



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Sharon Bayne

WCC Consultant
Warwickshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan
Blackwood Bayne
8 Herts Crescent
Loose
Maidstone
Kent ME15 0AX

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Dear Ms. Bayne, Sharon

The Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum is taking a strategic overview of the Warwickshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (WRoWIP) at this evidence gathering stage of the process.

We feel it is a good time to set out the thoughts of the LAF, at a strategic level, so we have something to which we can refer, when necessary, during the next phases of the RoWIP process.

We attach the following response for your consideration which includes what we consider to be basic principles:

- To keep parts of the current ROWIP which work, in strategic terms.
- To create a dynamic link between the main plans which affect PROW.
- To include new information which is useful, possibly critical.
- To emphasise that, in the end, the local authority must perform its statutory duty.

The LAF believes the starting point must be the current position of the Warwickshire County Council Rights of Way and Recreational Highways Strategy 2011 – 2026 (RoW&RHS), (Warwickshire 2nd RoWIP and part of WK 3rd LTP).

The 2nd RoW & RHS replaced the original Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2006 – 2016 (CARoWIP).

The RoW & RHS formed part of the LTP3 Local Transport Plan and the integration between the RoWIP and LTP3 is shown at Figure RW1. It makes reference to an LTP Implementation Plan which is not found in a search under this title.

The scope of the current Plan (page 420):

The legislation states that a RoWIP should cover:

- Footpaths, cycle tracks and bridleways and restricted byways, and
- Byways open to all traffic which are shown on the definitive map and statement.

WCC has recognised for some time there are a number of unclassified roads (UCRs) with an unsealed surface in the County which form valuable links in the recreational highways network.

The strategy will, therefore, include;

- All rights of way,
- cycle routes where they are part of the rights of way network, and
- recreational UCRs which are managed in a similar way to the rights of way network and which have mainly recreational use.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

THE LAF RECOMMENDS THAT THE NEW RoWIP COVERS AT LEAST THE SAME CATEGORIES OF HIGHWAYS AS THE CURRENT RoWIP

Other types of access which complement the rights of way network and extend and improve access to the countryside are not covered by the strategy. These include:

- Canal towpaths
- Greenways
- Sustrans routes
- Country parks
- Access land defined under CROW Act 2000 (including paths to isolated 'access islands')
- Town and Village Greens
- Local Green Space (as designated by local authorities under local or neighbourhood plans)
- Public open space maintained by local authorities.

Greenways, canal towpaths and Sustrans routes are catered for in the **Warwickshire Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2022 (LCWIP)**. See, for example, **Cross-country greenways and towpaths ref: X1 – X27**.

The LAF believes although these routes do not form part of the RoWIP, officers should always bear them in mind when looking for opportunities to enhance the rights of way network.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

THE LAF RECOMMENDS THE RoWIP AND THE LCWIP SHOULD BE GIVEN MUTUAL SYNERGISTIC CONSIDERATION AND THE RELEVANT DEPARTMENTS SHOULD LIAISE AND COOPERATE TO FACILITATE GOOD USE OF EFFORT, OFFICER TIME AND SCARCE RESOURCES.

Government guidance gives examples of options or activities which authorities should consider.

They include:

- The duty to include adequate margins or verges for ridden horses beside a carriageway where it is considered necessary or desirable.
- Additional provision for equestrians through the creation of bridleways and restricted byways.
- Routes for the centres of population which allow people to gain access to the countryside from where they live.
- Convenient and safe crossings over roads, railways, rivers and canals.
- Links which create circular routes and better facilities for walkers including dog walkers and runners.
- Attractive routes in order to support local tourism, economic regeneration and community led initiatives, and
- Routes for local journeys such as walking to work, to school, to the station, to the shops or to other local amenities.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

THE LAF RECOMMENDS THE NEW RoWIP CONTINUES TO CONSIDER THESE OPTIONS AND ACTIVITIES.

Table RW 1 of the current RoWIP shows links to National Transport Goals.

The Table shows 5 goals containing 17 challenges, of which 10 are said to be relevant in the RoWIP.

Table RW 1A shows 3 links from the ROWIP to the National Transport Goals.

Table RW 2 gives the status, length and number of Warwickshire's rights of way network.

By length, 82.5% are footpaths which informs that unless you are a pedestrian, you have very little of the network available to you.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

THE LAF RECOMMENDS THAT THE RELEVANT TABLES ARE RETAINED (IN AN UP-TO-DATE FORM) IN THE NEW RoWIP.

The current RoWIP identifies the following weaknesses (inter alia):

- Reactive workload rather than proactive.
- Backlog of applications to record routes on the Definitive Map.

- Ability to maintain the asset value in the medium to long term due to reductions in resources.

The LAF is extremely concerned about these challenges and notes that since the original CROWIP was published in 2006, the greatest challenge facing the network is the provision of an effective service which delivers the Statutory Duties, within difficult economic circumstances.

