rambling, this rose to 88% from the Users Survey. In total nearly 6,300 people gave us their views from a walker's perspective.

Some recent Countryside Agency national use and demand studies showed that in 48% of households, at least one member had walked in the countryside during the previous year. 47% of these households said they would walk more if there was better provision. Walkers in Derbyshire are in general very active with 55% of walkers completing the User Survey stating that they walked at least once a week. The main reasons quoted for walking were to enjoy the views, to get some fresh air, for relaxation and for the exercise, to keep fit. Most people walked in a family group, including with children and walked between 1 and 5 miles.

The most popular places for people to walk in the county were the Peak District National Park (87%) and Derbyshire Dales (75%).

Over 2/3rds of walkers travelled by car to where they wanted to walk due to the greater convenience that this afforded them, driving between 6 to 20 miles to reach their destination. A third of people stated that they mainly walk from home and only 3.6% used public transport to get to where they wanted to walk.

The most important things that walkers wanted, in order of priority were:

- Well connected paths providing circular routes
- The existing network to be open, easy to use, free from obstructions and well signed
- Attractive routes that link cafes/pubs/places of interest that benefit the local economy and tourism ventures
- Better surfaced paths which are less overgrown
- Routes from built up areas providing direct access to the surrounding countryside
- Safer road crossing points

Beyond the reasons of not having enough time or having other interests, the main issues that limited walkers or put them off were:

- Path surfaces in poor condition or unsuitable
- Paths overgrown with nettles or brambles
- The presence of motorised vehicles on a route
- Paths obstructed by barbed wire, fences or buildings
- Poor signposting – both at the roadside and along the route
- Poor condition or design of stiles, gates or other structures
- Litter and/or dog fouling along a path

56% of walkers did not use the paths as much as they would like, indicating a latent demand for use.

Horse Rider's needs

3.2% of respondents from the Citizens Panel said that they were horse riders, compared to 11% from the Users Survey. The British Horse Society estimates that around 4.5% of the UK population are regular horse riders indicating that a higher percentage of riders than average in the county had made the effort to complete the Users Survey.

The most important reason for riders using the network was to exercise their horse, which explains why horse riders used the paths more frequently than other users with half the respondents using the network at least 2-3 times per week. Other reasons quoted were for general relaxation, to get some fresh air, to enjoy the scenery and for the exercise. Most people rode either alone or part of a small group and covered on average between 4 and 10 miles, riding from where the horse was stabled.

The Peak District National Park, Derbyshire Dales and Amber Valley were the areas where there was most demand indicating either a preference for where people rode or where respondents to the survey lived or had their horse stabled.

Only a quarter of those responding had access to a horsebox or trailer and if used they would travel less than 5 miles to reach their destination.

Horse riders wanted:

- The creation of new bridleways or other paths where they can ride
- The provision of circular routes
- Safer road crossing points
- The existing network to be open, easy to use, free from obstructions and well signed
- Surface improvements to the existing network
- The creation of new multi user routes/Greenways
- Health initiatives such as Riding for Health schemes
- Attractive routes that link cafes/pubs/places of interest that benefit the local economy and tourism ventures

Beyond the reasons of not having enough time or having other interests, the main issues that limited horse riders or put them off were:

- The lack of suitable paths near to where their horse was stabled/near home
- Lack of well connected paths to create circular routes
- Path surfaces in poor condition or unsuitable
- The presence of motorised vehicles on a route

- Too many sections of road to link paths
- Poor condition or design of stiles, gates or other structures

Over 83% of riders did not use paths and trails as much as they would like indicating a considerable demand for an improved network.

19 people indicated in the Users Survey that they were Carriage Drivers. Their main concerns were the lack of circular routes and issues relating to the surface condition.

Cyclist's needs

24% of respondents from the Citizens Panel said that they cycled, compared to 30% from the Users Survey. The national average is 30%.

By far and away the most important reason cyclists gave for using rights of way was to keep fit. Other main reasons quoted were to enjoy the scenery and views, to get some fresh air and for general relaxation. People did say that they used their bicycles as a means to visit attractions and other places and they also said that cycling was an important family activity. 40% of cyclists said that they mainly cycled with children in a family group. Others were equally spread between those who rode on their own or as part of a small group.

Cyclists covered more miles on average than horse riders and walkers, with most journeys being more than 15 miles in length. Journeys of between 6 to 15 miles were also common with relatively few journeys being less than 3 miles. Cyclists who responded to the survey did not go out as frequently as walkers and horse riders with the majority saying that they only went out several times a year.

Cyclists were split evenly as to whether they cycled from home or whether they went by car to where they wanted to ride. If they went by car they did so because it was more convenient and because of the problem of taking a bicycle on public transport. Typical car journeys were between 11 and 20 miles.

The most popular places for people to ride a bike in the county were in the Peak District National Park, in the Derbyshire Dales and in North East Derbyshire.

