



Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025-2035



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Foreword

Foreword to be included here in final version of the document



1. Introduction

Leicestershire County Council is responsible for over 1,915 miles (3,084km) of public rights of way, including paths in both the countryside and urban areas. They are important for leisure, travelling to work or school, as well as peoples' health and wellbeing. The wonderful and diverse public rights of way are part of what makes Leicestershire a special place to live, work and thrive.

Although Leicestershire's rights of way network has developed over hundreds of years, it is important that it continues to meet the needs of the people that use it, both now and in the future. Enabling everyone to make the best use of the network, connecting our communities, and providing access to nature and the countryside is key to maintaining a healthy and prosperous rural county.

Every council that is responsible for public rights of way is required to have a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). This document is Leicestershire's RoWIP, which sets out how the network of rights of way will continue to be managed and improved over the next ten years between 2025 and 2035.

What is a Right of Way?

A right of way is a public highway that anyone, by law, has the right to use. There are four types:

- **Footpaths** for walking, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- **Bridleways** for walking, horse riding, cycling, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- **Restricted byways** for walking, horse riding, cycling, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs and horse-drawn carriages
- **Byways open to all traffic** for all modes including motorised vehicles



Footpath to
Foxton Locks
1 1/2



2. Policy Context

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan sets out the Council's long-term vision and priorities.
Its five strategic outcomes are: Clean and Green • Great Communities • Safe and Well
• Improved Opportunities • Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure

Environment Strategy

The Environment Strategy provides an overarching framework with the aim to protect and enhance the environment, which includes supporting green and blue infrastructure projects through partnerships and collaboration to support biodiversity. Good management and improvement of the rights of way network contributes toward these aims.

Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy

Reducing CO2 and CO2e emissions to net zero in Leicestershire is a key commitment made by the Council. Increasing mode shift to active travel through the use of the rights of way network and reducing Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) motor vehicle use assists in reaching our Net Zero targets for the benefits of all communities.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan and its actions have been developed in the context of key policies and strategies, to ensure the plan is aligned with wider policy objectives that benefit our communities. These cover the areas of travel and transport, the environment and public health.

Leicestershire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

Encouraging more active travel use is vital for improving public health and wellbeing. Improving the rights of way network for our communities helps to deliver the incredible positive value that regular physical exercise has on public health.

Local Transport Plan (LTP4)

The direction and policy framework for the RoWIP is set by our Local Transport Plan (LTP4). The LTP4 Core Document, adopted in November 2024, sets out the vision for transport for Leicestershire over 2025 - 2040. The vision for transport is:

'Delivering a safe, connected and integrated transport network which is resilient and well managed to support the ambitions and health of our growing communities, safeguards the environment whilst delivering economic prosperity.'

Cycling and Walking Strategy (CaWS)

The RoWIP is an important element of the Cycling and Walking Strategy, helping to support people make more sustainable travel choices.

Public rights of way are vital in enabling our communities to access green and blue spaces and in connecting our communities. Encouraging and enabling use of the rights of way network can help towards improving public health and wellbeing, reducing negative impacts on the environment and air quality, and supporting the rural economy.

Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy

The highway network plays a key role in keeping people and places connected, especially in a rural county. Public rights of way make up over 40% of the highways network. Keeping our highway network in good condition is important for our communities, with the public rights of way and the RoWIP being a key part of the overall highway asset management framework.

Multi Modal Area Investment Plans (MMAIPs)

MMAIPs are holistic long term investment plans and are one of the delivery mechanisms for the Local Transport Plan (LTP4) that help secure investment and prioritise improvements to the transport networks, including the public rights of way network, to help mitigate transport challenges.

Biodiversity Duty Plan

The Biodiversity Duty Plan sets out the current and future actions that the Council will need to undertake to meet the strengthened biodiversity duty. One of the main areas where the Council has an opportunity to conserve and enhance biodiversity and demonstrate that it is meeting the duty is in relation to the land that it manages, which includes our rights of way network.

Access for Nature Delivery Plan

The Access for Nature Delivery Plan, which supports the Council's Action for Nature Strategic Approach to Biodiversity, Habitat and the Local Environment, includes actions to work with partners to seek funding and support to implement enhancements on the rights of way network.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan and its actions have been developed in the context of key policies and strategies, to ensure the plan is aligned with wider policy objectives that benefit our communities. These cover the areas of travel and transport, the environment and public health.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

LCWIPs set out cycling and walking networks and infrastructure priorities in an area for investment, including rights of way. Alongside the plans are linked educational and promotional programmes to help encourage people to travel actively.

