

The Second Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) – report on progress against key priorities

The RoWIP is a 10-year strategic document that sets out how we intend to work with others to improve the management, provision and promotion of the Bracknell Forest Rights of Way (RoW) network.

There are ten RoWIP policies as follows:

1. Rights of way for all
2. Fulfil legal duties
3. Routes and links
4. Information and marketing
5. Responsible use
6. Preserve rural character
7. Sustainable benefits
8. Working in partnership
9. Raise strategic profile
10. Monitor and review

In summary, the actions required to make progress against all policies are underway, including:

1. Work is being completed by the council staff and volunteers to continuously capture data about the condition of the network and to prioritise works.
2. The Definitive map is being maintained, TRO notifications and restrictions are being implemented and reported defects are being addressed.
3. New and adjusted links on the network are being explored and implemented.
4. Publicity about the network is ongoing with a vibrant Local Community Access Forum (LCAF) meeting regularly.
5. Work underway to engage with local landowners, and tackle issues such as fly-tipping, amongst other communications.
6. Where required input is made to the planning process to shape the protection and enhancement of the network.
7. Sustainable benefits are delivered wherever possible, through schemes such as school access routes and joint events with Public Health for instance.
8. Extensive work completed and in progress with Parish and Town Councils along with Police and other agencies, such as Natural England.
9. Various works to raise profile completed, including creating a logo and embedding the network within the council's local plan.
10. Completed on a cyclical basis, through regular officer meetings, LCAF meetings, Quarterly Service reporting and these annual updates to DMT.

The detailed actions delivered in 2018 against each RoWIP policy are annexed below for reference.

Policy RoWIP 1 Rights of Way for All

Increase accessibility of the RoW network.

Physical improvements to RoW included:

- Vegetation maintenance - 14,863m of verge flailing and 16,188m of strimming/hedge-cutting by contractors twice per year
- Surface improvement to Sandhurst FP13 and FP22
- Repairs and replacement paving slabs to Sandhurst FP5 steps
- Repairs to ditch crossings through Winkfield FP19, Spinningwheel lane and Winkfield FP5
- Resurfacing around entrance gate to Snipes Lane using 5 ton of loose stone
- Removing older stiles and 'squeeze' gates along Winkfield FP8 and Winkfield FP5 and replacing with new accessible gates

New data is being collected by volunteer path wardens about the location of key features on RoW including signage and furniture to be combined with data derived from the six-monthly Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) inspections (see RoWIP 10 Monitoring and Review) and provide a full catalogue of the network. This will help identify issues and prioritise resources to improve the network.

Work is underway (about 70% complete) to map the location of furniture including gates and stiles to provide a map of obstacles to accessibility on RoW. The goal is to provide this information to the public as online interactive maps, so they can better plan their leisure/school/work routes.

Policy RoWIP 2 Fulfil Legal Duties

Deliver statutory functions of RoW.

The Second Consolidated Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way in Bracknell Forest Borough was updated in 2013. A working copy is kept updated by P&C and a hard copy can be made available for public view upon request.

Motor vehicles are due to be restricted from using the section of Devil's Highway leading to Crowthorne Woods (Crowthorne Restricted Byway 12). The RoW will be open to authorised users, which includes pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and carriage-drivers. Essential access will also be available for carrying out forestry work, for emergency services and to home owners with private access rights to their property.

The restriction is necessary to prevent damage to the surface of this RoW that is caused by motor vehicles along a route that is not classified or constructed for motorised traffic. These changes will also help to protect the rare and valuable wildlife that can be found in Crowthorne Woods and Swinley Forest, which are part of the wider Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Residents and a local business affected have been consulted.

Recent TRO width restrictions along several byways in Warfield/Winkfield will prevent all but the smallest motorised vehicles (e.g. trail riders) having access. This will help protect the surface from damage, allow authorised users better access and reduce the requirement for BFC to carry out repairs.

Reports regarding faults with RoW are received through Achieve and Confirm. P&C aims to respond to these within 5 working days. Follow up works, such as removal of fallen trees and repairing vehicle barriers such as bollards used to enforce width restrictions, are prioritised. Incidences of fly-tipping dealt are dealt with in conjunction with Public Protection Partnership officers.

Policy RoWIP 3 Routes and Links

Provide additional PRoW network linkages and safe circular routes, expanding this to a wider Green Infrastructure network.

