Stockport Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2018 – 2028: Improving and Maintaining Off-road Routes.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (section 60) requires all highway authorities to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) every 10 years. This includes making a new assessment of the network and reviewing the previous plan including consulting with the public. The plan does not solely focus on definitive Public Rights of Way. The plan considers all rights of way off-road that the public are able to use. Examples include routes in parks, concessionary paths, public rights of way and access space.

Right of Way Type	Users
Public Right of Way Footpath	
Other Footpaths e.g. routes concessionary in parks, alleyways etc.	
Cycle Track	
Bridleway	
Restricted Byways	
Byway Open to all Traffic	
Access Land	*

(*access land may allow cycling or horse riding on a case by case basis)

1.2. Context and scope of plan

1.2.1. The ROWIP sets out:

- the links to the Greater Manchester 2040 Transport Strategy and other strategic documents and plans;
- an assessment of the network and the value of the network for health, transport, recreation and utility as well as opportunities to improve the network; our support for wider diversity of access to the path network; our action plan, with an indication of the resources and timescale required;
- to identify and encourage the partnerships needed in the development and delivery of the action plan, and
- how we will monitor implementation of the plan.

1.3. Setting the scene - area profile

1.3.1. Stockport stretches from the borders of the Peak District National Park to Manchester, covering an area of 126km^2. Stockport is one of the ten metropolitan districts of Greater Manchester and lies in the south-eastern part of the conurbation at the junction of the Cheshire Plain and the Pennine foothills. Stockport has an estimated population of 286,800 (*Office of National Statistics (ONS)*) and is home to an estimated 16,000 businesses. Stockport is a major economic player within the North West region and working hard to further improve its town centres economic position in the Greater Manchester area. Over 1/3 of residence travel under 5km to work which means they could feasibly be encouraged to walk or cycle to work (Census 2011).

1.3.2. There are 992km of road in the borough of Stockport, consisting of 12km of motorway, 84km of 'A' roads, 38km of 'B' road, 43 km of other classified road and a further 814km of other unclassified roads. The average daily flow per km is 111.200, vehicles on motorways, 20,500 on 'A' roads, and 12,300 on 'B' roads (*DSD REPORT 1885 Transport Statistics Stockport 2015)*. The Public Rights of Way network is 268 km long. In Stockport there are at least 146 recognised green spaces totalling 1816 hectares in the borough of which only 29 green spaces are formal parks with a total area of 360 hectares. Greenspaces and parks, with their mixture of footpaths paths and other routes connecting them to the areas they serve, also form part of the rights of way network.

1.3.3. Stockport's residents and businesses benefit from good access to the motorway (M60) and major road (A6, A34) networks that pass through the Borough. These road networks link Stockport with Manchester City Centre, Manchester Airport and the wider Region. The soon to be opened A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road (A6MARR), including its walking and cycling facilities, will further improve this interconnectivity.

1.3.4. These roads cope with a variety of demands including longer distance commuters to Manchester, and work and shopping trips to Stockport Town and District Centres. Congestion is evident at specific locations across the Borough, rather than along whole routes, at various times through the day. The Council is working to improve the road network to ameliorate these issues. Part of this involves reducing the use of motorised vehicles for shorter journeys both by improving facilities on the roads and improving and advertising the off-road network.

1.3.5. There are currently 19 railway stations within the Stockport MBC boundary. Analysis of passenger data indicates that these stations account for almost 12% of entry and exit passenger numbers travelling within Greater Manchester. This rises to 24% if Manchester Piccadilly, Oxford Road and Victoria are excluded (Stockport Rail Strategy January 2015). These stations give access to the wider area for leisure and recreation, including paths and greenspaces, but improving access to these stations by walking and cycling is also seen as important to reduce congestion and parking needs at the stations.

1.3.6. Stockport bus station, adjacent to the rail station and the Mersey Way Shopping Centre, is the hub of Stockport's bus network. Buses from the town centre are available to all parts of Stockport, Manchester City Centre, the Airport, Cheshire, Derbyshire and beyond. There are plans to develop a new interchange on the site of the current bus station. This would be designed to allow for a potential Metrolink route development in the future. The update to the interchange will also allow for an improved route for the Trans Pennine Trail. These bus routes also give access to the wider area for leisure and recreation, including paths and greenspaces.

1.3.7. Stockport is undertaking a large redevelopment of the town centre with around £1 billion invested into a range of ambitious projects launched across Stockport by the Council and partners Estimates predict that this work will bring at least 5,000 new jobs and 1,100 new homes to Stockport. As part of this, improvements to the transport network aim to support lower carbon travel and improve wellbeing by providing improved facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, and improved linkage between the rail station and town centre; improve road safety through a reallocation of road space in the town centre, better traffic management and improved pedestrian/cycle links with surrounding residential areas. This will assist in encouraging residents to travel sustainably and make an important improvement to the rights of way network to the east of the town centre with a new bridge across the River Goyt into Woodbank Park.

2. Vision

2.1. Stockport's Rights of Way network will facilitate both recreational and utility travel for a range of users both from within the borough and those passing through it. Stockport Council recognises the potential of its urban and rural rights of way for safer sustainable travel routes for utility and recreational trips. The improvement and development of these routes is also seen as an important method of reducing congestion and pollution on Stockport's road network and promoting and improving health and wellbeing of Stockport residents.

2.2. This approach will be balanced with the need to address issues surrounding crime and anti-social behaviour and the processes used by the Safer Stockport Partnership to tackle these.

2.3. The approach will be in line with the Council's Plan and the aims of the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040.

3. Links to other plans, policies and strategies

3.1. Policy context

3.1.1. There are a range of policies previously adopted by the Council and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) which will relate to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, of which the most relevant of these policies are covered below.

3.1.2. Council Plan

3.1.3. The Council's plan is to work with the people of the borough to achieve the following outcomes:

- People will be able to make positive choices and be independent
- People who need support will get it
- Stockport will benefit from a thriving economy
- Stockport will be a place people want to live
- Communities in Stockport will be safe and resilient

3.1.4. The rights of way network would have most effect on:

- Enabling people to make positive life choices about staying active and other beneficious lifestyle approaches as part of making positive choices and being independent.
- Improving transport connectivity and supporting town centre regeneration as part of benefiting from a thriving economy.
- Improving the built and natural environment, including air quality; maintaining and enhancing the highway network; and maintaining good

quality parks and greenspace as part of making Stockport a place people want to live.

3.1.5. Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040

3.1.6. Connected Neighbourhoods is a spatial theme in the strategy aiming to give easy and affordable access to jobs, schools, shops and other facilities. Making neighbourhoods and town centres pedestrian and cycle friendly, providing attractive, liveable streets and public spaces, with slower traffic speeds and safe routes is seen as an important part of this.

3.1.7. If the strategy is successful then by 2040local neighbourhoods will be more pleasant and safe to walk and cycle around, with most short trips being made on foot or by bike. Access to local public transport services and neighbourhood facilities will be easier without a car.

3.1.8. Greater Manchester-wide policies identified in the strategy to apply consistently across the whole transport system include:

- "We will work with partners to improve pedestrian and cycle facilities across Greater Manchester, including development of a strategic walking and cycling network, wayfinding and cycle parking."

- "We will work with partners, including the Canals and Rivers Trust, to enhance green and blue infrastructure to provide a safe and attractive environment for walking and cycling."

3.1.9. These will be assisted by and assist in the delivery of the ROWIP.

3.1.10. Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council Local Development Framework Core Strategy DPD, 2011

3.1.11. The Stockport Core Strategy 2011 is part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for the Borough. The LDF replaces the Stockport Unitary Development Plan as the local plan to guide development.

3.1.12. However, it should be noted that the Local Plan is being reviewed and so there is a need to ensure that suitable linkages are made between this new document and the ROWIP to assist in the delivery of both plans.

3.1.13. The development of linkages between the ROWIP and the Local Plan are key to the successful inclusion of the needs of Rights of Way in all forms in future planning decisions and improved access for all users.

3.1.14. Stockport Physical Activity Strategy 2015 - 2018

3.1.15. Objectives of the Strategy include:

1. Increase sustainable opportunities for physical activity for all ages and abilities at a borough wide and neighbourhood level
2. Reduce levels of sedentary behaviour as an independent risk factor for health
3. Develop and support activities at locality level that promotes engagement from targeted groups to reduce social exclusion, celebrate cultural diversity and build strong communities
4. Encourage active travel as a means of getting to school and work and as part of everyday life
5. Maintain and seek to develop the standard and safety of our parks, green spaces, play, leisure facilities and rights of way in order to encourage their use by local residents and visitors
6. Work with local employers to create healthy, active workplaces which improve the health of the working age population
7. Work with schools and colleges to create healthy, active educational environments which improve the health of the school/college population
8. Ensure a holistic approach to the promotion and delivery of physical activity

3.1.16. These can all to some extent be supported through the ROWIP.

3.1.17. *Stockport Walking Strategy April 2010*

3.1.18. The strategy encourages and promotes walking as a desirable method of transport in its own right as well as a means of accessing other modes of transport and will facilitate improvement which will make walking a more direct, safe and pleasant mode of travel. The Stockport walking strategy supports the aims of the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy with a focus on the encouragement of walking for trips to Education, Work and for Leisure reasons. This is relevant to the ROWIP as the objectives for the walking can be supported through the actions of the ROWIP as can be seen in the walking strategies related action plan which include the maintenance of the public rights of way network and other related works. This is an acknowledgement of the usefulness of off-road routes in creating safer and more pleasant walking environments for all types of users.

3.1.19. The strategy is being reviewed in 2018 and the ROWIP must be reflected in the aims and objectives of this reviewed strategy.

3.1.20. *Greater Manchester Cycling Strategy, 2014*

3.1.21. Greater Manchester's vision is of a city fit for the future; a healthy, safe, sustainable, city where people want to live, work and visit, and where a well-

established cycling culture is integral to the region's health and prosperity. The aim is to double and double again the proportion of trips made by bicycle over the 12 years of the strategy. That's a 300% increase by 2025. The successful delivery of improvements to off-road routes will form part of this process and the ROWIP will need to assist to achieve this aim. The Council is currently developing a Stockport Cycling and Walking Strategy and the ROWIP must be reflected in the aims and objectives of this strategy. The GMCA is also developing a new Active Travel Strategy for Greater Manchester.