Leicestershire Highway Design Guide

As the Local Highway Authority for the county, the Council's primary focus is on prioritising the safety and efficiency of a cohesive transport network that also helps deliver accessible places that offer benefits for the environment and our health and wellbeing. This includes providing practical guidance to land developers and their agents on Leicestershire's expectations when designing sustainable developments, ensuring they promote active travel, including the use of the rights of way.

Tree Management Strategy

The many trees across our rights of way network provide huge benefits to physical, mental and social health, providing calming and peaceful environments and promoting general well-being.

Trees provide huge environmental benefits improving air quality, reducing air pollution, giving off oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide, which help to mitigate the effects of climate change. They also retain water and stabilise soils, thereby reducing flood risk.

Key Guidance and Legislation

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act)

The requirement for local highway authorities to have a Rights of Way Improvement Plan is set out in the CROW Act.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

This legislation sets out various duties relating to rights of way, including the duty to keep the definitive map and statement under continuous review. This is the legal record of public rights of way in Leicestershire.

There is a range of key guidance and legislation relating to local highway authorities in respect of preparing, publishing, assessing and reviewing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). These all play a role in informing the development and delivery of our RoWIP.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF sets out that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

This includes legislation relating to development and public rights of way.

Highways Act 1980

This sets out legislation pertaining to the highway.

Over 40% of the highways network is made up of public rights of way.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans - Statutory Guidance to local highway authorities in England - published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) November 2002.

This document sets out Government's guidance for local highway authorities (LHA's) on preparing, publishing, assessing and reviewing Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

LHA's are required to assess and review plans, and decide whether to amend them or not, at intervals of not less than 10 years.



3. What We Do

3.1 Looking After the Network

Within Leicestershire there are more than 1,915 miles (3,084km) of public paths. It is a significant resource to manage. Leicestershire County Council has a role to ensure the safe passage of people wanting to use the paths. Below are the main areas that collectively make up the ongoing programmes of work undertaken to look after the public rights of way network.

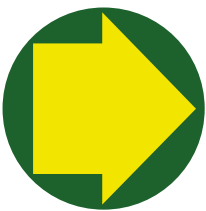
Signing Paths

The Council is required to maintain a direction post at the start of each path where it meets the carriageway. In Leicestershire, that is at nearly 7,000 locations in the county that meet this criterion





The signs, especially from urban areas, provide a gateway to the rural network, some include next village information and a distance. Within urban areas they also highlight routes that lead to schools or shops with local destination information on them. The largest number are on rural lanes showing where paths meets the carriageway. The traditional fingerposts point to the path as it joins the lane. Waymarker posts then guide users. On some promoted paths the signs include information on the promoted route, as well as local destinations where possible. The Leicestershire Round benefits from this and promotes itself at the junction points. One element of the local indicator for rights of way, which is used to monitor performance, includes measuring the number of posts that are provided.

The Council is also under a duty to sign paths along their route. In Leicestershire this utilises yellow waymarker posts at key sighting points along paths, to show the route ahead. Waymarker discs are also used at crossing points with colours that identify the status of the path. From the many compliments and messages

of thanks received, the council continues to have a very good reputation on the quality of its signage across the county. This includes compliments and thanks from those visiting the county.



There are now just over 15,000 locations for waymarker posts, and it is estimated that the Council has nearly 40,000 waymarkers in use at any one time located on other infrastructure across the network as well as posts. The waymarker discs are coloured to denote the status (type of right of way) of the route and the immediate direction of travel. The colour and status of the routes are:

Type of right of way	Waymarker Colour
Footpaths	
Bridleway	
Byways	
Restricted Byways	

The main focus of the waymarkers is to establish the legal routes of paths on the ground for the public and to ensure that the public keep to the paths.

Bridges and Structures

Just like other highways, the rights of way network has many bridges. These structures vary in size and condition, ranging from smaller stream crossings to the much larger structures with replacement costs of over £1million. The replacement of the bridges inventory is estimated to be over £12m.

There has been a rise in flooding incidents leading to bridges being washed away. In conjunction with Climate change policies, flood resilience has become a real issue for elements of the network. This has resulted in a changed design for bridges to allow a better chance of survival during peak flows. When older bridge structures reach the end of their life, they are replaced with bridges meeting the new design as part of the asset renewal process, providing improved resilience to impacts of climate change.

