



CABINET – 18 MARCH 2025

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN UPDATED RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (RoWIP) 2025-2035

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to advise the Cabinet of the intended approach to undertake the development of an updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) to cover the period 2025-2035, and to seek approval to undertake public consultation on a draft RoWIP.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
 - a) Notes the intended approach to undertake the development of an updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) to cover the period from 2025 to 2035; and
 - b) Approves the commencement of a 12-week public consultation exercise on a draft RoWIP 2025-2035, as set out in paragraphs 43-46.

Reasons for Recommendation

3. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires relevant authorities to assess and review a RoWIP every 10 years.
4. An updated RoWIP will enable completion of the action 'S12', set out in the County Council's Cycling and Walking Strategy (CaWS) Action Plan, which sets out the intention to prepare a revised RoWIP by 2026.
5. The Government's statutory RoWIP guidance recommends that authorities undertake a 12-week consultation period on a draft RoWIP to allow for representations to be made.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. Subject to the Cabinet's approval, a public consultation on the draft RoWIP document is expected to be undertaken for a period of 12 weeks between 19 May and 8 August 2025.
7. It is intended that the Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive a report as part of the consultation exercise at its meeting on 5 June 2025.
8. A further report is expected to be taken to the Cabinet at its meeting on 21 October 2025, detailing the outcome of the consultation and seeking approval of the final RoWIP.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

9. From 21 November 2002, relevant authorities in England were required by legislation to prepare and publish a RoWIP, with first Plans to be completed by 2007. This advice was subsequently amended by a requirement to fit elements of the RoWIP into the Second Local Transport Plan (LTP) process.
10. On 22 March 2006, the LTP2 was approved by the County Council. Details of the draft RoWIP were attached as an appendix to the report and were considered by the County Council at that time.
11. On 5 September 2006, the RoWIP was approved by the Cabinet for submission to the County Council.
12. On 20 September 2006, the RoWIP was approved by the County Council.
13. The 2006 RoWIP was updated in 2011 as an Action Plan to support the LTP3. The LTP3 provided a long-term strategy for transport within the County, including the public rights of way network. The LTP3 was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on 8 March 2011 for submission to the County Council. The LTP3 was subsequently approved by County Council on 23 March 2011.
14. On 20 July 2021, the CaWS and its Action Plan were approved by the Cabinet. The CaWS Action Plan contains a short-term action 'S12' to prepare a revised RoWIP by 2026.
15. On 22 November 2024, the LTP4 Core Document was approved by the Cabinet. The LTP4 is a key document in the development of the Council's transport programmes, providing the overarching strategic direction in support of sustainable travel and transport, including active travel and the public rights of way network.
16. In May 2022, the County Council approved its Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026), which was subsequently updated in 2024. The RoWIP helps to deliver positive actions towards all the Strategic Plan's five strategic outcomes:

- a) 'Safe and Well' - Active travel is proven to improve health and wellbeing, both physically and mentally. The public rights of way network facilitates easy access to cycling, walking, wheeling and riding routes for regular journeys.
- b) 'Clean and Green' - The public rights of way network provides sustainable access to nature and green space for all.
- c) 'Great Communities' - The public rights of way network helps connect all Leicestershire communities, encouraging community cohesion in a sustainable way.
- d) 'Improved Opportunities' - The public rights of way network helps to connect communities to wider services in a healthy, environmentally friendly way, helping children and young people get the best start in life.
- e) 'Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure' - The public rights of way network in Leicestershire spans over 1915 miles (3084 kilometres) of routes, providing accessible travel options for all.

17. On 7 February 2025 the Cabinet approved the 2025/26 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which was then presented to the County Council on 19 February 2025. Spending towards maintaining and improving public rights of way are contained within the MTFS.

Resource Implications

- 18. The updated RoWIP and its actions are intended to be delivered through the existing agreed capital and revenue budgets set out in the MTFS, in addition to any external funding secured or delivery obligated through the planning arena. The current revenue budget is £294,000 dropping to £258,000 in 2025/26.
- 19. As set out in the Environment and Transport Highways and Transportation Capital Programme, which is the subject of a separate report to this meeting, the capital maintenance budget for public rights of way is currently £18,797 levelling out to £17,000 until 2028/29.
- 20. The overall approach to maintaining the public rights of way network and the delivery of actions within the RoWIP will be through a risk-based assessment, aligned to the above core budgets available, which is being developed in parallel with the RoWIP.
- 21. In addition, the Council will continue to seek to improve and link paths with new developments. There are already a number of Section 106 contributions confirmed for such improvements, which will be programmed in for delivery over the coming years as the trigger points for the release of those funds are reached.
- 22. The RoWIP is being developed within the framework of the current and future funding available. It is accepted that this will be subject to variations and the Action Plan attached to the document can be updated to reflect future changes. All opportunities will continue to be explored and maximised towards securing external funding towards the sustainable management and improvement of the public rights of way network. This includes seeking to secure funding through

the planning arena, Government grants, partnerships, local parish and district authorities where possible and appropriate.