3.1.22. Stockport Economic Development Strategy 2012 -2017

3.1.23. The strategy aims "For Stockport to build on its position as a growth economy in Greater Manchester, connecting its residents and businesses to more opportunities, and providing an ideal environment to start, grow and locate a business."

3.1.24. The ROWIP can assist with Objective 7 – Enhance connectivity for businesses and residents within Stockport. Especially - the first and last mile linkages between public transport or parking locations and also the ability to improve congestion by provision of off-road cycling infrastructure.

3.1.25. ***Stockport Transport Asset Management Strategy 2015 – 2034***

3.1.26. The Transport Asset Management Strategy document sets out key actions and processes that Stockport Council has established to ensure long term value for money in the management of its highway assets. These assets include: Public Rights of Way Network, adopted alleyways and routes through parks and other greenspaces. This includes the development of an asset register as well as the planning and monitoring of maintenance of the routes based on expected working life of the materials used and whole life costing. The ROWIP must work with the Asset Management Plan to insure that these elements of the Councils asset are managed and maintained in a sustainable and cost effective manner.

3.1.27. Stockport Signage Strategy 2014

3.1.28. The strategy outlines the vision for signage in the borough through the vision "To reveal, connect and communicate the diverse range of places and activities which the borough has to offer through the implementation of integrated wayfinding, visitor information and public realm design." And its action plan includes a co-ordinated pedestrian and cycle wayfinding and information system linking key attractions and destinations, car parks and public transport interchanges. The related Town Centre Wayfinding Plan outlines how this is to be delivered in the town centre including supportive heads up mapping and online information. The provision of good quality signage would assist in advising users about off-road routes.

3.1.29. Stockport Highway and Street Furniture Design Policy

3.1.30. This document outlines the materials and street furniture which will be used on the borough's highways. This works in combination with the Highways Design Standard. This is designed to improve the public realm by making it a more legible environment and improving maintenance by focusing resources on to a smaller palette of materials. And will be useful where routes pass through and intersect with the road network. A similar document could be considered for the Rights of Way with respect to the different areas that these pass through and the user's needs. The design standard also provides a Flexipave standard detail for off-road routes.

3.1.31. Bridleways Maintenance Strategy for Stockport, 2009

3.1.32. The aim of the bridleway maintenance strategy is to identify a systematic approach to maintaining and improving bridleways throughout the borough and to enhance the working relationships/ partnerships between the Council and stakeholders such as primary users, residents, businesses and other legitimate users.

3.1.33. The objectives of the maintenance strategy are as follows:

- To meet the needs of primary users and those with legitimate rights to use the bridleways.
- To set out clear design standards and design options for the surfacing, drainage and maintenance of the bridleways.
- To provide the flexibility for each bridleway to be considered on its merit during maintenance assessment.
- To provide information on what can or cannot be done on bridleways and what surfaces are suitable where.
- To determine the proportion of residents' contribution towards bridleway maintenance where appropriate.
- To formulate a mechanism to incorporate the views of residents and other interested parties.
- To identify maintenance solutions which do not impose any additional costs to the Council.

3.2. Relevant Guidance

3.2.1. There is also a range of national guidance which should also influence the plan. The most relevant is listed below:

3.2.2. Rights of Way Circular (1/09) Guidance for Local Authorities Version 2 October 2009

3.2.3. This advice and guidance sets out the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)'s policy on public rights of way and its view of the law. It does not take the place of the legislation, but seeks to give an overview of it within a policy context. Defra considers that local authorities should regard public rights of way as an integral part of the complex of recreational and transport facilities within their area. This supports the Councils developing one public estate approach to these facilities and including the rights of way in the overall asset management plan.

3.2.4. Well Managed Highways Infrastructure: A Code of Practice, 2016

3.2.5. The Council has until October 2018 to implement the new code of practice. As part of the delivery of the code of practice the highway network should be considered as an integrated set of assets when developing highway infrastructure maintenance policies. This would include the Public Rights of Way and other walking, cycling or equestrian routes within the Council's control. This includes a network hierarchy, or a series of related hierarchies, which include all elements of the highway network, including carriageways, footways, cycle routes, structures, lighting and rights of way. The hierarchy to take into account current and expected use, resilience, and local economic and social factors such as industry, schools, hospitals and similar, as well as the desirability of continuity and of a consistent approach for walking and cycling. Clearly this work should be supported by and support the work of the ROWIP.

3.2.6. Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2017

3.2.7. The Government wants walking and cycling to be a normal part of everyday life, and the natural choices for shorter journeys such as going to school, college or work, travelling to the station, and for simple enjoyment. As part of our aim to build a society that works for all, they want more people to have access to safe, attractive routes for cycling and walking by 2040. The strategy and related Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans outline how this is to be achieved.

3.2.8. Understanding the Defra guidance on Public Path Structures (Gaps, Gates, Stiles, Cattle-grids etc.)

3.2.9. This document assists in delivering the DEFRA recommendations in "Authorising structures (gaps, gates & stiles) on rights of way Good practice guidance for local authorities on compliance with the Equality Act 2010" which were 1) have a published policy on how it will meet the requirements of the Equality Act in relation to public rights of way; 2) ensure that any structures

they give lawful authority to are clearly specified and documented; 3) consider including in any specification, provision to remove or vary the structure when the need for it changes or ceases; 4) consider displaying information on all lawful structures (including the accessibility) to enable someone with limited mobility to plan routes other than just those that are officially designated as 'easy access'.

3.2.10. Easy Access to Historic Landscapes by Historic England

3.2.11. The document looks at the fact that easier access will benefit almost all of us at some stage in our lives and not just people with disabilities. Whether during pregnancy, as a parent pushing a buggy or an older person who is finding steps a bit harder to manage, we all value thoughtful and effective design for easier access. The document helps advise on how to get the broadest possible public access to the historic environment.

3.2.12. *By All Reasonable Means Inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people by the Countryside Agency.*

3.2.13. This guidance document gives information on possible issues surrounding the use of routes by people with disabilities.

3.2.14. A chain of access is one of the main features of the document, highlighting that the following issues affect the likelihood of a disabled person visiting the countryside.

3.2.15. Improvements that could be useful are:

- Accessible information via the Internet, giving information that allows people to make decisions. Easily updatable information. Information should be provided in a range of media that is accessible at different levels.
- Access can be improved over time by the application of least restrictive access that can be agreed and achieved every time.

3.2.16. On the Right Track: surface requirements for shared use routes, Countryside Agency

3.2.17. The document advises that surfacing used for a different route is to be chosen with reference to 5 different factors:

- User requirements
- Legal Status and Land Management
- Route Environment
- Planning and consultation
- Budget and cost

3.2.18. There are differing user requirements dependent on user type and the type of trip made and a decision will need to be made about which user is the main one in different areas:

- Utility and Leisure Walkers – Hard all weather surfacing
- Recreational Walkers – Surfacing in keeping with the character of the route
- Utility and Leisure Cyclists – Smooth well maintained surfaces
- Recreational Cyclists – hard surfacing except for mountain bikers
- Horse Riders and Carriage Drivers – Soft surface free of small stones, glass and chippings

4. Assessment of the existing path network

4.1. Initial Review

4.1.1. The Council has reviewed the current network, the delivery of the last ROWIP and undertaken a consultation to develop an assessment of the network. The assessment considers the extent to which the current network meets the needs of the user and the opportunities to provide access for the mobility impaired. The preparation of the initial assessment included consultation with the public.

4.2. Current access provision

4.2.1. The borough of Stockport has an extensive network of formal and informal paths. Stockport has approximately 268km of recorded public rights of way (PROW) (i.e. footpaths bridleways and byways open to all traffic (BOAT) shown on the Definitive Map for Stockport). This includes 1 retaining wall, 48 footbridges and 13 culverts of sufficient dimensions to be under the care of the bridges and structures team.

Figure 1 Trans Pennine Trail

4.2.2. These PROW are joined by the routes on Council greenspace and alleys and other off-road routes to form a wider network which interacts with the road network. These routes comprise of a mixture of urban and rural routes which the Council seeks to address with sensitivity to their location. Through the Asset Management Strategy, the Council is looking to consolidate the way in which it treats the rights of way network. This is to reduce the variability in the quality of maintenance and the number of Council officers inspecting and maintaining the network.

4.2.3. The ROWIP action plan needs to work with the Asset Management Plan and its process to insure that the approach to managing the assets in a combined manner results in an improved maintenance regime that still reflects the needs of the different routes both on formal public rights of way and other rights of way such as park paths.

Figure 2 St Thomas' recreation path for pedestrians and cyclists.

4.2.4. Asset management planning also recognises the needs of different historical and environmental characteristics within the borough and seeks to address maintenance and improvements in line with their needs. The use of new materials and changes to routes within sensitive areas will be done in collaboration with officers from the Planning and Greenspace teams to insure they are appropriate.

4.3. Definitive Map and statement consolidation

4.3.1. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 obliged surveying authorities to record rights of way in their area and produce the legal record of paths in the form of a definitive map and statement, resulting – in the case of Stockport – in the Definitive Map and Statement for Stockport. The PROW areas are divided in to five historical wards within the borough – Marple, Stockport, Bredbury and Romiley, Hazel Grove and Bramhall, and Cheadle and Gatley. The Definitive Map and statement provide an inventory of the public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic) and their length, width and surface type, together with structures on the path such as bridges, gates and stiles for the five wards within the borough of Stockport. The relevant date of the current Definitive Map is 26 March 2012. The dimensions of the recorded routes are shown in Table 1. Section 53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 places a statutory duty on surveying authorities to keep the Definitive Map and statement under continuous review, making modification orders to update it as necessary.

Table 1 shows the different status of routes, as shown in the current Definitive Map and also described in the Definitive Map statement.

