

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
ACCESS COMMITTEE

10th August 2006

**CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO THE
CUMBRIA RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)**

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to advise members of the work that Cumbria County Council have carried out, with its partners including the Authority, to prepare a draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the county of Cumbria and to seek members' endorsement of the draft plan.

Strategic Planning Framework

The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

An Integrated Access Strategy

- AS1 In partnership with the County Councils (who have statutory responsibility) develop a ROWIP action plan for the Yorkshire Dales which identifies improvements to the network, related to need and adequacy of the existing network.

Best Value Performance Plan 2006/2007

- Contribute to the production and implementation of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the Dales by 2007.

Background

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a duty for all local highway authorities to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). ROWIPs will, amongst other things:

- provide an assessment of the adequacy and opportunities provided by local rights of way for access to services, recreation and renewal, based on current needs and demands of the full range of users;
- provide an assessment of the accessibility of local rights of way to all members of the community, including those with visual impairment or mobility problems,
- Identify any improvements that are required to ensure the rights of way network meets the needs of today's society.

The Government's time scale is that ROWIPs should be produced by the end of 2007.

Progress in the Dales

Both North Yorkshire and Cumbria County Council are producing ROWIPs for their areas, and although each Authority is approaching this differently, and are at different stages of plan preparation, both authorities are following the government guidance and aim to finish the process within the timescales required.

Throughout the process both Highway Authorities have involved the Yorkshire Dales Access Forum, as statutory consultee and advisor, and the public at large. Officers of this Authority have also worked closely with county council officers during the plan preparation.

Members of the Access Committee have received regular reports on progress. A report on the process both County Councils were undertaking was reported to this committee on 13th January 2005, and further progress was reported through the Head of Park Management report on the 11th of May 2006.

North Yorkshire County Council is in the process of preparing their draft plan, which is at an advanced stage and will be available for public consultation in early 2007. Whilst Cumbria County Council have already prepared their draft plan and are now consulting partners, other interested parties and also the general public, and it is this document which is the subject of this report.

Cumbria ROWIP - Consultation Draft

The full version of the ROWIP is available at www.cumbriacc.gov.uk and the Executive Summary is attached (**Annex**) This summarises:

- ❖ The part that the rights of way network plays in accessing Cumbria's countryside.
- ❖ The policy framework for developing the ROWIP
- ❖ The research that was undertaken for the preparation of the draft ROWIP
- ❖ The Statements of Action arising from the plan.

Plan Implementation

The draft ROWIP makes it clear that there is not a statutory duty to implement ROWIPs. The statements of action are aspirational five-year plans, to be delivered in partnership, with funding sought from a variety of sources.

The ROWIP Action Plan

The Action Plan contains a whole raft of suggested improvements for a variety of users - both local people and visitors to the County, as well as interest groups. In the Cumbria area of the National Park approximately 70 suggestions have been put forward. This includes suggestions made by Authority Officers and those identified through the Area Actions consultation process. All suggestions, across the County, have been scored and assessed for inclusion in the Action Plan.

Out of the seventy individual suggestions that have been proposed; about twenty of these suggest prohibiting the use of motor vehicles on individual routes; however with the

introduction of the NERC Act a number of these will have been resolved. Other themes which emerged include:

- ❖ The development of a Lune Valley Trail along the former railway line.
- ❖ The provision of off-road paths to provide alternatives to people walking sections of the A683 and A684.
- ❖ The creation of footpaths to integrate with existing paths to create an off-road footpath between Garsdale Station and Sedbergh.
- ❖ Off-road alternatives to sections of the Dales Way; where it currently uses roads.
- ❖ The creation of new bridleways to integrate with existing bridleways to form a Sedbergh loop off the Pennine Bridleway.

Delegation of Powers to Implement the ROWIP

As part of the process to implement the plan, Cumbria County Council wishes to delegate powers to each National Park Authority to implement the statement of action within their respective National Park boundaries.

In respect of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, discussions are currently ongoing between this Authority and Cumbria County Council with regard to up-dating the current delegation agreement, and this includes considering further delegation of powers to implement aspects of the ROWIP.

Conclusion

Cumbria County Council officers, in conjunction with partners, have carried out thorough research on the needs and aspirations for improvement in the rights of way network in Cumbria, and have identified a series of actions in accordance with the statutory guidance.

As there is not a statutory duty to implement the ROWIP it must be seen as an aspirational document. However Cumbria County Council has indicated its wish to delegate powers to each National Park Authority to implement the statement of actions within the National Parks, and to work with other partners to implement the ROWIP

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority confirms its support for, and congratulates Cumbria Council on the production of, the draft Cumbria Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

ANDY RYLAND
TRANSPORT AND VISITOR MANAGEMENT OFFICER

Background papers

Consultation Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the County of Cumbria – July 2006

Date: 20 July 2006

Cumbria - Rights of Way Improvement Plan Executive Summary

1. This is Cumbria's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). It is available for public consultation until 30th September 2006. At this stage, the Statements of Action are in draft format, are general and do not include specific projects, targets and costs. A full ROWIP will be produced in spring 2007 taking account of any comments received as well as additional details on the Statements of Action.

2. Please send any comments on this 'Draft ROWIP' by 30th September 2006 to:

The Countryside Access Development Officer
Cumbria County Council
The Courts
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA3 8NA
Or e-mail them to:
countryside.access@cumbriacc.gov.uk

Chapter 1 – Introduction

3. Highway Authorities have a duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The Cumbria ROWIP is being produced in partnership with the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District National Park Authorities, and with the full involvement of the Local Access Forums for each of these areas.
4. This draft ROWIP is open for consultation until the end of September 2006. A full, final ROWIP will be published in spring 2007, with finalised Statements of Action. By 2010-11, the ROWIP will be integrated into Cumbria's Local Transport Plan.

