

To: **Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection**
Date: **20 January 2023**

**Approval of the mid-term review of RoWIP2
Director of Place, Planning and Regeneration.**

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek Executive Member approval of the mid-term review conducted of the second Bracknell Forest Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP2).

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the mid-term review of RoWIP2 is approved by the Council.

3 Reasons for Recommendation(S)

- 3.1 RoWIP2 mid-term review is an important document that:
- reviews significant changes in legislation and policy relating to rights of way
 - gives an overview of the current operations of the Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum (LCAF)
 - provides an overview of progress made with delivering RoWIP2 actions, and prioritises remaining actions
 - shares success stories of how local rights of way has been improved
 - recommends further improvements to the borough's rights of way and open spaces network

See Summary of the RoWIP2 Mid-term review findings in Appendix A.

- 3.2 Formally approving this review document means it can be shared online with Bracknell Forest residents and stakeholders.
- 3.3 The excellent work completed over the past five years can be celebrated and those who have contributed to the success can be acknowledged.
- 3.4 This intermediary review will make the formal 10-year review much easier to complete.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The alternative option is to not formally approve the plan review. This would miss an opportunity to provide a copy of the review online and promote the good work being done to improve accessibility of the Bracknell Forest rights of way network.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 Through the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) the government recognises the value of public Rights of Way and requires that each highway authority produces a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP).

- 5.2 ROWIPs:
- are a mechanism for protecting and enhancing local rights of way
 - cover footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways, byways open to all traffic, and other routes for non-motorised traffic, and access land within the borough
 - assess the way in which local rights of way can meet the present and future needs of the public and the opportunities provided for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and enjoyment
- 5.3 The Bracknell Forest RoWIP2 is a 10-year strategic document that sets out how we intend to work with others to improve the management, provision and promotion of our rights of way network.
- 5.4 Its vision is: 'A thriving and accessible Public Rights of Way and greenspaces network in Bracknell Forest; that provides opportunities for open air recreation and enjoyment of the area and which supports wider interests including sustainable transport, the local economy, tourism, and health and wellbeing benefits.'
- 5.5 The second Bracknell Forest Rights of Way Improvement plan (RoWIP2) was produced in 2017 with the intention to review it mid-way through its 10-year lifespan. The purpose of such a review is not to re-launch the plan, or to create a shift in policy, but primarily to review how well targets and actions are being achieved and to re-evaluate the existing agreed priorities for the remainder of the plan.
- 5.6 Bracknell Forest Council officers and rangers who manage and maintain the borough's rights of way network have led this review, in consultation with other council teams and the Local Countryside Access Forum.
- 5.7 Of the 51 actions identified in RoWIP2, over half (51%) are fulfilled or on target for completion by 2027.
- 5.8 Over 80 physical improvements have been made to rights of way, comprising:
- Removing furniture, such as step-over stiles
 - Surface improvements
 - Major vegetation clearance
 - New signs
 - New bollards
- 5.9 Given existing resources it will prove difficult to achieve all the proposals contained in the action plan. This review has undertaken a prioritisation of actions, as this provides a more realistic and flexible approach.

Further information can be found in the full Mid-term review of RoWIP2 document in Appendix B.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 There are no specific legal issues arising within this report, as this review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is not the statutory ten-yearly review required under Section 60(3) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Financial Advice

6.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Other Consultation Responses

6.3 BFC officers and rangers and the Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum.

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.4 Not applicable.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.5 Not applicable.

Assistant Director: Planning

6.6 There are no direct planning implications arising from this report. Further improvements to the PRow network will continue to be sought through the planning process.

Climate Change Implications

6.7 The recommendations in Section 2 will have a positive impact on reducing emissions of CO₂.

There's an emphasis in RoWIP2 on promoting more sustainable and greener forms of travel by foot, bike, horseback and wheelchair/motorised scooters. Delivering key actions will have a positive impact on the environment.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

6.8 The recommendations in Section 2 are expected to positively impact resident's health and wellbeing.

Many of the actions in RoWIP2 are about promoting active travel opportunities in greenspaces. Delivering key actions will help towards improving residents' physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Background Papers

Appendix A - Summary of RoWIP2 review findings.

Appendix B – Full Mid-term review of RoWIP2 document.

Copy of RoWIP2: www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/public-rights-way/rights-way-improvement-plan

LCAF meeting minutes where members were consulted on Mid-term review of RoWIP2: [Agenda for Local Countryside Access Forum on Tuesday, 1 February 2022, 7.00 pm | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Local Countryside Access Forum on Tuesday, 7 June 2022, 7.00 pm | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](#)

Contact for further information

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Appendix A

SUMMARY OF ROWIP2 MID-TERM REVIEW FINDINGS.