Path status	Users	Length (km)	Number of paths	% of network by length
Footpath	Walkers	233	587	86.9
Bridleway	Walkers, horse riders and cyclists	27	65	10.1
Restricted byways	Walkers, cyclists, equestrians and horse drawn carts	1	2	0.4
Byway open to all traffic (BOAT)	Walkers, horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn carriages and motor vehicles	7	10	2.6
Total		**268**	**664**	**100**

4.3.2. The Public Rights of Way network can be expanded. One method of doing this is a process of claiming. This is a process driven by the public where applications are submitted with evidence of use of the route. The process has detailed legal elements but basically this evidence can be documents showing the routes existed and has not been formally extinguished and /or evidence of 20 years of uninterrupted usage by a number of people of a route. Details are found on the Council website. On the 1st of Jan 2026 all rights of way for routes which existed pre 1949 and have not been added to the Definitive Map will be formally extinguished and so no longer be claimable.

4.4. Route Settings

4.4.1. The rights of way in the borough involve comprehensive mix of route types. Routes are not only defined by the users who have legal access but also the type of area they are in and the type of journey made on them. These range from:

4.4.2. Routes in urban areas – Cut-throughs and back alleys normal paved in a way similar to the routes alongside main roads. These are used for utility journeys as well as some leisure pursuits by local residents. Improvements and maintenance will be undertaken with consideration for utility users needs.

4.4.3. Routes in urban greenspace – Paths in recreation areas and parks which are a mixture of permeable and impermeable surfacing to allow for all year use of the green space as both a recreational facility and in many cases a utility route through the space. Some minor routes may be unpaved. While

respecting the greenspaces' overall character when the main routes are maintained or improved, the materials and style used will reflect the need to enable both utility and recreational access which benefits as many potential users as possible, in terms of improved access for people with disabilities. Minor routes may remain unpaved.

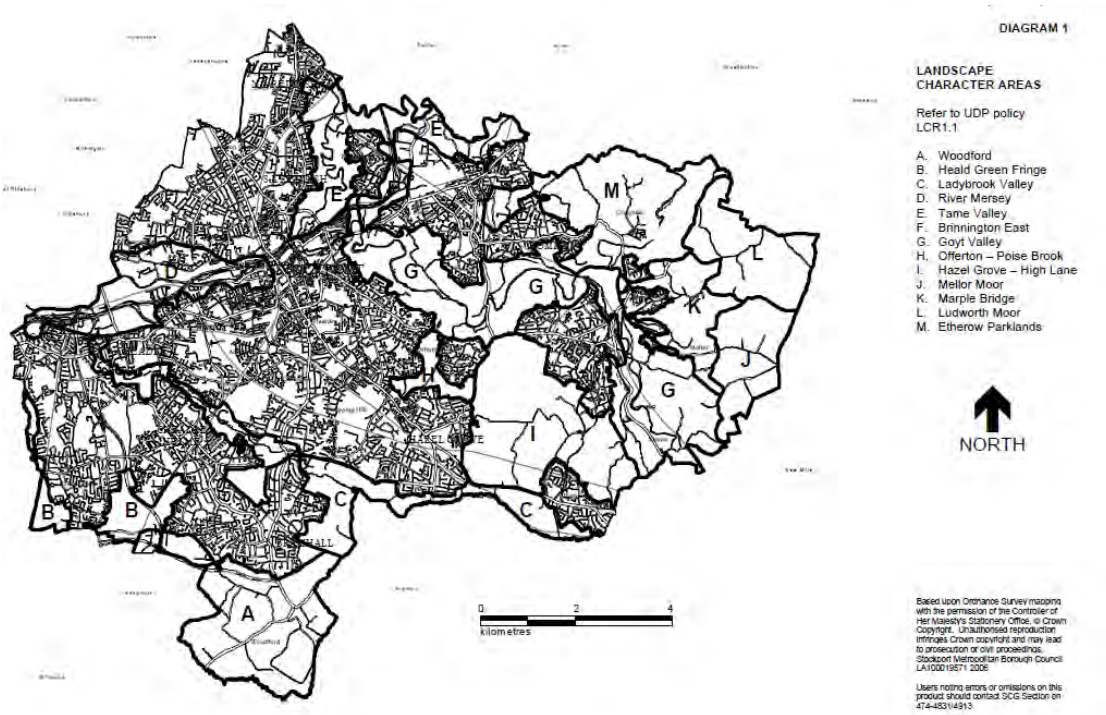
4.4.4. Routes in semi-urban areas – These routes in country parks and transition areas between the urban and rural including canal and riverside routes have the opportunity to fulfil a wide range of uses including:

- Opportunity for a rural experience for people with mobility limitations
- Off-road, longer distance, utility links between different parts of the borough.
- Longer off-road leisure routes within easier access of peoples' residences.

4.4.5. While respecting the overall character of the area there is a need to make these routes work for a wide range of potential users both in terms of a mixture of user groups and in terms of improving access to people with mobility limitations. Work will be discussed with conservation officers regarding greenspace and historic needs of an area as part of scheme development.

4.4.6. Routes in rural areas – These routes are often the more traditionally thought of public rights of way and can be a mixture of impermeably paved, permeably paved and unpaved routes. They often have a mixture of gates and stiles providing access control. Private access rights often need to be considered as well as user need. By their nature these routes are often the least accessible. However, they are also desirable to a range of users that may currently find them inaccessible and within reason and with consultation with landowners and interested bodies the accessibility of these routes can be improved in many instances. This can include adjustments to access controls, step removal, and in some cases surface improvement. It is accepted that some routes will remain unsurfaced. Where this is possible the Council will seek to do so. These types of improvements along with better information about the routes will make the network more accessible.

4.4.7. The Council is currently updating the Landscape Character Study of the borough. This was last undertaken in 2006 when the following map was produced.



4.4.8. The current Council policy on Landscape Character Areas, including the River Valleys states: The landscape and character of the borough's countryside will be preserved and enhanced, taking into account the distinctive attributes of local areas based on a landscape character assessment (including an assessment of the historic landscape character). Account will also be taken of the potential impact of development proposals on the character of areas adjoining the borough, including the Peak District National Park.

4.4.9. The environmental values and principally informal recreational role of the borough's river valleys will be safeguarded and enhanced. Formal outdoor recreation facilities may be permitted in river valleys but only where there are limited opportunities within adjacent residential areas to meet the essential leisure needs of local communities and where the facilities will play a positive role in addressing health and inequalities issues.

4.4.10. The ROWIP will work within the planning policies of the Council.

4.5. Cycle Routes

4.5.1. Cyclists are a significant rights of way network user group. A number of cyclable routes exist across the borough and this has increased during the last 10 years. Off-road tracks are often multi-user routes providing routes for walkers, and horse riders, although some exclude equestrians. Many routes have existed previously but have been officially opened to use by cyclists such as the canal towpaths, where the need for licences have been removed, or footpaths which have been upgraded to bridleways. Historically the Council has used the process of upgrading public rights of way footpaths to bridleways

to improve access as a pragmatic approach to expanding the network for cyclists because this keeps these routes on the Definitive Map which many users, especially walkers, feel is important to protect access in the long-term. The replacement of bridges or heightening of bridge parapets to meet safety guidelines has often been an important part of this process as has the identification of the appropriate surface type for all legitimate users. Some of these improvements can be small linkages which open up two areas of quieter roads or improve access to the wider off-road network as oppose to large lengths of route.

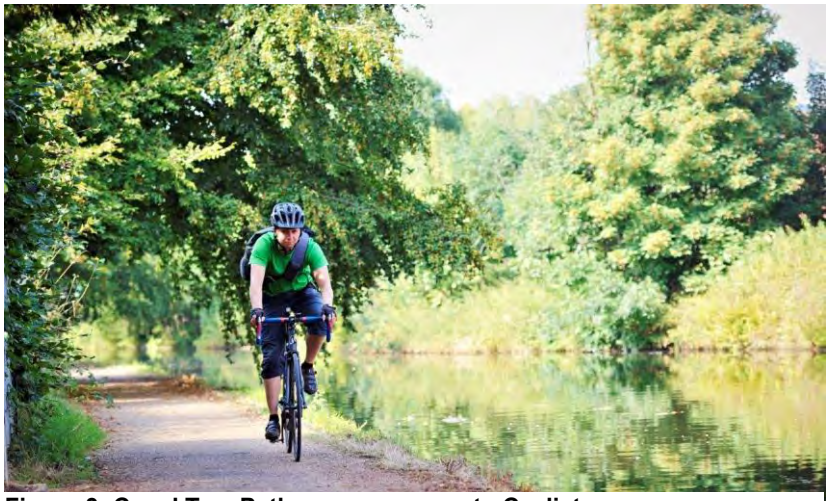


Figure 3: Canal Tow Paths are now open to Cyclists

4.5.2. The Council is continuing to develop provision for cyclists both on and off-road with the aim of encouraging less confident cyclists to utilise the mode for leisure and utility as well as providing for more confident cyclists who wish to use the road network. The ROWIP will continue to focus on routes away from the roadside both regarding new routes and investigating the opportunity to upgrade current paths to allow access to wider user groups. This just not just lead to improvements for cyclists but also for users with mobility needs such as wheelchairs and scooters. This will continue to include urban paths and alleys as cut-throughs between areas of quiet residential roads.

4.5.3. The Council will also continue to work to improve way different users interact with each other and understand their rights and responsibilities. This will include working to improve the way cyclists interact with pedestrians.

4.5.4. The Stockport Cycle Map which is made available for free to the public in paper form and on the Transport for Greater Manchester website http://cycling.tfgm.com/Pages/Cycle-Maps.aspx is regularly updated to promote the developing network.

4.6. Equestrian Routes

4.6.1. Currently routes for Equestrians only make up 13% of the borough's Public Rights Of Way. While there are other routes in the wider rights of way network that these riders can use this still indicates a lack of usable routes. The Council recognises the need to continue to support the needs of equestrian users not just because of legal commitments but also because of the mental

and physical health benefits of equestrian pursuits and the ability for people with disabilities to get involved in the sport. Stockport benefits from riding for the disabled groups in the area. The Council also recognises the economic benefits of equestrian pursuits in the borough.