The larger and historic bridges are complex to manage. They vary in age from Medieval structures through to recent constructions. The older structures can be very expensive to maintain. Several bridges are listed and three are scheduled ancient monuments. Both planned and emergency repairs place strain on available funding due to the nature of the work. The Council is looking to add PROW bridges onto the wider highway bridge asset register to provide one register, facilitating more efficient management of bridges for routine maintenance and unplanned failure events.

Not all elements of some bridges are maintained by the authority. Bridges over rail lines are mainly maintained by Network Rail. This includes the longest bridge on the network, which is nearly 300 metres in length.

The failure of a bridge, or danger posed to users by the structure being weakened, will lead to closures. Public safety is paramount in such circumstances. The closure of a bridge has a knock-on effect to the local network and may mean local path links are severed, therefore reducing the number and duration of any bridge closure is important. In such circumstance we prioritise repairs as far as possible to reduce the impact on the network.



Boundary Crossings

Rights of way differ from most other highways in that they often have barriers across them. If a path crosses an area of land capable of holding livestock the occupier can apply for permission to place a fence across it. Nearly all the current fences have historical usage permission. The landowner is required to provide a suitable crossing, usually a stile or a gate. Nearly a fifth of all reports received from the public about rights of way are about these crossings.

The COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020's saw an increase in the number of people using local paths. The number of reports regarding stiles saw a large increase with new users exploring paths.

Improving access to the wider community has included programmes to replace stiles. Under the previous RoWIP the Council had a policy of 'gap, gate, stile'. The best replacement to a barrier is a gap. A gate is easier to use than a stile. The authority has encouraged gaps to replace stiles in areas with no livestock. It also supported the replacement of more than 1,700 stiles with gates, which have proved popular with users and land managers.

Routes on the network near urban areas and those that link settlements on key green corridors will be subject to 'gap, gate, stile' support where funding is available, to improve access for more people on these priority paths.

Applications for new barriers for livestock will require a gate, ensuring that it meets the Council's design requirements in the online standard drawing¹.

Surfacing

Public paths vary in condition and usability, particularly when it comes to the surface of a route. Most paths in urban areas are either sealed by use of material such as asphalt, or stoned, whilst most rural paths have no sealed or stoned surfacing. Paths that cross arable fields can be ploughed and then restored to provide a level walk.

A path that can be ploughed and an urban surfaced path are different for users, yet both are public highways. The surface of the path is fundamentally different, reflecting the number of people using it. One is close to where many people live, while the other may not be. A sealed surface path does need to be inspected on a programmed basis to ensure proper maintenance.

Paths originating from urban areas, including rural shorter loops, going directly to another close town or village see more use. All reports from customers on any path have been, or are intended to be, investigated. To improve the ongoing maintenance of surfaced routes, a programmed inspection regime is intended to be introduced. This will ensure that regularly used surfaced routes are checked and maintenance works identified.

Key path networks near urban areas, as well as village to village cross field routes, will have a higher level of priority for improving and widening access, such as stile replacement, drainage and stoning.

A much smaller part of the path network are byways, which are carriageways that are mainly used by walkers and riders, but sometimes by vehicles. This RoWIP also includes other minor county roads which have no sealed surface. The legislation that requires local highway authorities to reclassify routes as byways included the provision that there was no liability to surface routes to be suitable for vehicles. Walkers and riders however, do need to be catered for.

¹ www.leicestershirehighwaydesignguide.uk/materials-and-construction/standard-drawings-and-specification/rights-way-standard-drawings

Inspection Regimes

The authority responds and investigates all defect reports no matter where they are on the network. The reports are usually allocated to inspectors who specialise in rights of way work. As well as responsive inspections, the authority also has a programme to inspect all sealed routes. These are mostly in urban areas but also include routes such as cycleways on rural routes. An annual inspection programme is already in place for most of the urban sealed routes. The other routes are to be scheduled for inclusion in the yearly inspections over the early years of the action plan.

Planning

The county is subject to a wide range of planning proposals. These vary in scale from large mineral sites, distribution centres, urban extensions and smaller housing sites. Paragraph 105 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that “Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance Public Rights of Way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks...”.

The Council is a statutory consultee in the planning process, providing advice in relation to public rights of way in relation to planning proposals and applications.