Network Rail have consulted on closing the unguarded level crossing (across the mainline from Ambarrow Court) which is on a public footpath. The footpath will be diverted over an existing bridge, with the right of way diverted through the National Trust woodland at Ambarrow Hill. The Three Castles Path will be affected by the level crossing closure in Sandhurst and we will work with Ramblers and Open Spaces Society to ensure that the diversion from the published route is clearly signposted on site.

A proposal is being explored to seek a permissive path (or dedicated right of way) between Cabbage Hill and Hazelwood Lane to avoid the need to walk along the busy Forest Road. Discussions have been taking place with Thames Water who own the land, and LCAF has been proactive in promoting this route.

Much of the Open Access land in Bracknell Forest Borough comprises land in the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). While access to Wildmoor Heath, Crowthorne Woods and Swinley Forest cannot be hindered, active promotion of improved access to the countryside is focused on the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs), to help protect the important heathland habitat of the SPA and the rare ground nesting birds that can be found there.

New links and extensions to the network have been made possible via paths and routes that are included within public open spaces associated with housing developments. This is most notable around the Warfield development where the Cabbage Hill SANG, East-West Green Corridor and The Cut riverside park have created paths that connect to existing byways and quiet lanes.

BFCs Implementation and Infrastructure Team have devised several linked routes to the north of the borough (Ralphs Ride/The Parks, river park along The Cut etc.) and are keen to receive requests for more improved links for recreational routes from P&C and LCAF. They need to be deliverable i.e. ideally on land which we can easily access (BFC/parish ownership).

Policy RoWIP 4 Information and Marketing

Provide access information on RoW and promote the network to encourage use.

P&C publicised traffic free cycle routes and a health and wellbeing initiative (social prescription) on viewing screens at an Outdoor Cinema event at Lily Hill Park last summer.

Volunteer led-countryside walks are advertised in P&Cs events leaflet, via social media and on BFCs website.

Information about long distances recreation routes including the Bracknell Forest Ramblers Route, the Blackwater Valley Path and The Three Castles Path are provided on BFCs website. A Bracknell Forest Ramblers Route leaflet and horse riding leaflet is promoted online and hard copies are distributed to local libraries.

Online route guides / maps which are available on BFCs walking page, are being reviewed in conjunction with the Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum (LCAF). The intention is to provide new recreation routes with differing levels of access i.e. easy access

for people in wheelchairs and with mobility issues, moderate access which includes countryside circular walks of between 2.5-10.8 kms and differing types of terrain and long-distance routes such as the Bracknell Forest Ramblers Route, the Blackwater Valley Path and The Three Castles Path.

An annual public walk event is due to take place in June, which will use a section of The Three Castles Path.

Policy RoWIP 5 Responsible Use

Promote and publicise legal and responsible use of RoW and access to the countryside, supporting landowners and land managers regarding public use of their land.

Landowners were contacted to create resolutions to the following issues:

- Reduction of overgrowth to Sandhurst FP5a.
- Bird Hill Golf Course have removed low limbs to encroaching trees into Pendry's Lane (Warfield BW17)
- Thames Water have installed bollards along their section of Hazelwood Lane bridleway to reduce fly-tipping issues.
- Somerton farm have removed blockage to Winkfield FP10.
- Royal Parks have cleared vegetation along Winkfield FP3.

Where a new road crossing has been constructed part way along Avery Lane (byway), a crossing point has been carefully designed to provide a waiting area for equestrians, and a separate crossing point for walkers and cyclists. Recent new signs have been provided where new access road crosses the byway, leading to the Newell Green housing development.

Measures are being taken to reduce the vulnerability of the RoW network to fly-tipping e.g.

- Bollards installed on Hazelwood Lane by Thames Water
- The new TROs on rural byways to the north of the borough, to protect the surface condition from heavy motorised use, should also help prevent illegal fly-tipping.

P&C work closely with SAMM wardens within the SPA to encourage better understanding of users' responsibilities regarding RoW and Access Land.

Policy RoWIP 6 Preserve Rural Character

Protect the rural character of RoW in the countryside.

Where appropriate / applicable the planning process is used to maintain the rural character of RoW. For example, RoWIP policy 6 was quoted in a planning response for a site in Warfield with a footpath running through it. The policy works well alongside Defra Rights of Way Circular (1/09) para 7.8, which refers to not embedding RoW in the highway footways next to trafficked roads. BFC recommended refusal on the basis of how the layout plan rerouted the public footpath, completely urbanising the route that is currently a pleasant cross-field path.