4.6.2. In recent years route availability has increased for equestrians in the form of bridleways. However, this has mainly been due to the funding of the leisure and utility network for cyclists, funded through grants from central government, as opposed to direct expansion for equestrian users. This has the joint benefit of enabling both cyclists and horse riders to get off congested local roads and in to areas which they will find more pleasant and safer.

4.6.3. The Council is aware that the design and implementation of these routes need to strike a careful balance between the needs of all the likely users to ensure that the equestrian users are properly facilitated while the cyclists who increasingly also used the route are appropriately catered for. The Council is also aware that there are tensions between users on shared use paths but feel that the increased available of routes to several groups provides a positive outcome within the finite space and resources available. As previously stated, the Council will continue to work with users to understand their rights and responsibilities of path users.

4.7. Paths on the street register

4.7.1. In addition to the recorded rights of way on the Definitive Map, it is also necessary to consider other routes such as, ginnels, alleyways and paths in housing estates that are adopted and maintainable at public expense and also, those that are unadopted including those with unclear status which are not currently adopted / maintained at public expense but do provide useful links to the public.

4.7.2. A total of 3,869 adopted routes are recorded within the borough of Stockport, covering a distance of 943.6 km. A sample survey for the borough of Stockport conducted in (2017), indicated that there are 660 un-adopted routes in existence, with a total distance of 140.1 km.

4.7.3. Opportunities to improve the overall rights of way network in the borough and the relating walkability and rideability of the borough for sustainable transport uses needs to consider all of the potential infrastructure.

4.7.4. The Council has a policy of positive path management to address issues on these routes such as anti-social behaviour. This has historically had an ultimate response of gating on adopted routes. The gating of routes is no longer pursued by the Council due to the high costs of implementation and maintenance that comes with the process. Routes that were gated need to be reviewed regularly to identify if there is a need and local support to maintain

the gates. In some locations for example the Walnut Tree estates gate has been decommissioned.

4.8. Permissive paths

4.8.1. Permissive paths are routes allowed with the consent of the landowner. There are permissive paths in the borough and they mainly cross land owned by public bodies. The majority of these routes are over Council-owned land that are either disused railway line formations or green spaces. The most significant in terms of length are those such as the Middlewood Way, and sections of the Fred Perry Way. However, as the Council seeks to encourage the use of sustainable transport and to manage its assets as one estate the minor routes in greenspace are increasingly being seen as key to improving connectivity in the borough and providing routes away from traffic and linking areas of low traffic and connections to other off-road routes.

Figure 4 Middlewood Way

4.9. Access land

4.9.1. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act 2000), introduced a new right that empowered users to walk freely, without staying on paths, on land classified as mountain, moorland, heath and downland, together with all areas of registered common land. Across the borough of Stockport, there are three open access areas in the following locations; Cloughend, Ludworth Quarry and Paradise Quarry, there are also a number of sites registered as common land.

4.10. Access to parks and green spaces

4.10.1. Stockport borough parks, greenspaces and woodlands provide access and opportunities to walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and are important visitor attractions in their own right. In Stockport there are at least 146 recognised green spaces totalling 1816 hectares in the borough of which only 29 green spaces are formal parks with a total area of 360 hectares Currently the greenspaces include a range of paths for walkers, plus paths which allow cyclists and /or equestrians, 7 bridges, 83 footbridges,

Figure 5 Etherow Park Path

23 culverts, 155 retaining walls, 2 tunnels and a range of seating, lighting and other assets.

4.10.2. Five of the local greenspaces are venues for Park Runs. These are held at Woodbank Memorial Park, Mersey Vale Nature Park, Bruntwood Park, Bramhall Park, and Brabyns Park.

4.10.3. Many of the parks also benefit from Friends of Groups which assist in the maintenance and activities in the park to make the best of the space for local people. There is also a group of volunteers for the Trans Pennine Trail. This is an area of volunteering we hope will expand to include the wider path network.

4.10.4. The ability to utilise the routes through these parks to provide improved links in the rights of way network is an important part of the ability to deliver improvements to the network through the ROWIP. The ROWIP will aim to include, benefit and exploit more fully the benefits of the borough's green spaces to the network.

4.11. Network condition

4.11.1. The Council as a highway authority is responsible for the maintenance of public rights of way and has a duty to assert and protect the rights of users. There are five historic wards within the borough that the PROW are divided by which are – Marple, Stockport, Bredbury and Romiley, Hazel Grove and Bramhall, and Cheadle and Gatley. This can be seen in the map below. The distribution of the different status of routes that comprise the network – footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic, vary amongst the historic wards with Marple having the highest number of routes.

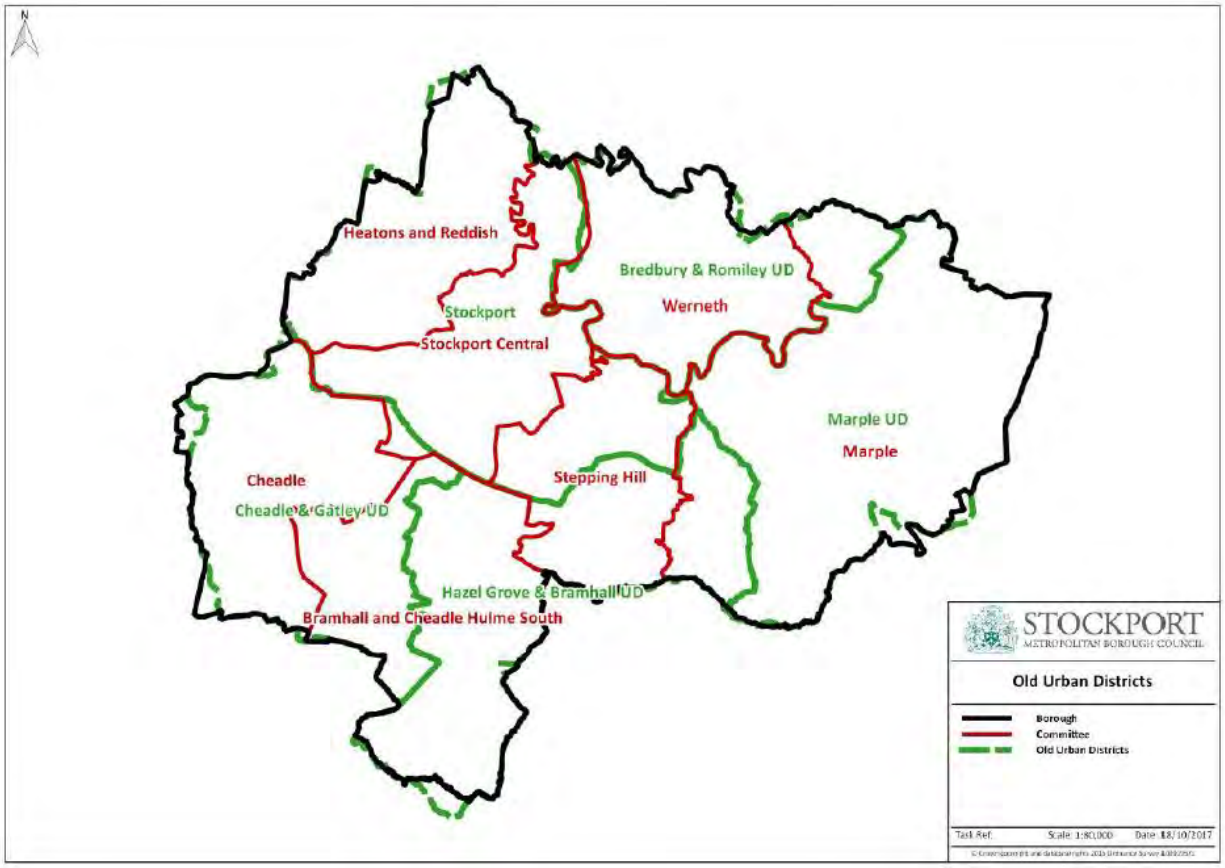


Table 2 District of Stockport Network classification and dimension

Path status	Users	Length (km)	Number of paths	% of total network length
Footpath	Walkers	21	65	7.8
Bridleway	Horse riders, walkers and cyclists	3	10	1.1
Byway open to all traffic (BOAT)	Walkers, horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn carriages and motor vehicles	-	-	-
Restricted	Walkers, equestrians, cyclists, horse drawn carts	0.25	1	0.09

Table 3 District of Marple Network classification and dimension

Path status	Users	Length (km)	Number of paths	% of total network length
Footpath	Walkers	90	193	33.35
Bridleway	Horse riders, walkers and cyclists	11	19	41.51
Byway open to all traffic (BOAT)	Walkers, horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn carriages and motor vehicles	6	9	2.2

Table 4 District of Hazel Grove and Bramhall Network classification and dimension

Path status	Users	Length (km)	Number of paths	% of total network length
Footpaths	Walkers	43	111	15.93
Bridleway	Horse riders, walkers and cyclists	1	5	0.37
Byway open to all traffic (BOAT)	Walkers, horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn carriages and motor vehicles	-	-	-
Restricted Byway	Walkers, Cyclists, equestrians and horse drawn carts	-	-	-

Table 5 District of Bredbury and Romiley Network classification and dimension

Path Status	Users	Length (Km)	Number of paths	% of total network length
Footpath	Walkers	39	99	14.4
Bridleway	Walkers, horse riders and cyclists	9.1	18	3.37
Byway open to all traffic	Walkers, horse riders, cyclists and motor vehicles	0.1	1	0.04
Restricted Byway	Walkers, cyclists, equestrians and horse drawn carts	0.5	1	0.18

Table 6 District of Cheadle and Gatley Network classification and dimension

Path status	Users	Length (km)	Number of paths	% of total network length
Footpath	Walkers	40	119	14.8
Bridleway	Walkers, horse riders and cyclists	5	13	1.85
Byway open to all traffic	Walkers, horse riders, cyclists and motor vehicles	1	2	0.37
Restricted Byway	Walkers, cyclists, equestrians and horse drawn carts	-	-	-

4.11.2. The condition of other off-road routes are also monitored by the relevant team such as greenspace or highway inspectors, where the route is adopted, to insure that routes are maintained appropriately. Routes that are adopted highway come under the rules outlined in the Council's Highway Inspection and Repair Policy. Routes in greenspace are currently being reviewed to

identify a new inspection and repair process. Through improved asset management the Council is seeking to move towards a more cohesive method of inspection.