23. The Director of Law and Governance and the Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

24. This report will be circulated to all members.

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PART B

Background

25. The RoWIP is a plan that explains how improvements made to the public rights of way network in Leicestershire, alongside effective management and maintenance, will provide a better experience for all users when walking, wheeling, cycling and horse riding. The Plan covers a period of 10 years and aims to help connect Leicestershire communities with each other and through nature and green spaces.
26. In September 2017, the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan set out the Council's operational procedures in undertaking a risk-based approach to asset management, aligning with Government guidance 'Well-managed highway infrastructure a code of practice 2016'. The Code is designed to promote the adoption of an integrated asset management approach to highway infrastructure based on the establishment of local levels of service through risk-based assessment.
27. Aligned operational procedures and service levels for maintaining the public rights of way network are now being developed alongside the RoWIP. Together the RoWIP and risk-based operational procedures will set out the overall approach to maintaining the public rights of way network.
28. The LTP4 Core Document was approved in November 2024 and is a key document in the development of the Council's transport programmes, providing the overarching strategic direction in support of sustainable travel and transport, alongside the CaWS, for active travel and the public rights of way network.
29. Therefore, the current RoWIP as a whole is now required to be updated to ensure it aligns with:
 - a) Current Government legislation and statutory guidance;
 - b) The latest Council policies and strategies, including the LTP4 Core Document and the CaWS;
 - c) The Council's risk-based approach to asset management.

Updating the RoWIP

30. The statutory guidance sets out that RoWIPs are required to consider at least the following:
 - a) The extent to which rights of way meet the needs of the public;
 - b) The opportunities for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation;
 - c) A statement of the action the Authority proposes to take for the management of local rights of way.

31. The updated RoWIP will therefore set out a statement of action covering the identified changes to be made in respect of the management of, and improvements to, rights of way for a 10-year period, in line with Government guidance. The updated RoWIP is intended to cover the period from 2025 to 2035.
32. The Council has a statutory role as:
- a) A Local Highway Authority to maintain and sign routes on the ground and to keep them open for people to use.
 - b) A local surveying authority to map all of the paths on the Definitive Map and let people know where they are.
 - c) An access authority to look after open access sites and rights.
33. As with the current RoWIP, the updated Plan will set out a series of actions to meet these areas of work to maximise the use of the network in the most cost efficient way.
34. The Council, working with other authorities and agencies, including the voluntary sector, aims to:
- a) Develop and manage a rights of way network that meets the current and future needs of the local community.
 - b) Provide a good quality and value for money rights of way service.
 - c) Enable as many people as possible to walk, wheel, cycle and ride, with particular focus on those currently excluded, including those with mobility constraints.
 - d) Contribute towards improving the health of residents of Leicestershire and reduce their carbon footprint.
 - e) Promote Leicestershire as an attractive place to walk, wheel, cycle and ride for all, including those living in or visiting the County.
 - f) Monitor and report at regular intervals on how these goals are being achieved.
35. The updated RoWIP is a key part of delivering towards these aims.

Consultation and Engagement

36. Consultation and engagement is embedded in the approach to developing and updating RoWIPs. Engagement will take place throughout the development of the draft RoWIP to help shape its contents before formal consultation.
37. The statutory guidance stipulates a number of stakeholders that must be engaged with when preparing an updated RoWIP; for Leicestershire that includes:
- a) Highway authorities whose areas adjoin Leicestershire;
 - b) District councils and parish councils;
 - c) Natural England;
 - d) Local Access Forums.

38. The Council hosts the Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LLAF). This is a statutory group that advises the Council and other bodies on the improvement of public access for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area. The LLAF includes member representation and will play a key part in helping shape the RoWIP and supporting how the Council engages with its biggest stakeholder, the public.
39. There are two planned periods of engagement and consultation as part of updating the RoWIP, pre-consultation engagement during development, and then formal consultation on the draft RoWIP. This ensures all stakeholders have the opportunity to input and help shape the RoWIP and then review it once the draft is developed.

Pre-Consultation Engagement

40. In line with the Government's statutory guidance, there are several pre-consultation engagement activities being held, involving various stakeholders, over a four-week period during February and March 2025 to gain input to help shape the draft RoWIP. This will ensure that a wide range of stakeholders, including advocacy groups, local members and residents, are given the opportunity to have their say.
41. This is being carried out through a few different methods, which include:
 - a) Direct elected member engagement - County Council Members, district council members and parish councils will be asked for their views and be asked to advise of any known local priorities for improvements to the rights of way network in their areas. They will also be invited to participate in the online survey and map-based feedback exercise.
 - b) Direct engagement with statutory and other key stakeholders - Key stakeholders including neighbouring highway authorities, Natural England and advocacy groups, will be contacted directly asking them for their priorities for improvements to the rights of way network in Leicestershire. They will also be invited to participate in the online survey and map-based feedback exercise.
 - c) Online public survey - An online survey will be launched to collect responses covering a range of subjects in relation to the Leicestershire rights of way network. For example, questions will include how often the network is used, what barriers stop people from using the network, and what would encourage people to use the public rights of way network more often. This will help inform how the RoWIP can help ensure the network better meets the needs of users.
 - d) Online map-based feedback - A map-based online engagement tool (Social PinPoint) that allows people to leave comments on specific areas of the public rights of way network via placing pins on a virtual map of Leicestershire. The participants will be able to highlight which their favourite routes are and which they use most often, what improvements they would like to see and where. This will help to identify what is needed and prioritise improvements.