Chapter 2 – The existing access resource, its quality, and the opportunities it offers

5. Cumbria is a unique area, rich in landscape and natural beauty. Cumbria also boasts one of the longest networks of public rights of way in England and Wales – over 7441 km – complemented by rural lanes, unclassified roads, large tracts of open access land and a wealth of wider access opportunities, including designated cycle routes and permitted access. The bodies involved in the management of local rights of way and wider countryside access are listed and mapped.
6. The opportunities available to different user-groups of the network are assessed, including those for people with limited mobility. While opportunities for the more 'independent' user groups, such as mountain bikers and long-distance walkers or cyclists are considerable, and while there is best practice to draw on in terms of barrier-reduction projects and access to information, there is still considerable scope for improvements.
7. The quality and condition of existing countryside access is assessed with 'use and condition' research. This shows that while some areas the resource is in good condition, there remains demand for improvements; such as signage, the maintenance of access furniture and upgrades to existing routes. Annual targets to improve the percentage of paths 'easy to use' are already included in Cumbria County Council performance plans.

Chapter 3 – Policy framework and integrating access

8. The Cumbria Countryside Access Strategy was published in 2005 as the policy framework supporting the ROWIP. The vision statement includes a commitment to partnership working to deliver improvements that will bring a wide range of benefits. The aims include encouraging people to explore and enjoy the countryside and to make sustainable travel choices.
9. The ROWIP has a number of key links to the Local Transport Plan. Local rights of way have an increasing contribution to make to non-motorised travel, especially for short, local journeys and to access goods and services. In particular, the ROWIP can help deliver shared objectives, such as:
 - Greater use of sustainable transport modes,
 - Reduced congestion,
 - Improved air quality,
 - Road safety,
 - Accessibility planning (mobility) and
 - Other quality of life targets.
10. The Joint Cumbria Structure Plan and Yorkshire Dales Local Plan are also noteworthy documents as they identify 'Key Service Centres'. These towns are used later in the ROWIP to help prioritise potential projects.
11. Links to other policy areas and emerging agendas are presented here; in particular, the framework behind improving access for people with limited mobility, and the benefits of integrating countryside access with wider agendas, such as health and the local economy. Of particular note are:
 - The valuable contribution that countryside access can make to meeting targets for increasing the amount of exercise that people take and
 - Tourism in Cumbria generated £1.12 billion in 2004. Tourism, countryside recreation and the local economy are inextricably linked - illustrated during the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001.

Chapter 4 – Research

12. Two elements of research were undertaken. The first identified the needs and preferences of fourteen 'key audiences' in order to determine how well local rights of way and wider countryside access opportunities meet the present and likely future needs of the public. A 'need' was defined as critical to the activity taking place, and a 'preference' was defined as something that would enhance the experience. The fourteen 'key audiences' are:
 - Land or property owners or countryside managers
 - Urban residents
 - Rural residents
 - Passive visitors or tourists
 - Latent users
 - Serious walkers
 - Casual walkers
 - Serious cyclists - mountain biking and other cycling
 - Casual cyclists
 - Equestrians
 - Other users – recreational vehicle users
 - People with limited mobility
 - People from Black and Minority Ethnic groups

- Young people

13. The needs and preferences research involved focus groups and interviews with members of the public as well as workshops with the Local Access Forums. A number of needs and preferences were common to several key audiences, for example, improvements to signing, to information, and integration with sustainable transport. The results of the needs and preferences research are presented.
14. The second element of research was to devise a scoring system to enable project ideas (in other words, proposals for developing local rights of way) to be placed in an initial priority order. The scoring system was devised with the help of the Local Access Forums and user group representatives.
15. The adequacy of countryside access was then measured by inviting over 400 consultees and the public to submit project ideas between December 2005 and the end of February 2006. Over 1200 suggestions were received and mapped – the results are presented in chapter four. The amount of responses received suggests considerable demand for improvements to the network.
16. All the suggestions were scored and mapped. The conclusions from the needs and preferences research, together with the suggestions, form the basis for the Statements of Action.

Chapter 5 – Statements of Action

17. There are two Statements of Action; one for the Lake District National Park and one for the remainder of Cumbria, including the Cumbrian part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Statements of Action are in draft form, structured by the user-group affected. Further detail (targets, projected costs, priority projects and potential partners) will be added for the final ROWIP, to be published in spring 2007.
18. Examples of improvements that appear in the Statements of Action include:
 - Improving and upgrading existing routes,
 - Creating new links to form new linear and circular routes,
 - Maximising the effective use of information about the network and its opportunities,
 - Integration with and adding value to the new quiet lanes network, and
 - Seeking to ensure the provision of public transport services and transport hubs are integrated with the current and future use of the network.
19. There is no statutory duty to implement ROWIPs. The statements of action are aspirational five-year plans, to be delivered in partnership, with funding sought from a variety of sources. Local Access Forums will be the key providers of advice and guidance on how best to implement the statements of action. Improved joint-working through 'Countryside Access Cumbria' will also help deliver the implementation of improvements.
20. In addition to working in partnership to deliver improvements, Cumbria County Council will seek to delegate powers to each National Park Authority to implement the statement of action within their respective National Park boundaries.