Policy RoWIP 7 Sustainable Benefits

Manage a countryside and access network that delivers benefits to health and well-being, economy and biodiversity.

Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey collected by Natural England provides trend data for how people use the natural environment in England.

Findings from the 17/18 report suggests that a greater percentage of adults are visiting the natural environment each week (54% in 2009/10 to 62% in 17/18), and the main motivation for spending time in the natural environment is health and exercise.

P&C joined forces with Public Health to run the Pope's and Amen Corner wander, to celebrate health care week which ran from 12-18 November last year.

P&C worked with volunteers to set-up monthly free countryside walks, which encourages people to get physically active and provides an opportunity to socialise with other walkers, thus improving health and wellbeing. Over 175 local people participated in these walks in 2018.

The surface improvement to Sandhurst FP13 (Calvert Walk) will help maintain links to the local school and is a good example of how BFC are enhancing the traffic free RoW network around urban areas to increase the use of sustainable transport for accessing work, schools and services.

Policy RoWIP 8 Working in Partnership

Develop volunteer initiatives and partnerships with other organisations to help make resources go further; collaborate with neighbouring authorities to deliver solutions to cross-border maintenance, legal and improvement issues.

P&C produce an end of financial year PRow financial report for town/parish council's and provide updates at Parish, Parks and Public Realm meetings to recognise existing support and encourage increased future parish /town council involvement in the management of public access.

Volunteers have an important part to play in helping to manage our RoW network. They inspect 63,085m of PRow twice per year spending roughly 105.2hours and local volunteer groups have spent 70 hours on PRow improvement works.

P&C work with neighbouring authorities to tackle issues and take advantage of cross boundary opportunities. Two incidences of criminal damage to bollards on Hawthorn Lane, were reported by residents, and quickly dealt with respectively by RBWM (farm shop end) and BFC (Nuptown end). The reinforced bollard arrangement on the Drift Road end of Hogoak Lane is working well, with no further incidences to report. RBWM have also cut back Ashmore lane vegetation and BFC has improved the gate at the Hawthorn Lane junction.

BFC work in partnership with landowners and the local Police to address issues such as fly-tipping on PRow and the illegal use of footpaths and bridleways. Fly-tipping is reported through CADIS and new signage to deter fly-tipping has been installed around 'hot spots' such as Winkfield RB1 (Sandy Lane, Ascot).

Policy RoWIP 9 Raise Strategic Profile

Increased awareness of organisations and policy and decision-makers about the importance of RoW and the wider green infrastructure network will enable better planning and development of neighbourhoods.

RoWIP is embedded in council plans including Local Plan, LTP3, BAP etc. to promote the key role that RoW play in maintaining Bracknell Forest's high quality of life.

RoWIP is quoted in internal planning consultations where appropriate, to protect the network, prevent or reduce the effects of urbanisation and to prevent unauthorised obstruction or diversion. This includes pre-app advice where RoW are on or adjacent to sites.

BFC helped to produce a new logo for LCAF to give the forum its own identity and raise its profile. This logo was used in recent written correspondence to Thames Water regarding creating a new permissive path between Cabbage Hill and Hazelwood Lane. Membership promoted to LCAF via a leaflet (available online or as hard copies). The application process has been improved by creating a new online application form, which fits in with BFCs move towards self-serve.

Policy RoWIP 10 Monitor and Review

Monitoring the condition of the PRow network and assessing progress made with RoWIP actions

Six-monthly BVPI inspections, were carried out which covers over 17,000m of PRow per year and collects data about the condition of features including surface condition, obstructions and furniture. Formal inspections of footbridges and culverts are completed by Atkins as part of BFC Highways department inspections.

BFC provides information to IPRoW surveys and Ramblers FOIs, as well as comparing information with other unitary authorities and county councils through ADEPT South East Rights of Way Managers Group.

P&C's RoW team regularly meet to review progress made with delivering RoWIP actions. Updates are provided as part of BFC's Quarterly Service Reports and the three LCAF meetings held each year. Report review outcomes to DMT annually.

LCAF produce an annual report (with support from P&C) on key activities and achievements of the forum, and which gets submitted to Natural England and published online.