4.12. Network maintenance –statutory duty and responsibilities

4.12.1. The Council as a highway authority is responsible for the maintenance of not just highways (including public rights of way) but also other paths on its land and also in extreme cases taking actions on private land if it is necessary to secure the safety of the public. In the case of all highways (including public rights of way) it also has a duty to assert and protect the rights of users. The routes recorded on the Definitive Map are highways maintainable at public expense unless a specific alternative is in place. Therefore, the Council has duty to maintain them to a safe and proper standard. The current maintenance guidance to highways authorities "Well-Managed Highways Code of Practice" advises that all routes both PROW and other Council paths should benefit from functional hierarchies to guide a risk based approach to maintenance and inspection.

4.12.2. The Rights of Way Act 1990 sets out the responsibilities of landowners with regard to ploughing and cropping. In summary, the Act requires landowners to reinstate or retain all cross-field paths and field edge paths that are susceptible to ploughing or cropping. The Council has a duty to ensure this Act is complied with and has the power to take enforcement action and prosecute if required.

4.12.3. Landowners are also responsible for the maintenance of stiles, gates and hedges. The Public Rights of Way team work closely with landowners to ensure that furniture on paths is safe and convenient. In reality the majority of maintenance responsibility for the public rights of way network is undertaken by the Council.

4.12.4. As a measure of good practice, complaints and reports relating to network maintenance are logged on the Public Rights of Way Jobs Database for subsequent site inspection. After a site inspection, the job is given a priority rating and included in the annual maintenance schedule.

4.12.5. The Council has outside commitments to specific rights of way in relation to their position as national routes for example the Council's commitments to the maintenance of the Trans Pennine Trail.

4.12.6. There is an ongoing programme to resurface some rights of way either as part of general maintenance or route enhancement. These may be linked to other capital schemes as appropriate to gain best value for money.

4.12.7. Going further in to the future as rights of way network maintenance is more comprehensively included in the Asset Management system of the Council, the priority of repairs and resurfacing of the rights of way network as a whole will become more clearly defined with in the overall lifecycle planning process of the Council's assets.

4.12.8. Where rights of way have been lit, consideration is then also needed for the maintenance of those lights. This is all done through the Council's Street Lighting Team. Lighting is not always appropriate on rights of way and careful consideration needs to be given not only to the likely use times of the route involved but also to the impact it will have on the local wildlife and the aesthetics of the area. Where lighting is utilised, timed lighting should be the initial choice to minimise negative impacts with the lit time kept to a minimum.

4.13. Network promotion

4.13.1. The promotion of active travel and modal shift as part of a sustainable transport system is an important element of the Greater Manchester 2040 Transport Strategy. Promoting the right of way network is an essential part of raising awareness of the potential of these forms of transport. This supports the aims in Greater Manchester and Stockport to address congestion through promoting more sustainable mode use for shorter journeys and to create healthier residents through encouraging physical activity and improving air quality.

Figure 6 Signage

4.13.2. Promoting the network of routes within the borough also raises awareness to all potential user groups that they can utilise the network to access facilities and opportunities in the borough as well as to provide leisure opportunities which support mental and physical health.

4.13.3. A range of promotional activities are organised with the support of Stockport Council by independent groups that encourage people to use the off-road network within the borough of Stockport.

4.13.4. Further groups take place without Council support such as riding for the disabled and dementia walk events but utilise the rights of way.

4.13.5. Promoted routes within the borough of Stockport include:

4.13.6. Walking Routes:

- Ethrow Goyt Valley Way
- Fred Perry Way

- Ladybrook Valley Interest Trail
- Middlewood Way (also usable by Cyclists and Equestrians)
- Midshires Way (also usable by Cyclists and Equestrians)
- Trans Pennine Trail (also usable by Cyclists and Equestrians)
- Cheshire Ring Canal Walk (also usable by Cyclists)
- Podcast – Manchester and Stockport Branch of Ashton Canal
- Podcast - Peak Forest Canal and the Roman Lakes

4.13.7. Cycling Routes

- Alan Newton Way (also usable by Equestrians and Pedestrians)
- Halls Route (also usable by pedestrians)

4.13.8. The increased number of respondents to the ROWIP consultation identifying as equestrians means that there is a need to ensure that suitable routes are also promoted for these users in the future.

4.13.9. There is also a recognised need to improve the quality of information available to users with access needs such as step free routes and wide access points to improve their confidence for route planning.

4.13.10. While the need to improve information is important it is also acknowledged that signage done in a non-sympathetic way can have a negative impact on the aesthetic appeal of a right of way. It is also acknowledged that signage is often subject to vandalism and so needs to be robust to minimise the opportunity for this and minimise the maintenance costs of signage.

4.14. Demographic analysis

4.14.1. The density of Public Rights of Way varies across the district. Broadly, our analysis shows that there are more recorded routes in rural areas. Of the assessment areas, Marple has the longest public rights of way network. However, if other off-road routes are brought in to consideration, such as alleyways and routes through greenspace, the availability of these rights of way does become more evenly spread.

4.14.2. Rights of way provide valuable links between communities and to local services such as schools and shops. In rural areas the rights of way network may have extra value for recreation drawing people from outside the local area. Larger parks and Country Parks can also have this effect. In urban centres they are more likely to be used for local journeys although they also provided recreational opportunities such as for exercise. Individual paths are valued by people for different reasons and this will impact on their future development and maintenance style. There is a need to do further consultation for these routes if maintenance is being considered for amendment to make sure that they continue to meet the needs of local users and that they also meet the needs of hitherto unidentified need. There will

always be conflicting desires for all routes and the differing views should be carefully considered to reach a workable compromise.

4.15. Health analysis

4.15.1. The Council plan looks to promote healthy communities and address the inequalities in health and deprivation across the district. Areas of the district with the highest health inequalities deprivation and highest percentage of people with a long term illness have limited Definitive Public Rights of Way but it is not without access to off-road routes with significant routes such as the Trans Pennine Trail passing through them. The areas also benefits from access to green space such as Reddish Vale and Vernon Park access to which are being improved as part of the Stockport Town Centre Access Package.

4.15.2. The benefits of physical activity for improvements to health are well documented, it protects against heart disease, obesity, diabetes and osteoporosis. Providing a more accessible network for walking, cycling, horse riding and other exercise will contribute to improvements in health. The rights of way network offers a significant opportunity to facilitate the national and local targets for regular exercise. This is shown in the responses to the consultation as part of the development of the plan where a large number of recreational users responded.

4.15.3. Recent research has also shown that access to nature for is beneficial for mental and physical health increasing the knowledge of the health improvement that can be derived from utilising Greenspace and PROW in the countryside beyond just the opportunity to be physically active. This is being advocated by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in a number of their guidance documents. It is recognised that by the Council that improving activity levels will have a positive impact on the health and social care costs in the borough.

4.15.4. The Council is aware that many of the off-road routes in the borough have issues surrounding accessibility for people with disabilities. The Council is also aware of the need to encourage people with disabilities to participate in sport and physical activity. The Council looks to use the least restrictive access controls on off-road routes in the borough. Where access controls are needed, due to other users of the area e.g. stock control or the need to address antisocial behaviour due to issues raised by the police or local residents, the Council will work to make these as accessible as possible. Reviews of the current access controls on the network will take place as part of improvement or maintenance schemes. The Council is also aware that there is a need to, where possible, remove steps or provide an alternative route.

4.15.5. The issue of air quality has also become an increased area of concern with regards to health and the provision of routes to travel and exercise away from trafficked routes and so the worst air pollution is of interest especially when

considering routes to educational facilities. The potential for these routes to be used for shorter journeys and so reduce the levels of pollution over all is also considered to be important and is a key aspect of the Greater Manchester plans to improve air quality.

5. Consultation

5.1. Initial Consultation

5.1.1. The initial consultation took place via a questionnaire that was on the Internet and emailed to interested parties, including those known to be involved in the use of public rights of way or sustainable modes of travel. The consultation took place for 6 weeks between the 6th February and 17th March 2017. It obtained the public's views on:

- Why they used Rights of Way (including off-road routes not formally designated as public rights of way such as routes in parks and alleyways)
- How often they use rights of way (including off-road routes not formally designated as public rights of way such as routes in parks and alleyways)
- What types of modes they used on the rights of way
- What types of modes they used to access rights of way
- How they find out about routes
- What they most valued in terms of rights of way maintenance and looked for in terms of facilities
- What they would be willing to do to support the maintenance and promotion of the use of routes

5.1.2. Consultation, while not formalised, also includes the views and information that officers have gained from contact with the public at the ongoing Cycling, Walking and Stockport Disability Transport and Access Forums, Local Area Access Forum, ongoing discussion with the Director Of Public Health and issues discussed at the Safer Stockport Partnership and the Positive Path Management Group which are attended by the Police.

5.1.3. The survey was housed on the Council's Have Your Say page with other Council Questionnaires and so available to all residents with social media used to promote its presents. The questionnaire was also available in libraries for those who need a hard copy. While the consultation was taking place a report was taken to all Area Committees asking for comments from Councillors and also to the Local Access Forum, Disability Stockport Transport and Access Forum and Cycle User Group.

5.2. The Findings

5.2.1. The consultation was responded to by 1006 individuals. This is 154 more responses than to the previous questionnaire in 2006.

5.2.2. The reasons to use off-road routes, such as Public Rights of Way, paths in parks and alleyways, are predominantly for leisure purposes.

5.2.3. Overall, pedestrian movement (both walking and running) is the most predominant use of the rights of way network in Stockport. This is the same as when the original survey was undertaken for the 2007 ROWIP document. Cycling is the second most identified use of the Stockport rights of way network with Equestrians coming third. It should be noted that the number of equestrians responding to the questionnaire has increased since the last questionnaire in 2006.

