

**REPORT TO:** Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 17th June 2009

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director Environment

**SUBJECT:** Rights of Way Improvement Plan

**WARDS:** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Board on Halton Borough Council's first Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan, to enable any comments to be incorporated into the document prior to the Plan being presented to the Executive Board for approval.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- (1) The Board forwards any comments on the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan to the Executive Board for consideration.

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a requirement that all highway authorities in England and Wales prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

Rights of Way Improvement Plans are not about rights of way in isolation, they are intended to deliver an integrated network of routes in and between town and country. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan must assess:

- The extent to which the local rights of way network meets the present and likely future needs of the public;
- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and enjoyment of the authority's area; and
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind and partially sighted people and others with mobility problems.

3.2 The Plan must also contain a 'Statement of Actions' that the highway authority intends to carry out in order to improve its network, with particular regard to issues identified within the assessment. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has issued guidance to local authorities on how it should approach the

preparation of its Plan, which has been followed in the preparation of this Plan.

- 3.3 The rights of way network is undoubtedly a major means of accessing the countryside and key services, but on its own does not show the full picture. There are many other routes and sites that are used by the general public for informal countryside access and every day journeys that are not legally recorded as definitive public rights of way. With this in mind, the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Halton considers the whole network of access routes, public open spaces and sites as well as definitive rights of way and highways. It also assesses the whole spectrum of users and journey purposes, from disabled access needs to routes to open access land.
- 3.4 Once the ROWIP is published the Council is required to make a new assessment and review it within 10 years. Thereafter, they are required to review the plan at not more than ten year intervals.
- 3.5 The ROWIP is a strategic document and will form a distinct strand of Halton's Local Transport Plan (LTP). This is Halton's first full 10 year Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- 3.6 A copy of Halton's Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan Summary document is shown in Appendix 1, however, a copy of the full Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan will also be made available at the meeting and is available for inspection in the Member's rooms. An addendum to the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan issued to all consultees on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2009 can be seen in Appendix 2.
- 3.7 The Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan is currently out to consultation with a wide range of users and stakeholders to enable their views to be taken into consideration, prior to the Plan being put to the Executive Board for its consideration, which is anticipated to be in July 2009.
- 3.8 The views of the Board on the draft ROWIP are requested to enable them to be considered and incorporated into the final document prior to the final plan being presented to the Executive Board, for approval.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 In developing the draft ROWIP, a broad range of local, regional and national policies have been assessed, to help identify the future needs and demands of walkers, cyclists and horse riders. In order to address these requirements, the Plan proposes an extensive list of rights of way policies and a detailed action plan, the implementation of which will be dependent on resources.

## **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Resource Implications**

There are no direct resource implications resulting from this report. However, the Action Plan, contained within the ROWIP, gives a broad assessment of the requirements of the proposed actions, both in term of staff and funding, should the Plan be approved. Current resources enable an ongoing programme of improvement and maintenance to existing Public Rights of Way. Further clarification on how the Plan is to be implemented is provided in Section 5.

Whilst there is a statutory requirement to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, there is no requirement on Local Authorities to implement the plan. Specific funding has not been allocated by Central Government to deliver the improvements, so local authorities will have to secure additional funding to implement any proposed improvements, which cannot be funded through available capital and revenue resources.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans are meant to be aspirational and ambitious in identifying potential improvements to the network. Therefore the net has been cast wide when considering ways to improve the network, whilst recognising that it would not be possible to implement them all immediately.

It therefore follows that the Council will need to work in partnership with a range of organisations in order to deliver many of the proposed actions.

### **5.2 Social Inclusion Implications**

The development of the rights of way network and other access routes will provide a fair and inclusive network that will help all sections of the community access opportunities.

### **5.3 Sustainability Checklist**

The ROWIP will help to address sustainability issues by improving the quality and sustainability of the environment and improving sustainable access to the countryside and to key services.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

The ROWIP will assist in providing a safe and sustainable transport network that will provide access to schools (including those in the Building Schools for the Future initiative), colleges, recreational and social facilities. It is thus supportive of the 'Children and Young People

in Halton' priorities contained within the Council's Corporate Plan and Halton's Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.

## **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The ROWIP will assist in providing safe and sustainable access to employment and training opportunities and as such will help to address worklessness, which is a priority of the Council's Corporate Plan, the Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement and the Liverpool City Region's Multi Area Agreement.

The maintenance and improvement of the Rights of Way network also has the ability to facilitate/support the Council's Supported Employment Scheme.

## **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

The ROWIP will assist in encouraging more people to take exercise through walking, cycling and horse riding and thereby help to address health issues associated with obesity. Indeed, one of the ROWIP's Strategic aims is to 'Promote the health benefits of the network and make it easier for people to incorporate exercise into their daily lives and lead healthier lifestyles'. The RoWIP is therefore supportive of the health priorities contained within the Council's Corporate Plan and Halton's Local Strategic Partnership's Community Plan and Local Area Agreement.

## **6.4 A Safer Halton**

The ROWIP will assist in providing for safer travel to key services and recreational activities. One of the Strategic Aims identified in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is to 'Improve the Safety and Attractiveness of Routes Affected by the Transport Network'.

This Aim is supported by the proposed ROWIP policy R10 (Imp2) 'Improving Network Safety'. It can therefore be seen that the RoWIP is supportive of the 'Safer Halton' priorities contained within the Council's Corporate Plan and Halton's Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.

## **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

The development of public rights of way network and other access routes can be a key element in the regeneration process, by providing safe sustainable access to employment, education, health, retail shopping, social and tourism opportunities. The RoWIP is therefore supportive of the 'Urban Renewal' priorities contained within the Council's Corporate Strategy and Halton's Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy.

## 7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

There are no inherent risks, associated with the recommendations made within this report. However, the development of an effective ROWIP will help to address those risks identified in the network assessment, which impact on the achievement of a fully inclusive rights of way network and other access routes.

## 8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan	Rutland House	Janet Whelan ext 3008
Halton Bridleway Study – Groundwork Merseyside	Rutland House	Janet Whelan ext 3008
Halton Rights of Way User Survey 2007/08) – Mott Macdonald	Rutland House	Janet Whelan ext 3008

## **Summary assessment of Implications:**

### **Resource Implications**

There are no direct resource implications resulting from this report. However, the action plan, contained within the ROWIP, gives a broad assessment of the implications of the proposals, both in term of staff and funding requirements, should they be approved. Current resources enable an ongoing programme of improvement and maintenance to existing Public Rights of Way.

Whilst there is a statutory requirement to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, there is no requirement on Local Authorities to implement the plan. Specific funding has not been allocated by Central Government to deliver the improvements, so local authorities will have to secure additional funding to implement any proposed improvements, which cannot be funded through available capital and revenue resources.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans are meant to be aspirational and ambitious in identifying potential improvements to the network. Therefore the net has been cast wide when considering ways to improve the network, whilst recognising that it would not be possible to implement them all immediately.

It therefore follows that the Council will need to work in partnership with a range of organisations in order to deliver many of the proposed actions.

### **Social Inclusion Implications**

The development of the rights of way and minor highways network and other access routes will provide a fair and inclusive network that will help all sections of the community access opportunities.

### **Sustainability Checklist**

The ROWIP will help to address sustainability issues by improving the quality and sustainability of the environment and improving sustainable access to the countryside and to key services.