Updates / changes required to RoWIP2	Further comments
Foreword and Vision	
Reference provided to the new Executive Member and Director.	A new foreword will be provided when the plan undergoes its next review in 2027.
Section 2. RoWIP2 process and consultations	
Updates to the 2017 feedback, where relevant, are provided in the action plan table in Appendix A.	A wider consultation of key stakeholders, and of users of rights of way, will be conducted as part of the 10-year review in 2027.
Section 3. Policy context (plans, strategies and framework)	
<p>Updates required for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Planning Policy Framework • The Council Plan • Emerging BFC Local Plan, including the POSS study. • Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan 2018-23 • Bracknell Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 • Neighbourhood Plans • Bracknell Forest Climate Change Strategy 2020-2024 (NEW) • The green infrastructure review, 2017 (NEW) • Blackwater Valley Strategy 2011-2016 (Expired/ no longer applicable) 	<p>The planning policies in the emerging Bracknell Forest Local Plan are essential in protecting and enhancing local rights of way and recreational routes.</p> <p>Providing access to outdoor recreational opportunities will help to improve residents' health and wellbeing. This is especially important during the recovery phase of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>Climate change is also a hugely important issue, where improved PRow and providing opportunities for sustainable travel, can play an important role in helping to address climate change.</p>
Section 4. The Bracknell Forest rights of way network	
<p><i>Under 4.1 Current network statistics</i>, reference is made to 2 new footpaths in Sandhurst. The 4.4kms increase to the total length of the rights of way network, is a 5.6% increase in total network length.</p> <p>Further clarification provided under 4.5 <i>Network maintenance and enhancements</i> (see right)</p>	<p>This is only a small increase which should have minimal impact to rights of way maintenance requirements.</p> <p>It's important to continue prioritising creating new routes and links (RoWIP2 policy 3).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibilities of vegetation management • Referencing important practical support of the Bracknell Conservation Volunteers (BCVs) in delivering furniture improvements • Changes to the way rights of way are inspected

Updates / changes required to RoWIP2

New updates added under *4.8 Land owners' responsibilities* and *4.9 Responsible use of the countryside*.

Further comments

More comprehensive list provided of landowners responsibilities and rights.

Example provided about new signage provided by key partners to encourage responsible shared use of byways.

Section 5. Use and demand

Reference provided in section *5.1.5 Motorised vehicle users*, to one new permanent TRO on Avery Lane (Warfield Byway 8).

Making permanent TROs to prevent motorised vehicles using byway are advised only where necessary.

Making the location and restrictions of TROs as a publicly available record should help residents to make informed travel choices.

Overview provided in section *5.2.2 Changes to use and demand* about the increased observed popularity of rights of way and recreation routes and how this impacts maintenance requirements.

Increases to use and demand has been largely driven by coronavirus pandemic.

Accessing these facilities has been important for residents' health and wellbeing.

Increased use has added pressure to rights of way and greenspace facilities, leading to greater maintenance requirements.

An update provided about LCAF (section 5.3), including an overview of membership and a description about how the Forum has adapted during the coronavirus pandemic.

LCAF continues to maintain a good representation of rights of way users and the minimum number of members required according to The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007.

3.—(1) A local access forum shall consist of at least ten and not more than 22 members.

Section 8. Action plan and PRow improvements

A thorough review has been carried out of the progress made in delivering the 51 actions listed in RoWIP2.

Out of the 51 actions identified:

- 51% are fulfilled or on target for completion
- 33% have had some progress made on them
- 10% are falling behind the target
- 6% are no longer relevant

A traffic light colour-coding system has been used to indicate progress made against each of the actions. A detailed description has also been provided of progress made and recommendations for prioritisation of remaining actions. This can be found in the end column of the Action Plan table, shown in Appendix B.

10 actions have been given high priority. See summary table below.

Updates / changes required to RoWIP2

Over 80 physical improvements have been made to rights of way, comprising:

- Removing furniture, such as step-over stiles
- Surface improvements
- Major vegetation clearance
- New signs
- New bollards

Two out of the 18 PRow improvements on the PRow improvements and access routes proposed by LCAF (see Appendix C), have been completed.

Three new suggestions for improvements and one that has been deleted owing to one part of the land on the route no longer being owned by BFC.

Further comments

The biggest improvements to access have been to replacing stiles with more accessible pedestrian gates or removing furniture altogether.

Partnership approach to this work has been a key factor to successfully carrying out these improvements.

Figure 1 Summary table of actions progress and priority level

Action category	Progress and priority against each action no.									
Encourage use	1 (M/L)	2 (M)	3 (M/L)	4 (L)	5 (M/H)	6 (L)				
Mapping / cataloguing	7 (H)	8 (H)	9 (H)	10 (M/H)	11 (L)	12 (M/H)				
Legal status and condition	13 (N/A)	14 (H)	15 (M)	16 (H)	17 (H)	18 (N/A)	19 (H)			
New routes / links	20 (M)	21 (M)	22 (M/H)	23 (M)	24 (M)					
Improving access	25 (M/H)	26 (M)	27 (M)							
Partnership working	28 (M/L)	29 (M/H)	30 (M)	31 (M)	32 (M)	33 (H)	34 (H)	35 (MH)	36 (L)	37 (M)
Raising awareness	38 (L)	39 (L)	40 (L)	41 (M/L)	42 (L)	43 (L)	44 (M)			
Responsible use	45 (L)	46 (N/A)								
Monitoring	47 (M)									
Additional	48 (N/A)	49 (M)	50 (M)	51 (M)						

Progress on each of the 51 actions:

Green: Fulfilled or on target for completion by 2027.

Orange: Some progress made but needs some attention to meet target.

Red: Very minimal or no progress made. Risk the target won't be met.

White: No longer relevant or is to be discontinued.

Priority levels: High (H) Medium/High (M/H) Medium (M) Medium/Low (M/L) Low (L) No longer applicable (N/A).

Only five of the actions are shaded red. This indicates minimal, or no progress has been made in delivering them. Four of these have been identified as low priority. This is because the actions have less importance than those that have a legal or statutory function to fulfil, or where there are significant benefits to improving accessibility of rights of way.