5.2.4. When asked how often they used Rights of Way the highest response rate, at twenty eight percent, of users said that they use a rights of way two to three times a week. Those responding with once a week, 4 times a week, and everyday all recorded a response rate of 17%. This shows that responders to the questionnaire are taking these routes very regularly. It should also be noted that the percentage of responders identifying that they use a right of way at least once a week has increased from 65% to 79% when compared to the consultation results in 2006.

5.2.5. When asked what facilities users look for when using Rights of Way, the answer with 64% of the respondents was ‘routes near my home’. The second most popular reason was ‘places to sit, rest or picnic’ at 39% closely followed by routes ‘near a car park’ at 36%. Of the reasons given by the respondents ticking ‘other’, ‘Traffic free routes’ were the most repeated desire this was followed by being ‘suitable for horse-riding or for dog walking’. The ‘quality of the surface being good’ was the 4th most identified issue, with ‘routes suitable for cycling’ being the 5th most repeated comment.

5.2.6. The most common way users look for further information on new routes is through leaflets and maps, this accounted for 69% of those that answered.

5.2.7. When asked to rank which services provided that users found most important with regards to rights of way (1 being most important and 9 least important) the overall result was:

1. Surface condition
2. Obstruction removal
3. Drainage
4. Litter Removal
5. Maintenance of greenery

6. Signage
7. Lighting
8. Route information
9. Speed at which the Council responded to queries about routes

5.2.8. The majority of respondents identified walking as their main way of accessing rights of way, at 76% of respondents. Car was the second most popular way at 49%. Bicycle accounts for 37% of access and Horse for 17% with a further 5% using horseboxes.

5.2.9. When asked for information on what could be done to improve the network there were a range of responses. However, the following commonalities can be identified:

- 22 responses focused on cleaning and bin provision for litter and dog waste.
- 18 responses focussed on surface quality
- 15 focussed on drainage improvements.
- 14 focused on the provision of information in the form of internet or other publications with a further
- 12 specifically identifying signage and mapping improvements including accessibility information.
- 8 respondents identified issues with other types of maintenance such as greenery or stiles.
- 7 responders identified issues with other users due to speed or inconsiderate use of routes.

5.2.10. The Local Access Forum made the following comments regarding improvements to the network:

1. Consultation with all user groups who use bridleways as they are true multi user tracks especially horse riders and disabled users
2. Expanding the bridleway network by judicious upgrading of footpaths, with surfaces suitable for all users (non-slip unsealed surfaces safe for cyclists and shod or barefoot horses). Removal of barriers and steps from short but important links between housing estates, usually on ‘no cycling’ paths that are still used by cyclists but prevent use by Mobility scooters, wheelchairs, bigger prams and horses (even though some are narrow - most are short and the other end easily seen to be able to wait until someone has passed)
3. Linking paths to create longer routes and more circular shared-use off-road routes (horses in particular should not have to share routes with motorised vehicles)
4. Better signage

5. Better surfacing of ROW, Cheshire East & Tameside use sandstone which is so much nicer underfoot for all users, whereas Stockport insist on using recycled rubbish that is harsh underfoot for all users including cyclists._ Absolutely no sealed surfaces on rights of way, if we wanted to walk/ ride on tarmac there are plenty of roads and pavements to use.
6. Resources to be provided to ensure that all PROW claims (DMMOs) are processed within a year.
7. A Council commitment to speedy resolution of any problems reported, including a commitment to enforcement action within a specific time (not more than 6 months).
8. A Council commitment that no further Definitive Rights of Way will be gated, and a formal review protocol for Gating Orders / Public Spaces Protection Orders. Updating the Definitive Map (again) and, in particular, reviewing the Statement to include all furniture.

5.2.11. Councillors also made the following comments:

- It was commented that Stockport did a lot of work to publicise public rights of way and that any work that can be done to further educate the public on their role and where they were located would be welcomed.
- Members highlighted the importance of existing public rights of way being maintained through the community payback scheme.
- It would be helpful if the online map of the rights of way and footpaths included the appropriate number making them more easily identifiable especially if any concerns need to be report or complaint made.
- It would be helpful to have an online form to report issues on the network.
- There were often complex ownership issues on Public Rights of Way (PROW) which caused problems, including blocking and lack of maintenance by private landowners. There often seemed to be a lack of enforcement assistance.
- Using QR codes on maps and notice boards would help improve access to internet support for other languages and enhanced information. This was something that could be included in the Digital by Design programme.
- Lighting on PROW in urban or semi-rural areas was often inadequate and could create a safety issue.
- The PROW process would be complicated by 2026 deadline for new claims to be made and processed. The Council would need to consider prioritising those routes that are most important to claim before that deadline.
- Connectivity with pathways adjacent to the canal network needed to feature within the Plan.

5.2.12. For further details see the Consultation Report 2017.

5.3. Draft ROWIP Consultation

5.3.1. The draft ROWIP was subject to a 12 week statutory public consultation period, which ran from 16th of October 2017 to the 8th of January 2018. Comments were invited from residents, our partners, user groups, and other interested agencies. All comments were considered and appropriate amendments have been included in the final ROWIP. This is reflected in the Draft ROWIP - Consultation Report.

5.3.2. Overall the response to the consultation was positive, however, issues were highlighted regarding: the protection of the countryside, the conflicting needs of different users of the rights of way, the conflict of making routes accessible for people with specific access needs and the preservation of routes as they are, maintenance of routes, and the need to encourage a range of the community to use the routes. These issues have been addressed in the amendments to the report.

5.3.3. The progress of the ROWIP will continue to be monitored for success via the Transport Annual Monitoring Report process which advises the overall asset management plan.

6. Conclusions

6.1. The overall conclusions are broadly the same as in the 2007 plan. However, the details behind these conclusions and the best way to address them have been amended to reflect the current resources available to the Council and the current needs of the public.

6.2. The actions have been adapted to work towards a more combined approach to delivery in line with the Council's Asset Management Plan and one estate approach. The Council is also developing a larger online presence for reporting and requesting services that the Rights of Way processes will need to become part of. Due to the reductions in Council resources, the plan also looks to support delivery through partners and other groups by facilitating their ability to be involved or using the planning process to insure that the right of way network is protected and developed. This is to be in line with work already undertaken by greenspaces to support the Parks and other greenspaces in the borough and the work undertaken by Community Rail Partnerships to support local rail stations.

6.3. There are 7 conclusions

6.3.1. **Conclusion 1. - Updating the network – The Path network is valued and has a multitude of uses and users. However, there is a need to update the network to reflect current needs and use. When doing this the rights of way network cannot be considered in isolation. Use of,**

management of and improvements to rights of way are interlinked with many other existing and proposed plans and strategies. The Council also needs to work with local communities to enable them to support and utilise their off-road network. The main conclusion from the consultation work is that the Rights of Way network is still valued and has many uses. The increased response rate to the consultation and the wider range of respondent's backgrounds and ages indicates that the user base of the network is growing.

6.3.2. The network is not just the public rights of way network and needs to include the other off-road routes maintained by the Council and others to enable it to form part of the overall transport network in the borough and support the use of sustainable modes both as transport and form of physical activity.

6.3.3. The Council is developing a system of asset management that considers the needs of the network as a whole and maintains it in line with consideration to minimising whole life cost while minimising risks and maximising resilience.

6.3.4. Public rights of way are not always used on their legally recorded routes. Parts of the path network could be diverted to reflect current patterns of use and/or resolve longstanding issues including make routes more useful for the modern day.

6.3.5. New development needs to consider the best way to treat and, where beneficial, improve current paths while also identifying and providing new off-road links to sport the use of sustainable modes.

6.3.6. It is essential to work co-operatively with developers, owners and occupiers of land to better manage the path network, to identify and achieve missing links, to reflect changed use, and update the network to meet present and future needs.

6.3.7. The benefits of partnership working and supporting local people's involvement in the rights of way network is clear. It is only possible to achieve change and improvement in the network with the support of all those involved.

6.3.8. The action plan predominantly identifies Stockport Council Officer groups however, it is recognised that there are a range of partners who need to be involved including but not limited to:

- Local residents and businesses
- Social Housing Providers
- Developers

- Specialist Groups such as the Greenspace Forum, Disability Stockport, Trans Pennine Trail Partnership and Sustrans.

6.3.9. **Conclusion 2 - Information - Improved information can increase use of the path network. Information on wider access to greenspaces and on other access routes needs to be widely available. Improvement to signage can also encourage wider use of the network** Information was not seen to be a top priority in the 2017 consultation unlike in the previous consultation. This could reflect the changes in internet offer and mobile technology in this time as well as a change in priority when it comes to the maintenance of the network as a whole.

6.3.10. On-site information, web based information, and guided walks to familiarise people with routes could potentially still provide an increase in the number and types of users on different routes. The borough's paths are used for a variety of purposes for exercise, utility, recreation and journeys. These could be encouraged by providing additional information about paths, their destination, distance and what will be encountered on the path. There is also a need to improve the information for specific groups such as those with specific access needs.

6.3.11. The Council provides mapping, signage and leaflets or internet information about a range of locations that are accessible for the public. This information, while not seen as a priority to all users, is important for users who are new to an area. As the Council increasingly relies on providing information through its internet and social media systems it is important to insure that quality information is provided for those areas which need it in a coordinated and accessible manner.

6.3.12. While signage was not one of the most important elements of improvement that respondents wanted to see; it was 5th in importance to the Local Access Forum and specifically mentioned in another of open responses about improvements.

6.3.13. The expectation is that by continuing to provide signage along routes particularly complicated routes or those to specific facilities we will continue to improve confidence in the use of the network. This is critical for long distance routes and ones that move between styles of facility. However, this will need to be balanced with the cost of maintenance and the effect of clutter on the area.

6.3.14. **Conclusion 3 – The record of public rights of way and other access routes needs to be kept up to date.** The growing move to asset

management, a risk based approach to inspection and maintenance and a one estate approach for all Council assets, means that the accurate collection of data is increasingly vital.