- e) Hosting a special forum with focus group workshops - Members of the LLAf will join the Cycling, Walking and Wheeling Forum for a special forum inviting all interested parties along to take part in discussion and learn all about the development of the RoWIP and how they can help shape it. This will be an opportunity to get detailed feedback in a face-to-face environment, asking attendees for their ideas on what improvements could make the rights of way network better meet the needs of all users over the next 10 years.
42. During this pre-consultation engagement period all activities will be advertised through Sustainable Travel Roadshows, social media and on both the Leicestershire County Council website and the Choose How You Move website.

Formal Consultation on the Draft RoWIP

43. Following the pre-consultation engagement, and subject to the Cabinet's approval, there will then be a formal consultation on the draft updated RoWIP once it has been developed. This will take place over a 12-week period between May and August 2025.
44. During this period, the draft RoWIP will be shared online, and an accompanying online survey will be launched. Participants will be asked to consider the draft RoWIP developed using earlier feedback, and whether they feel the Plan will help achieve the goals of a RoWIP in ensuring the rights of way network meets the present and future needs of users, provides opportunities for all users to access nature, open-air recreation and exercise, and does so in an efficient cost effective and sustainable way.
45. The views of the Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be sought during the 12-week public consultation period at its 5 June 2025 meeting.
46. The draft RoWIP will be reviewed in consideration of the consultation responses, and a final updated version will be presented to the Cabinet for approval at its meeting in October 2025.

Timetable

47. The proposed timetable of the consultation and engagement on the draft RoWIP is set as follows in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Consultation and engagement timetable

	Activity	Dates
Pre-consultation engagement period	Public and stakeholder engagement, over a four-week period, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and stakeholder engagement (online survey, map-based feedback tool); • Joint forum of LLAF and Council Cycling, Walking and Wheeling Forum. 	17 February – 16 March 3 March
Cabinet	Seek the Cabinet's approval to consult on the draft RoWIP during May to August 2025.	18 March
Consultation period	Public consultation on the draft RoWIP document (12 weeks).	19 May - 8 August
Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Seek views on the draft RoWIP from the Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its June meeting.	5 June
Cabinet	Advise the Cabinet on the outcome of the public consultation and seek approval of the final updated RoWIP.	21 October

Conclusion

48. In summary, the updated RoWIP will be developed through engagement and collaboration with stakeholders, and in line with current Council policies and strategies, to create an achievable and affordable plan. This will help achieve the goals of a RoWIP in helping maintain and improve a rights of way network that meets the present and future needs of users, providing opportunities for all users to access nature, open-air recreation and exercise, and does so in an efficient cost effective and sustainable way.
49. In doing so, it is intended to continue building on the successes of the significant work that has been undertaken to date to manage and maintain the public rights of way network in Leicestershire, providing continued accessible and sustainable travel options for all.

Equality Implications

50. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping is being drafted, which currently indicates a neutral impact; this is to be assessed by the Environment and Transport Departmental Equalities Group, and Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group. This EIA will be updated as necessary following the completion of the engagement and consultation activities set out in this report.

Human Rights Implications

51. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Other Implications and Impact Assessments

52. A Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (HIA) has been undertaken and currently indicates a positive impact to public health. This will be updated as necessary following the completion of the engagement and consultation activities set out in this report.
53. The RoWIP will facilitate the continued successful management and improvement of the rights of way network through Leicestershire countryside, facilitating and encourage access to nature and green spaces for all. Therefore, the updated RoWIP is considered to help deliver positive benefits to residents and visitors to Leicestershire, in support of the goals set out in the Environment Strategy, Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy and Action Plans, and the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Background Papers

Report to County Council on 22 March 2006 - Second Local Transport Plan (LTP2)
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=1292&Ver=4>

Report to County Council on 20 September 2006 - 2006 Rights of Way Improvement Plan
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=1502&Ver=4>

Report to County Council on 23 March 2011 - Third Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3)
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=3057&Ver=4>

Report to the Cabinet on 20 July 2021 - Cycling and Walking Strategy and Action Plan (CaWS)
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=6445&Ver=4>

Report to the Cabinet on 22 November 2024 - Fourth Local Transport Plan (LTP4) Core Document
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7511&Ver=4>

Report to County Council on 18 May 2022 - Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026)
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=6482&Ver=4>

Report to the Cabinet on 07 February 2025 - Provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2028/29
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7873&Ver=4>

Government guidance - Local authority rights of way improvement plans
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-authority-rights-of-way-improvement-plans>