Lack of resources, therefore, investment in, and maintenance of, the Warwickshire Rights of Way Assets ensures unsustainable deterioration is increasing exponentially year on year.

The present situation is unsustainable. The Statutory Instrument is not providing an effective service which delivers the legal Duty.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

THE LAF RECOMMENDS THAT THE NEW RoWIP REFLECTS THE CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES TO THE NETWORK OPENLY AND HONESTLY SO THAT THE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE TO ALL AND MAY BE USED TO ATTEMPT TO MAKE POSITIVE CHANGES TO THE GENERAL SITUATION, WHERE POSSIBLE.

Table RW 3 reflects **LTP 3 Challenges and Priorities: Rights of Way and Recreational Highways.**

It lists 22 Strategy based challenges and priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

THE LAF RECOMMENDS THAT THE CURRENT STRATEGY BASED CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES ARE CONTINUED IN THE NEW RoWIP.

The LAF notes the current **Policy RW 4a: Definitive Map Review**, which deals with (generally) districts from north to south and, within districts, parishes in alphabetical order.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

THE LAF RECOMMENDS THAT, IN THE LIGHT OF NEW EVIDENCE AND CONSULTATION RESULTS, THE AUTHORITY SHOULD ASSESS HOW THIS SYSTEM HAS WORKED AND REVISIT IT IF NECESSARY.

The LAF notes that the Action Plan in the current RoWIP contains 30 actions but only 4 have a finite timescale, the rest having a practical but nebulous 'ongoing' category.

The LAF sees no evidence of any reporting strategy for these actions. This lack of evidence does not allow for scrutiny and comment by anyone outside the authority.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

THE LAF, WHILE RECOMMENDING THAT THE ACTION PLANS BE RETAINED IN THE NEW RoWIP, IT ALSO RECOMMENDS A PROPER REPORTING PROCESS IS PUT IN PLACE SO THAT PROGRESS CAN BE MONITORED AND SUCCESSES AND FAILURES CAN BE RECOGNISED.

The LAF notes that apart from **Table RW 2 Warwickshire's Rights of Way** (at October 2009) (above) and the bare statement that there are over 3,300 public rights of way in the County, covering around 1,750 miles (**Managing the network, page 435 of the RoWIP**), there is a dearth of information regarding the composition of the network assets, which is an obstacle to the understanding of the extent of the challenges to the network and basic statutory duties of keeping the Definitive Map up-to-date and the network signposted and free from obstructions. While the LAF accepts that the RoWIP is an aspirational document, it feels that the basic statutory duties must be performed.

This information is available in the **Transport Asset Management Plan Version 1.2 April 2011**.

Although this information is now 13 years old, it does provide some useful figures.

For example, estimated value at 2011 prices:

15,000 signposts and way-markers **£750,000**

25 Major bridges and culverts **£5 million**

775 Minor bridges and culverts **£7,750,000**

A further 1200 bridges and culverts **£2 million**.

The estimated value of the public rights of way network is **£23,900,000**

The comparable figure for the Unsurfaced, Unclassified Road Network was **£1,618,400**

The combined figure of £25,500,000 (which needs adjusting for inflation) represents a not inconsiderable public asset which is managed by the authority.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

THE LAF RECOMMENDS THAT THE TRANSPORT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN IS DOVE-TAILED INTO THE RoWIP PROCESS TO ACHIEVE SYNERGY AND SO

THE BASIC QUANTITIES AND UP-TO-DATE VALUE OF THESE ASSETS IS AVAILABLE IN THE NEW RoWIP FOR THE SAME REASONS AS THE ACTIONS AND PRIORITIES MENTIONED ABOVE.

IT IS VITAL THAT FULL, FRANK AND TRANSPARENT DISCLOSURE OF ALL RELEVANT INFORMATION IS PUBLISHED WITHIN THE NEW RoWIP.

The cost of producing and publishing the new RoWIP must incorporate inbuilt value by establishing significant visible and deliverable advice on provision of appropriate maintenance of the entire Warwickshire Public Rights of Way Network. Maintaining the intrinsic value of the asset, in both monetary and amenity terms, should be paramount. Warwickshire's Public Rights of Way, free at the point of access, provide enhanced recreational and health benefits for all users; they are a vital and priceless asset.

This document is prepared and presented by John Hall and Sheila Cooper on behalf of the Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum.

If the Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum can be of any further assistance in any way whatsoever please contact us using the details below:

Please Respond to the Chair: Sheila Cooper: sheila.ann.cooper41@gmail.com

Copy to: John Hall - Vice Chair: johnhall607@gmail.com

Copy to: Alistair Rigby - LAF Secretary: alistairrigby@warwickshire.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheila Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'S' and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Sheila Cooper

Chair Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum