

**HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**  
**COMMITTEE: 5 JUNE 2025**

**RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the development of the Council's updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), providing it with an opportunity to comment on the plan and the actions identified, as part of the public consultation that is being undertaken. The RoWIP sets out a series of actions that will continue to manage and improve the Leicestershire rights of way network for its current and future users.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. From 21 November 2002, relevant authorities in England were required by legislation to prepare and publish a RoWIP. This advice was subsequently amended by a requirement to fit elements of the RoWIP into the second Local Transport Plan (LTP) process. Leicestershire's first RoWIP was approved by the County Council in September 2006.
3. The 2006 RoWIP was updated in 2011 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 County Council in March 2011.
4. On 20 July 2021, the Cycling and Walking Strategy (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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. On 7 February 2025, the Cabinet agreed the 2025/26 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which was then approved by the County Council on 19 February 2025. Spending towards maintaining and improving public rights of way are contained within the MTFS.
  8. On 18 March 2025, the Cabinet approved the intended approach to undertake the development of an updated RoWIP to cover the period 2025-2035, and to undertake a 12-week public consultation on a draft RoWIP.

### **Background**

9. Within Leicestershire there are more than 1,915 miles (3,084km) of public paths. Leicestershire County Council has a role to provide safe passage of people wanting to use the paths, ensuring the network is effectively recorded, managed and maintained. Approximately 40% of the highway network is made up of these rights of way. On this network there are many infrastructure assets that are required to be in place and maintained by the Council, working in partnership with landowners, farmers, organisations and volunteers. These assets include many gates and stiles, bridges of various sizes including large listed structures, around 40,000 waymarkers and over 15,000 waymarker posts. The Public Rights of Way network represents a significant asset to manage and maintain efficiently and effectively.
10. 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 through nature and green spaces.
11. 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 local levels of service for highway maintenance which are determined based on technical risk assessments alongside local needs and priorities.
12. Similar operational procedures and service levels for maintaining the public rights of way network are now being developed and alongside the RoWIP these will set out the overall approach to maintaining the public rights of way network for the next decade.
13. Since the current ROWIP was approved in 2006, much has been done including:

- a) The installation/replacement of more than 250 large bridges, around 300 new bridle gates, 15000 waymarker posts, over a 1000 small sleeper bridges and more than 1700 hand or kissing gates
- b) The removal of 1500 stiles
- c) The placement of 40000 waymarkers
- d) The strimming of more than 1000 miles of paths
- e) The repainting of more than 25000 posts and much more.

14. It 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**

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. The Council has a statutory role as:

- a) Local Highway Authority to maintain and sign routes on the ground and to keep them open for people to use.
- b) Local Surveying Authority to map all of the paths on the Definitive Map and let people know where they are.
- c) Access Authority to look after open access sites and rights.

18. As with the current RoWIP, the updated Plan will set out a series of actions to meet these areas of work and maximise the use of the network in the most cost-efficient way.

19. 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.

20. The updated RoWIP will play a key part in delivering these aims and build on the successes and achievements delivered during the first ROWIP period.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

21. Consultation and engagement is embedded in the approach to developing and updating RoWIPs. Engagement has taken place throughout the development of the draft RoWIP to help shape its contents prior to being published as part of a formal consultation, the output of which will further inform the final plan.
22. 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.
23. 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 plays a key part in helping shape the RoWIP and supporting how the Council engages with its biggest stakeholder, the public.
24. There are two 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**

25. In line with the Government's statutory guidance, there have been several pre-consultation engagement activities held over a four-week period during February and March 2025. This ensured that a wide range of stakeholders, including advocacy groups, local members and residents, were given the opportunity to have their say and help shape the draft RoWIP.
26. This engagement was carried out through a few different methods, which included:
- a) Direct elected member engagement - County Council Members, district council members and parish councils were asked for their views and asked to advise of any known local priorities for improvements to the rights of way network in their areas. They were also 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, were contacted directly asking them for their priorities for improvements to the rights of way network in Leicestershire. They were also invited to participate in the online survey and map-based feedback exercise.