Cyclists wanted:

- A well surfaced network
- The creation of new bridleways or multi-user paths such as Greenways where they can cycle

- Attractive routes that linked cafes/pubs/places of interest that support the local economy and tourism
- The provision of circular routes
- Safe road crossing points
- Routes from built up areas providing direct access to the countryside
- Routes that they could use in conjunction with public transport
- Routes that would allow them to access local amenities/schools etc

Beyond the reasons of not having enough time or having other interests, the main issues that limited cyclists or put them off were:

- Path surfaces in poor condition or unsuitable
- The lack of suitable paths near to home
- Lack of well connected paths to create circular routes
- The presence of motorised vehicles on a route
- Not enough information about where to go or how to get there
- Too many sections of road to link paths

73% of cyclists did not use paths and trails as much as they would like.

Motorised user's needs

2.5% of respondents from the Citizens Panel said that they took part in driving and/or riding a motorised vehicle off the metalled highway compared to 18% from the Users Survey. This is large increase in percentage terms. The impression received was that motorised users in the County feel very strongly about this matter and more people than usual had taken the trouble to complete the forms in order to be able to get their views across.

As with cyclists the majority of motorised vehicle users, almost 50% use paths and trails several times a year. The main reasons quoted for driving were to enjoy the views and for general relaxation. The third reason quoted for using paths and trails was for the challenge of the routes; this was followed by the need for fresh air and for getting exercise. Nearly two thirds of motorised vehicle users used the paths and trails as part of a small group, although over a fifth of drivers took part within organised groups. Motorised users drove the furthest to reach paths and trails traveling more than 20 miles and wanted to use routes of over 15 miles in length.

When asked about what vehicles they drove, over two thirds of the respondents to the User Survey said that they drove a motorbike, whilst just over a quarter said that they drove a four wheel drive vehicle.

Vehicle users wanted:

- The creation or identification of new routes available to motorised vehicles
- The existing network to be open, easy to use and well signed
- Attractive routes that link cafes/pubs/places of interest that benefit the local economy and tourism ventures
- Well connected paths providing circular routes
- More consideration for nature conservation and biodiversity issues

In addition to the results emerging from the public consultation for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Derbyshire County Council carried out a Review Examining the Use of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside as part of the scrutiny process that it undertakes. This review was wide ranging and identified the need to:

- Improve information about, and the mapping of, the network of unsealed minor highways
- Speed up the process for clarifying the legal status of routes
- Improve the management, maintenance and enforcement of the network of unsealed minor highways
- Work closely with partners to achieve the objectives identified above

People with mobility or visually impaired needs

The new legislation specifically requires authorities to assess the needs of blind or partially sighted people and others with mobility problems. Local authorities also have duties under the Disability Discrimination Act. People with mobility problems can include older and disabled people or those with young children and pushchairs. Family, friends and carers who accompany people with mobility problems are also affected by the accessibility of the network.

15% of the respondents to the User Survey regarded themselves as having some form of restriction to their mobility levels. The vast majority of these people classed themselves as walkers rather than any other category of user. In addition, 10% of the people responding to the Citizens Panel questions stated that limited mobility stopped them using the countryside. A further 12% of respondents cited health reasons for why they did not use the countryside as much as they would like.

We analysed the responses separately for those people who had ticked any of the boxes to the mobility question of the Users Survey except “fully mobile”. Unsurprisingly, these people identified many of the same high priorities for improvements as all the other users, indicating that they are

seeking inclusive access to the same services, in the same way and on the same terms as the rest of the community if it is possible.

At the strategic level people with mobility issues wanted:

- The existing network to be open, easy to use and well signed
- Well connected paths providing circular routes
- More consideration for nature conservation and biodiversity issues
- Attractive routes that link cafes/pubs/places of interest that benefit the local economy and tourism ventures
- Safer road crossing points
- Routes from built up areas providing direct access to the countryside
- Routes that can be used for local journeys such as safe routes to schools, shops etc
- Routes that can be used in conjunction with public transport

The difference in emphasis was that people who had some form of mobility issue placed a higher priority on improvements that benefited their immediate locality.

The main limitations faced by people with mobility problems or who were partially sighted were:

- Lack of information about where they could go or what to expect on certain routes (they required information about the nature of the surface, the gradient, associated facilities such as car parking and toilets)
- Poor surfacing, wheelchairs and the infirm need a well compacted even surface with no loose gravel or stones
- Poorly designed structures such as gates and other barriers
- Lack of associated facilities including seating/rest areas, car parking, toilets etc
- Lack of awareness by other users of the needs of people with disabilities

In the Key Issues Consultation with the main stakeholders and local councils, the need to provide routes accessible for those who were partially sighted or who had mobility problems was identified as the most important priority for improving paths and trails in Derbyshire.