

## APPENDIX E

# Summary of Rights of Way Improvement Plan

## Introduction

E.1 Leicestershire, like many counties in England has a wonderful network of Public Rights of Way. The 3000 kilometres of Rights of Way in the County offer the best way to explore and enjoy the countryside. The paths also provide local routes that link communities and give access to schools, shops, work places and other facilities for many. To put this into some sort of perspective, this is the equivalent of managing a path that extends from Leicester to well beyond Moscow.

E.2 Although this network has developed over hundreds of years, it needs to meet the current and future needs of users. The County Council is considering how best to manage this unique resource.

E.3 In researching the plan, the authority has considered national, regional and local research. This includes local surveys, exemplar projects set up by the Countryside Agency and a raft of national studies. All of these have underlined the importance of walking and riding in people's everyday lives. Some of the key findings include:

- Most walking journeys begin from the doorstep
- 90% of the Leicestershire public see access to the countryside as important
- Most people in the county go walking or riding in the countryside at least once a month
- 94% of the Leicestershire public live in or close to predominantly urban areas
- 46% of the network is within these areas, amounting to 1400 kilometres of routes near to doorsteps
- The main motivation for walkers and riders is because it is fun and healthy
- Over the last 25 years the amount of miles travelled on foot and bicycle fell by more than 25%
- Physical activity, walking in particular, could make the single most effective contribution to the health of the nation. Regular walking reduces the risk of coronary heart disease by up to 50%.



E.4 The walking and riding environment also helps to contribute to a number of areas other than general access. By its very nature, walking and riding, is a socially inclusive activity. Respondents repeatedly underlined the quality of life contribution that walking provided both within the local community and accessing the landscapes around them. It is also sustainable in the short and long term, providing opportunities for people now and hopefully in the future.

E.5 At the heart of the proposals set out in the Draft Plan, is the desire to provide improved opportunities for walking and riding. Much needs to be done to arrest the current falls in walking

and riding. Society is increasingly dependent on the car and we live ever more sedentary lifestyles. Often those groups in society that would benefit most from more active lifestyles, are those least likely to undertake exercise.

E.6 Despite this, both local and national studies show that walking and riding remain extremely popular. The challenge is to involve a wider section of society and make walking and riding part of our everyday lives. Access should be for all, and to be so it needs to compete with the car for utilitarian journeys and a host of other activities for recreational time. It needs to be available near to everyone's home, be fun, attractive and free from physical and mental barriers.

### Improving and broadening access

E.7 A series of proposed policies seek to encourage developers to encourage walking and riding from the doorstep. This includes within new developments and links to surrounding areas and public services. 'Developers will be expected to maximise the potential for access within, to and from new development by walking and cycling' Planning pages 24-27.

E.8 The County Council is also proposing to focus new improvements and promote use near to where people live. 'Priority improvements will be focused on the half of the network identified in conjunction with the Local Transport Plan Process, in and within 1 kilometre from urban areas' pages 76-77. This includes areas that contain 94% of the resident population. We are linking these proposals with the Local Transport Plan. This includes schemes of improvements, maintenance and promotion to local path networks that are intended to:

- Increase levels of walking and riding in all sectors of the community
- Raise environmental awareness
- Improve social inclusion
- Encourage tourism and economic development
- Contribute towards physical activity levels.

E.9 Part of the proposed programme includes the removal of barriers, both real and perceived. 'The County Council will seek to have all routes as free from barriers as possible' Disability and Mobility pages 44-45. In addition is the active encouragement of walking and riding linked to areas that are benefiting from improvements.

E.10 The proposals are intended to be further developed in direct consultation with those communities affected and in conjunction with the Leicestershire Local Access Forum. They will be monitored and the results reported on with regular reviews.

E.11 The County Council also has a statutory role as:

- A Highway Authority to maintain routes on the ground and to keep them open
- A Surveying Authority to map all of the paths on the Definitive Map
- An Access Authority to look after the new open access sites and rights.

E.12 These statutory requirements will continue to be the major focus of our work. They are discussed in further chapters. However, the plan offers an opportunity to stand back and consider how best to deliver the Rights of Way service. It is all too easy to identify further funding requirements without first considering how to get the most from existing resources. The authority is also looking at attracting funding from a number of other agencies, including central and regional government. These include funding through the Local Transport Plan and involvement in the Local Area Agreement process.

## Health

E.13 As well as looking at how best to provide these statutory requirements, the plan considers other areas that have been identified by government and the community.

E.14 In 2002, the Chief Medical Officer produced a report entitled 'Health Check: on the state of public health'. He highlighted the problem of obesity and the general health of the nation. This and further research has underlined the need to exercise:

- Sedentary lifestyle is one of the ten leading global causes of death and disability
- More than two million deaths worldwide each year are attributable to physical inactivity (W.H.O.)
- Regular walking reduces the risk of coronary heart disease by up to 50% (Dept Of Health)
- Lack of exercise causes more illness than smoking in EU countries (W.H.O).

E.15 The Chief Medical Officer described this as a wake up call, that needs to lead to changes in lifestyle in all households. Being inactive is described as no longer an option. Scientific evidence indicates that most people need to undertake moderate physical activity, walking is ideal, for at least 30 minutes, 5 times a week. 'The County Council will work with The Primary Care Trusts, Education providers & the Countryside Agency....to assess how the Rights of Way network can contribute to improving health' Health issues, pages 45-51

## The background

E.16 From the 21st of November 2002, Highway Authorities in England were required to prepare and publish a Rights Of Way Improvement Plan. This has to be completed by 2007. This has now been amended by the requirement to fit elements of the plan into the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The Provisional LTP has been published with proposals for the Rights of Way network. The authority is now producing an Improvement Plan with links to the LTP process. Current guidance indicates that the Improvement Plan will be fully integrated into the LTP process by 2010.

E.17 The Improvement Plan is a statutory requirement set out in Sections 60 & 61 of the Countryside and Rights Of Way Act 2000.

In summary, the Plan is required to consider at least, the following:

- The extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public
- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the authority's area
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems
- A statement of the action the authority proposes to take for the management of local rights of way
- Such other matters as the Secretary Of State may direct.

E.18 The new requirements build on previous initiatives, including Milestones, encouraging local authorities to look at the longer term management of the Rights of Way system.

In summary, we want to:

**Develop and manage a Rights Of Way Network that meets the current and future needs of the local community**

**Provide a high quality Rights of Way service, including working effectively with other agencies and authorities**

**Enable walking and riding opportunities to as many people as possible, with particular focus on those currently excluded including the young and those with mobility problems**

**Contribute towards improving the health of residents of Leicestershire**

**Promote Leicestershire as an attractive place to walk and ride for all including those visiting the county**

**Monitor and report on how we are achieving these goals at regular intervals**

### Getting the plan

E.19 The Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Leicestershire was published in March 2006. It is subject to a consultation process, until the end of May 2006. Consultees include, surrounding authorities, parish councils, user groups, the Leicestershire Local Access Forum and the general public. All comments should be submitted in writing or by e-mail to the Rights Of Way Team, Room 500 County Hall, Glenfield, LE3 8TE. Further information is available at the County Council website at [www.leics.gov.uk/paths](http://www.leics.gov.uk/paths). The site also contains a downloadable pdf version of the document. You can also request further copies of the plan, or further information by e-mailing [footpaths@leics.gov.uk](mailto:footpaths@leics.gov.uk) or ringing 0116 2657086.

E.20 The Draft Plan, together with the results from the consultation, will form the basis of a full Rights of Way Improvement Plan published in 2006. The Plan is being produced in conjunction with the Local Transport Plan. Some proposals developed within this document have already been considered during the Draft Local Transport Plan consultation period. The full Local Transport Plan is due to be published in April 2006.