- c) Online public survey – a four week online survey was launched in February 2025 to collect responses covering a range of subjects in relation to the Leicestershire rights of way network. For example, questions included 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 feedback has helped inform how the RoWIP can help ensure the network better meets the needs of users. Over 1240 responses were received to the online survey, which included responses from:
    - Leicestershire residents,
    - Visitors to Leicestershire,
    - County, district or parish/town members,
    - Representative of a public sector organisations,
    - Representative of a voluntary sector organisation, charity or community groups,
    - Representative of a business or private sector organisations.
  - 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 were able to highlight their favourite routes, the ones they used most often, as well as what improvements they would like to see and where. This has also helped to identify what is needed and prioritise improvements.
  - e) Hosting a special forum with focus group workshops – on 3 March 2025, the LLAF members joined the Cycling, Walking and Wheeling Forum for a special session that invited 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 was an opportunity to get detailed feedback in a face-to-face environment, where attendees were asked for their ideas on what improvements could help make the rights of way network better meet the needs of all users over the next 10 years. Over 40 people attend the in-person event at County Hall.
27. During the pre-consultation engagement period, all activities were advertised through social media and on both the Leicestershire County Council website and the Choose How You Move website.
28. Further detail covering the engagement feedback can be viewed in the draft RoWIP appended to this report.

#### Formal Consultation on the Draft RoWIP

29. Following the pre-consultation engagement, the RoWIP was updated and a formal public consultation on the revised draft has now commenced. This will be held over a 12-week period between May and August 2025. This report forms part of the consultation to ensure comments from the Committee can be considered and reported to the Cabinet.

30. During the 12-week consultation 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 and comment on whether they feel the actions proposed will help achieve the goals set out in the 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.
31. In addition to the online survey, a variety of engagement opportunities, including sustainable travel roadshows with stakeholders are planned during the 12-week consultation period to ensure that people have an opportunity to discuss the Plan and provide their thoughts on any potential amendments to the Plan.
32. The draft RoWIP will be reviewed and updated as appropriate in light of consultation responses received. The final updated version will be presented to the Cabinet for approval at its meeting in October 2025.

### **Resource Implications**

33. Despite funding constraints, the Council has continued to manage the extensive rights of way network, meeting its statutory obligations and delivering a range of successful projects in Leicestershire.
34. The RoWIP and its actions present an ongoing programme of work, and capital and revenue allocations to ensure it continues to meet its statutory obligations, which are being delivered within agreed budgets, subject to approval through the MTFS.
35. The delivery of future actions in the RoWIP is dependent on continued funding, which comes from various sources, including agreed capital and revenue budgets set out in the MTFS, the Government, Section 106 contributions, and delivery of obligations by developers to improve the PROW network via the planning process and collaborative endeavours with other working partnerships.
36. The current revenue budget is £258,000 in 2025/26, as agreed through the current MTFS.
37. As set out in the Environment and Transport Highways and Transportation Capital Programme presented to the Cabinet on 18 March 2025, the annual capital maintenance budget for public rights of way is currently £18,797 levelling out to £17,000 until 2028/29. However, it is recognised that the cost to maintain the rights of way network presents a significant challenge in order to continue to maintain standards for users. As such, future increased maintenance funding provision is being considered for the immediate year and beyond in the wider context of potential multi-year funding settlements from the Government, the detail of which will be subject to the next Government spending review announcements post 11 June 2025.
38. 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 budgets available, which is being developed in parallel with the RoWIP.
39. In addition, the Council will continue to seek to improve and link paths with new developments. There are already a number of agreements with developers and

Local Planning Authorities which are programmed for delivery over the 10-year plan period as the trigger points for the works are reached.

40. 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 actions 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.
41. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance were consulted on the content of this report.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

42. A public consultation on the draft RoWIP document is being undertaken for a period of 12 weeks, between 19 May and 10 August 2025.
43. The outcome of the consultation and the final draft Plan will be presented to the Cabinet on 21 October 2025 for approval. The Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments will be considered when finalising the RoWIP and reported to the Cabinet at its meeting in October.

### **Conclusion**

44. The updated RoWIP is being 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.
45. 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.
46. The Committee is asked to comment on the draft RoWIP appended to this report.

### **Appendix**

Appendix A – Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025-2035

Appendix B – Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025-2035 – Action Plan

### **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>

Report to the Cabinet on 18 March 2025 - The Development of an updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) 2025-2035

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7874&Ver=4>

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

None.

### **Equality Implications**

47. An equality screening was undertaken as part of the process to develop the RoWIP, with the likely impact of the Plan being identified as positive or neutral.
48. Feedback received during engagement and forthcoming consultation activities, including with stakeholders such as the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group, will be considered when updating the final draft Plan for approval.
49. Where appropriate, Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken during the development of individual projects and programmes.

### **Human Rights Implications**

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

### **Environmental Implications**

51. 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. All of which are aligned to the Council's Strategic Plan.

52. Environmental Impact Assessments will be carried out in relation to work undertaken on individual projects and programmes where appropriate.

### **Health Implications**

53. A Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (HIA) has been undertaken and currently indicates a positive impact to public health, through encouraging and enabling communities to travel actively in the natural environment, contributing towards mental and physical health and wellbeing. The HIA will be updated as necessary following the completion of consultation activities set out in this report.

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