6.3.15. Good quality information will not only assist path users, landowners and developers but will also help in setting targets, identifying lifecycle plans and priorities for improvements.

6.3.16. The Council will also need to continue to meet its duties regarding the continuous review of the Definitive Map and the identification of routes that can be claimed based on information provided by the public.

6.3.17. As the Council moves to increasingly automated processes for dealing with reports and requests from the public it will be easier to ensure that the records of works and requests are collated to support such data. The ROWIP must work to take the best advantage of modern technology possible.

6.3.18. **Conclusion 4 – Missing links – There is need for additional off-road routes to address the needs of a range specific user types. Carefully considered path improvements can improve the overall utility of the network for a range of users. The users benefiting from improved linkages will be identified on a case by case basis.** There remains a need to improve routes to meet the needs of the range of users on the network. The facilities available to cyclists and equestrians in the borough have increased over the last 10 years and the provision of links and connections to fill gaps in the network have been undertaken. However, horse riders and cyclists still have more limited opportunities to use the network than pedestrians.

6.3.19. The opportunities for carriage driving and lawful vehicle use are also very limited. Although the demand for this type of route is not likely to be high, it is reasonable to assume that if improved networks were available this could cater for latent demand, as there would be places where people could go. Such provision, however, cannot be seen to be a priority at the current time.

6.3.20. Pedestrians including those with accessibility needs such as pushchairs and wheelchairs, have missing links too, including a need to consider crossing points and appropriate linkages over rivers, train lines and high speed roads. Where these are addressed consideration of providing access for other users such as cyclists or equestrians is worth being considered.

6.3.21. Changes to the network can be particularly important to people with mobility problems or to increase the number of routes available to cyclists and

equestrians. However, these improvements can only be realised where there is community support and continued maintenance is also achievable.

6.3.22. Surfacing choices and drainage are shown to be key to ensuring the usefulness of the network to as many users as possible following the consultation while lighting is an improvement that needs more careful consideration. The consultation did not rank lighting as highly in terms of importance and both costs and impact on the environment mean that it should be only utilised where there is a specifically identified need.

6.3.23. Conclusion 5 – Access for all – People with all types of access needs have limited access to the path network both physically and in terms of information and this must be addressed. Paths should be available to all and their usage should be encouraged to all parts of the community. Where good access can be provided it should be and where it can't as much as possible should done to avoid restricting or limiting access unnecessarily. A small response was received from the disabled community about the use of rights of way. However, comments were received about a need to improve the quality of the information available to enable those with additional needs to decide if a location is suitable for them to use. The need to consider the accessibility of gaps and gates for those with larger wheelchairs, scooters and specialist bicycles has also been raised with the Council and needs to be considered and addressed as possible. This will need to be done with the involvement of the relevant groups to insure that the actions taken are appropriate to the needs of the community. In historic and environmentally sensitive locations the relevant planning and greenspace officers will be involved in the planning to achieve a suitable outcome.

6.3.24. Our consultation work in the 2006 ROWIP Consultation showed that some minority groups felt less able to utilise the rights of way network than others. The response rates from the 2017 questionnaire saw an increase in the response rate from none white British respondents and younger people although there is still much to be done to improve the involvement of these groups in the network. Improved information about potential routes and the importance of an active lifestyle will both be important to encourage and facilitate these users.

6.3.25. **Conclusion 6 – Network maintenance – Maintenance is a concern to all path users especially surface quality and drainage.**Surface Maintenance was identified as the most important issue for consultation responders. Maintenance concerns regarding drainage and greenery maintenance were also seen to be important. This is similar to issues identified in the previous consultation.

6.3.26. Signage and lighting maintenance also need to considered as part of the overall package although this is considered to be a lower priority by consultation respondents.

6.3.27. As part of the new Well Managed Highways Infrastructure Code of Practice and the Transport Asset Management Strategy there is a need to develop a hierarchy for inspection and maintenance of rights of way to reflect the needs of the routes and users and to manage risk. The preferences in the consultation need to be utilised to direct the priorities of the asset management process as well as to direct the prioritisation of upcoming work plans.

6.3.28. **Conclusion 7 - Inconsiderate Users - Problems of inconsiderate user behaviour need to be addressed as this deters people from using paths and impacts on their enjoyment.** The consultation study showed that people identified litter and obstruction removal as important to their enjoyment of the rights of way network. They also identified issues around speed and other users being inconsiderate as issues that needed to be addressed to improve the network. This included issues around dog fouling and control. Some respondents to consultation feel that the Council should use more of their legal powers to enforce against those behaving inconsiderately including landowners not respecting the rules about PROW. An example of this would be not adhering to rules about the placement of dangerous livestock.

7. Statement of action

The local highway authority is required to produce a statement of action. This action plan comprises the proposals the Council is to take for the management of local rights of way and how an improved network of local rights of way is to be secured, with regard to matters dealt with in the assessment.

The statement of action sets out the activities that will address the 7 conclusions identified within the ROWIP.

Funding levels against each action are only indicative and do not guarantee that funding is available

Key to Costs

L < £10,000

M = £10,000- £100,000

H >£100,000

Conclusion 1: Updating the network – The Path network is valued and has a multitude of uses and users. However, there is a need to update the network to reflect current needs and use. When doing this the rights of way network cannot be considered in isolation. Use of, management of and improvements to rights of way are interlinked with many other existing and proposed plans and strategies. The Council also needs to work with local communities to enable them to support and utilise their off-road network.

Conclusion 1: Recommended actions.				
Action	**Cost Estimate**	**Key Date**	**Stakeholders**	**Outcome**
1.1 Monitoring User Needs	L	Ongoing	PROW Highways and Transportation Services	Annual Transport Monitoring Report to include information about Right of Way including satisfaction.
1.2 Off-Road network to be included in overall asset management planning as part of network.	L	October 2018	PROW Highways and Transportation Services	Off-road routes included in Network Hierarchy for delivery of recommendations of “Well Managed Highways Code of Practice”.
1.3 Route statuses clarified where necessary.	L	Ongoing	PROW ICT Greenspace Highways and Transportation Services	Route status work such as claims, amendments and clarification work to be carried out as required.
1.4 Asset management processes to be developed to consider all users. Amendments to overall strategy to be implemented	L	Ongoing	PROW Highways and Transportation Services Network Asset	Asset Management Plan implemented to reflect the recommendations of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

when necessary.			Maintenance	
1.5 Work with Planning Policy to insure that the Local Plan reflects the needs of the current network.	L	Winter 2019	Planning Policy PROW Greenspace Traffic Services Highways and Transportation	Transport Policies in the Local Plan reflect the needs of the modern rights of way user. This will protect the current network.
1.6 Ensure that Greater Manchester Policy supports the development of the network for all users.	L	Ongoing	Highways and Transportation	Comment on all relevant policy to ensure that it reflects the needs of the Stockport ROWIP
1.7 Link in the needs of the ROWIP with the Local Plan	L	Winter 2019	Planning Policy Greenspace PROW Traffic Services Highways and Transportation	Policies in Local Plan reflect and support the ROWIP. This will assist in the improvement of the network going forward.

1.8 Link in the Rights of Way routes with Asset Management planning.	L	Ongoing	Greenspace PROW Traffic Services Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance Structures Including Drainage	Asset management for the Council includes the rights of way in the borough and reflects the needs of the ROWIP
1.9 Link in the Rights of Way routes with the delivery of Well Managed Highways Code of Practice.	L	October 2018	Greenspace PROW Traffic Services Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance Structures Including Drainage	Policies in reviewed Strategies, Policies and Plans to deliver the Well Managed Highways Code of Practice reflect the needs of the ROWIP.
1.10 Include Rights of Way needs in reporting and monitoring systems for the Council's wider highway	L	Ongoing	Greenspace PROW Traffic Services Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance	Rights of way needs are included in future planning and procurement decisions of ICT software and processes. This will assist in the development of a robust set of asset management

network.			Structures Including Drainage ICT	processes.
1.11 Ensure that all improvements are consulted on in line with the Consultation guidance for Transportation and Highways and the wider Council Consultation Strategy.	L	Ongoing	PROW Traffic Services Highways and Transportation	Consultation with relevant users will enable schemes to reflect the needs of users.

Table 6 Conclusion 1: Recommended Actions

Conclusion 2: Information - Improved information can increase use of the path network. Information on wider access to greenspaces and on other access routes needs to be widely available. Improvement to signage can also encourage wider use of the network

Conclusion 2: Recommended Actions				
Action	**Cost Estimate**	**Key Date**	**Stakeholders**	**Outcome**
2.1 Include off-road routes in plans for signage asset management.	L	Ongoing, online reporting to start by 2018.	PROW, Greenspace, Network Asset Maintenance, Traffic Services.	Signage for off-road routes is included in asset management systems for Council signage. Including Online reporting of problems, overall signage strategy development and new scheme development.
2.2 Provide advice to public wanting to promote routes or undertake led walks or rides.	L	Ongoing	PROW, Greenspace, and Traffic Services	Respond to requests in accordance with Council guidance on communication and sign post to other advice where relevant.
2.3 Promote named walks or rides both local and national on Council websites.	L	Ongoing; initial review by May 2018	PROW, Traffic Services, Greenspace, Culture and Leisure	Review routes displayed on Council's website annually for amendments and updates. Routes for walkers, cyclists and equestrians would all be included.
2.4 Provide guidance on walking and riding to Council destinations and advice to other facilities in the borough to provide similar information	L	Ongoing initial review by May 2018	Highways and Transportation, Culture and Leisure,	Update Council website as needed and respond to requests from outside the Council as relevant.

