

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 24 September 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 approval to the adoption of Halton's first Rights of Way Improvement Plan following a 12 week consultation with other local authorities, user groups and outside agencies.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board approves the adoption of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, subject to any minor amendments and inclusion of photographs that may be required prior to its publication, being delegated to the Strategic Director, Environment, in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Planning, Transportation, Regeneration & Renewal.

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 they should approach the

preparation of a ROWIP, 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 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 next Local Transport Plan (LTP), which is being prepared on a joint basis with Merseytravel and the five Merseyside districts. This is Halton's first full 10 year Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- 3.6 A copy of Halton's Rights of Way Improvement Plan Summary document is shown in Appendix 1, however, a copy of the full Rights of Way Improvement Plan will also be made available at the meeting and is available for inspection in the Member's Rooms.
- 3.7 The Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan has been used as the basis for a 12 week consultation with a wide range of users and stakeholders to enable their views to be taken into consideration in the preparation of the final document.

Although only 14 formal written responses were received, these responses, along with discussions with other consultees, were found to be positive. In addition, twenty seven questionnaires on the ROWIP were also returned. On the whole, the document was well received and strongly supported. Summaries of the results of the questionnaire survey and the written responses, together with Halton's officers' comments are shown in Appendices 2 & 3.

- 3.8 The Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan was also considered by the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board at its meeting on 17th June 2009, when it resolved that the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan be forwarded to the Executive Board for consideration.
- 3.9 Under the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, there is a requirement to undertake

a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) on certain plans and programmes, such as the ROWIP.

3.10 The SA/SEA process seeks to ensure that the environmental, social and economic effects of implementing a plan are considered. This process has shown that implementation of Halton's ROWIP and associated policies will have significant positive effects on social inclusion, accessibility, health, tourism, landscape and air quality. The process has also acted as a checking mechanism to ensure the effects of the proposed ROWIP policies are considered in a robust manner. In addition, the SA/SEA process has assisted in the preparation of a framework for monitoring the Plan and indicators have been developed, which will be used to assess progress. Finally, it was recommended that additional policies be added to the Halton ROWIP, to further increase the sustainability performance of the Plan. These are detailed, as policy numbers R18 (M5) and R19 (M6) in the ROWIP Summary document, attached as Appendix 1. Further details of the recommendations resulting from the SA/SEA can be found in Appendix B of the main ROWIP document.

3.11 The ROWIP has also been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment, which, identified that:

- the Plan aims to deliver safe and sustainable access on PRowWs, cycleways, bridleways and other access routes, available for use by all residents especially those on low income and visitors to Halton, regardless of race, sexual orientation, age and religion; and
- Halton through the ROWIP will be improving accessibility to people with disabilities. Such improvements in accessibility for people with disabilities have wider benefits for all users.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 In developing the 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 terms 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 of the ROWIP.

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 secure 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 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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
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