

CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT – CLLR PHILIP WHITEHEAD

WASTE AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICES

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REFERENCE: HT-06-15

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL'S COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2015 - 2024

Purpose of Report

1. To adopt Wiltshire Council's Countryside Access Improvement Plan 2015 – 2024 and accompanying policies.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The over-arching aim of the Business Plan is to create “stronger and more resilient communities”. The Countryside Access Improvement Plan sets the strategic direction for much of the work undertaken in the Rights of Way and Countryside team. Countryside access in Wiltshire contributes towards the Business Plan vision in a number of ways:
 - It supports the rural economy through use of local services when people visit the countryside and historic sites.
 - It provides an extensive network of routes and areas people can use for exercise, particularly near settlements. Local access to green space from home can help to reduce health inequalities.
 - It provides access within and between settlements and to public transport services, providing alternatives to driving.
 - The Paths Improvement Grant Scheme (PIGS) helps to encourage individuals and groups to take an interest in their countryside by providing funding which enables them to undertake works themselves.
 - The Rights of Way and Countryside team has hundreds of individuals, user groups and parish councils who help manage the network.
 - Volunteering can provide a focus for local people, which helps to bring communities together.
 - Mitigating climate change through the provision of green space.

Main Considerations for the Council

3. The document is a statutory requirement for Wiltshire Council and sets out the strategic direction for much of the work undertaken by the Rights of Way and Countryside Team.

Background

4. In 2008, Wiltshire County Council produced its first Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). ROWIPs are a requirement under the Countryside and Rights of Way CROW Act (2000). ROWIPs are aspirational plans which set out how councils will manage and improve the rights of way network to meet modern day needs. The plan continued to be taken forward by Wiltshire Council when Wiltshire became a unitary authority in 2009.

5. ROWIPs must consider:

- 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 outdoor 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.
6. Although the guidance focuses on rights of way, it also states that improvements to other routes and areas which allow people to access the countryside need to be considered. This includes Wiltshire Council's countryside sites and other areas with public access not directly the responsibility of Wiltshire Council. To reflect this requirement more clearly, the title of the second ROWIP has been changed to the Countryside Access Improvement Plan.
7. The document demonstrates the contribution that countryside access makes towards public health, the economy, transport needs and community cohesion. It sets out high level actions to maintain and improve what is available, to seek to meet Wiltshire Council's statutory requirements and includes a number of policies for the Rights of Way and Countryside team. A review will be undertaken in 2019 to see if the document still meets the needs of the Wiltshire Council Business Plan and the Rights of Way and Countryside team. If so, it will run its full course; if not, a revision will be undertaken.
8. The different parts of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan are appended as follows:
- Main document – **Appendix 2**
 - Appendices – **Appendix 3**
 - Rights of Way and Countryside Policies – **Appendix 4**
9. The plan is one of the “daughter documents” of Local Transport Plan 3. A Habitat Regulations Assessment must be undertaken to cover all of these plans - this is included in **Appendix 5**.

Safeguarding Considerations

10. No issues relating to safeguarding should occur as a result of the adoption of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan.

Public Health Implications

11. A key focus of Public Health, as set out in the Wiltshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, is living healthily – i.e. prevention rather than just cure. Wiltshire's rights of way network and countryside sites are a vital, free at the point of use and well used resource for members of the public to exercise. As the Countryside Access Improvement Plan seeks to support and promote active living, many of the actions are a delivery mechanism for a number of the aspirations of the Wiltshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. These actions provide routes and places for people to exercise, improving the physical and mental health of people of all ages.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

12. Legislation for the protection of certain species must always be considered in the work of the Rights of Way and Countryside team. One of the actions in the plan refers to this requirement.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

13. An Equality Analysis has been undertaken for the document, this is available on request.

Risk Assessment

14. Production of the plan is a statutory requirement so Wiltshire Council would be in breach of its legal duty if it did not produce one.

Financial Implications

15. There are no financial implications of adopting the Countryside Access Improvement Plan itself. However, the implementation of the plan will require funding.

Legal Implications

16. Production of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan is a statutory requirement under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000).

Options Considered

17. No other options were considered as the production of the document is a statutory requirement under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000).

Reason for Proposal

18. It is a statutory requirement of Wiltshire Council to produce the plan. The plan supports the aspirations of Wiltshire Council's Business Plan and sets the strategic direction and policies for much of the work that the Rights of Way and Countryside team undertake.

Proposal

19. The Countryside Access Improvement Plan and associated policies will be adopted for the period 2015 – 2024. The policies will be reviewed when required. The main document will be considered again in 2019 to see if it is meeting the aspirations of the Wiltshire Council Business Plan and the needs of the Rights of Way and Countryside team.

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None