2.5 Ensure changes are incorporated in to new versions of the TfGM Cycle Map.	L	Ongoing	Traffic Services PROW TfGM	Updates on the network passed to TfGM on request when the map is updated.
2.6 Continue to support walk a day programme and Health Walks Programme	L	Ongoing	PROW, and Public Health Services	Maintain and increase numbers of participants utilising the walking programmes
2.7 Maintain PROW mapping on Council website to reflect definitive map data.	L	Ongoing	PROW ICT	Online Map to be updated as change occurs to provide information to the public in an accessible format.
2.8 Promote the responsibilities and rights of different users.	L	Ongoing	PROW, Greenspace, and Traffic Services,	Publications by the Council should where relevant reference and promotes the rights and responsibilities of users.
2.9 Manage and maintain the PROW Forum and the Cycle User Group.	L	Ongoing	PROW, Transport Strategy	At least 4 meetings per year per group.
2.10 Manage and maintain Local Access Forum	L	Ongoing	Democratic Services PROW Transportation and Highways	Maintain and facilitate Local Access Forum meeting in accordance with the terms of reference.
2.11 Ensure that information provided to the public through the Council reflects the desire to promote routes	L	Ongoing initial review by May 2018	PROW, Greenspace, Traffic Services, and Growth Team.	Review information on Council website annually to ensure it reflects the needs to promote available routes.

for sustainable modes.				Ensure that information publicised by the Council reflects the desire to promote the use of the rights of way network.
2.12 Ensure that PROW and other Right of Way signage is considered in the delivery of the Stockport Signage Strategy.	L	Ongoing	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance Planning and Development Management	Signage for Rights of way considered along with other borough signage to form a robust network.
2.13 Ensure that Signage asset data is included in the Council's asset management database and maintained.	L	October 2018	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance	Delivered as part of Well-Managed Highways Code of Practice timescales and Stockport Asset Management Plan.
2.14 Develop and maintain a 3 to 5 year programme for signage maintenance and Improvement.	L	April 2018	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance	Programme published on Council website as part of Well-Managed Highways Code of Practice timescales and Stockport Asset Management Plan.

Table 7 Conclusion 2: Recommended Actions

Conclusion 3: Recording of Routes - The record of public rights of way and other access routes needs to be kept up to date.

Conclusion 3: Recommended Actions				
Action	**Cost Estimate**	**Key Date**	**Stakeholders**	**Outcome**
3.1 Consolidate the Definitive Map	L	2027	PROW	Produce a new consolidation of the Definitive Map
3.2 Review the recording and management process for modification orders.	L	April 2020	ICT PROW	Develop a recording and management process for modification orders which takes best advantage of the Council current and developing asset management processes utilising relevant computer packages.
3.3 Review the recording and management process of permissive paths.	L	April 2020	ICT PROW	Develop a recording and management process for permissive paths which takes best advantage of the Council current and developing asset management processes utilising relevant computer packages.
3.4 Identify PROW assets in joint Stockport asset management records. (Includes – stiles, bridges, signs, lighting, benches, gates, barriers, surfacing details)	M	2019 October	PROW Network Asset Maintenance Traffic Services Structures ICT	All Assets recorded in relevant shared asset records of Council. (Confirm, QGIS and PARIS)
3.5 Investigate with ICT if online forms can be used to	L	April 2020	ICT PROW	Identify and act on opportunities to make the process less paper based while still

make PROW claims process more user friendly.				meeting legal requirements of the process.
3.6 Identify routes as necessary before 2026 closure of Definitive Map to pre 1949 additions.	M	2026 (subject to government review)	PROW	Identify routes which need to be claimed for definitive map on Council Land. Promote the ability to make claims on routes by the public

Table 9 Conclusion 3: Recommended Actions Conclusion

Conclusion 4: Missing links – There is need for additional off-road routes to address the needs of a range specific user types. Carefully considered path improvements can improve the overall utility of the network for a range of users. The users benefiting from improved linkages will be identified on a case by case basis.

Conclusion 4 Recommended Actions				
Action	**Cost Estimate**	**Key Date**	**Stakeholders**	**Outcome**
4.1 Improvement of current off-road routes to make them more usable by a range of users.	M/H	Ongoing from 2019	PROW, Greenspace and Traffic Services	Develop 3 to 5 year programme for route improvements utilising asset management and lifecycle planning techniques.
4.2 Identification of new or improved crossings including bridges and underpasses.	M/H	Ongoing from 2019	PROW, Greenspace, Structures and Traffic Services	Develop 3 to 5 year programme for route improvements utilising asset management and lifecycle planning techniques.
4.3 Identification new routes or route improvements for all users as part of new developments.	L	Ongoing Winter 2019	Planning Development Control PROW Greenspace	All new developments to be considered in terms of improvements to rights of way network as part of planning requirements. Ensure necessary policies are included in the Local Plan to enable improvements to be delivered.

			Traffic Services Highways and Transportation	
4.4 Improve paths in line with the hierarchy in action 6.2	M/H	Ongoing	PROW Greenspaces Traffic Services Network Asset Maintenance	Improvements reflect the needs of the network and work in synergy with asset management and lifecycle planning.
4.5 Improve paths via planning gain in line with the hierarchy in action 6.2	M/H	Ongoing	Planning PROW Greenspaces Traffic Services Network Asset Maintenance	Planning gain delivers appropriate path improvement in terms of asset management and lifecycle planning.

Table 10 Conclusion 4: Recommended Actions

Conclusion 5: Access for all – People with all types of access[1] needs have limited access to the path network both physically and in terms of information and this must be addressed. Paths should be available to all and their usage should be encouraged to all parts of the community. Where good access can be provided it should be and where it can't as much as possible should be done to avoid restricting or limiting access unnecessarily.

Conclusion 5 Recommended Actions				
Action	**Cost Estimate**	**Key Date**	**Stakeholders**	**Outcome**
5.1 Work with relevant members of the community to improve the usability of PROW information for users with specific needs.	L	November 2019	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Disability Groups	Develop design guides for use by staff and developers to improve the information available to users both in terms of signage and mapping.
5.2 Work with the relevant members of the community to identify access issues and priorities there improvement for disabled users utilising a range of modes.	L	Ongoing from 2019	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Disability Groups	Develop 3 to 5 year programme for route improvements utilising asset management and lifecycle planning techniques.
5.3 Update policy of least restrictive access to reflect latest guidance and	L	November 2019	PROW Traffic Services	Reviewed Policy Published.

[1] Access needs can cover a wide range of issues – Physical mobility needs including those of families with small children, information access needs including people with limited language skills and confidence and safety issues including lone females and ethnic minority users.

technology.			Greenspace Highways and Transportation	
5.4 Support the provision of guided walks and rides to encourage the use of rights of way.	L	Ongoing	PROW, Greenspace, Highways and Transportation, Culture and Leisure, and Public Health Service	Support and advice provide on request.
5.5 Provided information about different routes in the borough to encourage their usage in a range of media.	L	Ongoing	PROW Greenspace Highways and Transportation Culture and Leisure Public Health Services	All Council venues to advertise their accessibility by Sustainable Modes

Table 11 Conclusion 5: Recommended Actions

Conclusion 6: Network maintenance – Maintenance is a concern to all path users especially surface quality and drainage.

Conclusion 6 Recommended Actions				
Action	**Cost Estimate**	**Key Date**	**Stakeholders**	**Outcome**
6.1 Ensure that the Council's Asset Management Plan and related policies includes the needs of off-road routes including PROW.	L	October 2018	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance Structures including Drainage	Review of documents for Asset Management in relation to adoption of Well-Managed Highways Code of Practice timescales. Update documents as necessary.
6.2 Develop hierarchy for Public Rights of Way, Cycle Routes and other Council owned rights of way infrastructure as part of implementation of Well-Managed Highways Code of Practice to guide inspection and a risk based approach to maintenance.	L	October 2018	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance Structures including	Hierarchy adopted as part of Well-Managed Highways Code of Practice timescales.

			Drainage	
6.3 Develop a 3 to 5 year programme of works to maintain the Public Rights of Way network and other Council owned rights of way such as concessionary paths in parks.	L	April 2019	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance Structures including Drainage	Programmes published on Council website.
6.4 Promote process for task days and friends of groups on Rights of Way.	L	May 2018	PROW Greenspace ICT	The promotion of forms and training to enable the development of friends of groups and task days on the rights of way network.
6.5 Develop inspection and maintenance programmes for Rights of Way in line with asset management and a risk based approach.	L	October 2018	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance Structures including Drainage	Programmes adopted as part of Well-Managed Highways Code of Practice timescales.
6.6 Investigate with ICT online reporting for maintenance issues including obstruction being expanded to include Rights of Way.	L	2020	PROW Traffic Services Greenspace Highways and Transportation Network Asset Maintenance Structures including Drainage	Identify and act on opportunities to make the process more in keeping with other Council reporting while still meeting legal requirements of the process.

Table 13 Conclusion 6: Recommended Actions

Conclusion7: Inconsiderate Users - Problems of inconsiderate user behaviour need to be addressed as this deters people from using paths and impacts on their enjoyment

Conclusion 7 Recommended Actions				
Action	**Cost Estimate**	**Key Date**	**Stakeholders**	**Outcome**
7.1 Improve litter and dog waste management including collection points and enforcement options.	L	April 2019	Greenspace PROW Public Realm Community Safety	Review current process and publish findings in relation to rights of way.
7.2 Work with relevant agencies to address antisocial behaviour.	L	April 2019 Ongoing	Police Community Safety Officers PROW Greenspace Traffic Services	Review current process and publish findings in relation to rights of way. Monitor issues and feed back to the Local Access Forum with regards to progress.
7.3 Advertise and promote the rights and responsibilities of different users on the boroughs rights of way.	L	Ongoing	Police Community Safety Officers PROW Greenspace Traffic Services	Review where and how current promotion and education as to the rights and responsibilities of different users is undertaken and seek to expand this area of work.

Table 15 Conclusion 7: Recommended Actions

6.2 Implementation, monitoring and review

This ROWIP plan is designed to inform the delivery of the rights of way network improvements as an integrated part of the overall highways and transportation programme delivery.

As part of the Council's Asset Management Processes there is now a Transport Annual Monitoring Report and the results of this report would be used to monitor the overall delivery of transport initiative in the borough including the ROWIP. The Council will also complete the Trans Pennine Trail Annual Post Completion Monitoring.

The statement of action will be reviewed in 2022 before a full review in 2027.