Where public rights of way are impacted by development the Council will expect that consideration is given not just to replacement or reinstatement, but enhancement of the provision, to reflect the increased potential of local usage.

This recognises the impact that development can have on a public right of way, which is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, including future transport options.

As an example, a new large housing site on the periphery of an existing settlement will need to offer local travel options for new residents, including walking, wheeling and cycling to schools, shops and wider links into the rural network to access the wider environment.

Developers are requested to check if a site is crossed by any paths or is alongside any others. An online map is available for free inspection to check where the paths are. This can be used by any party².

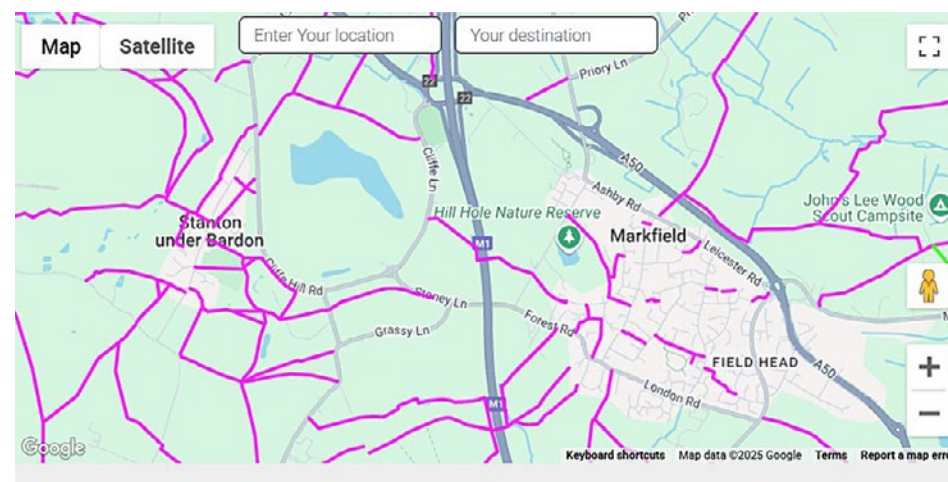


Figure 1 - Where to walk and ride map resource available to the public.

² www.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/cycling-and-walking/where-to-walk-and-ride-in-leicestershire

Where sites are subject to public rights of way, or could be linked to others, the Council has developed a wider Leicestershire Highway Design Guide³ (LHDG), which includes advice relating to rights of way. The LHDG is an online and dynamic guide, that will continue to be updated when required, to ensure it provides the most up to date advice in relation to development and rights of way.

At sites crossed by public rights of way there are several matters that should be considered when designing the layout of a development.

Details of how all existing and proposed public rights of way will be treated should be provided within the planning application. This should include provision for their management during construction, boundary treatments, surfacing, width, structures, signage and landscaping. Future maintenance will also need to be formally agreed.

Consideration should be given as to who will use the public rights of way and why, to maximise non-motorised travel. Users of all abilities need to be considered at the outset for surfacing, path widths and gradients and in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010⁴.

Some large sites have significant development periods, including phasing. Building works cannot begin until existing routes have been subject to a temporary closure or a full-time diversion or extinguishment. The long-term temporary closure of paths during construction is often a frustration to the public. Conversely, site security and safety on sites, including for local people, has to be recognised. These two issues need to be balanced, but safety must be paramount.

Both temporary and longer-term orders to divert or close routes are subject to statutory provisions that will take time to process. Developers should build this into the early planning of a site. The obstruction or diversion of an existing right of way is not permitted without obtaining the consent of the County Council, as the local highway authority, even if planning permission has been granted.

In the past, there have been several new estates built without finalising an official diversion of a path that crosses the site. This results in plots being crossed by a highway, making the conveyancing process far more difficult for all parties involved and causing difficulties for occupiers who wish to sell a unit soon after buying. Resolving these issues before they occur is advantageous for all parties concerned.

Paths should be routed through public open spaces where appropriate, and ideally away from estate roads. If the use of footways or cycleways is unavoidable, the route should be as direct as possible, taking account of where people would like to go. Parallel paths and footways should be avoided.

The Council will resist the provision of routes that take the form of narrow passageways bounded by walls, hedges or close-boarded fencing.

Planting should consider the mature sizes of the species being used and be set back from the path to ensure clear passage and minimise maintenance. If a route is curved or has corners, the distances between planting and the path should be increased to maintain satisfactory visibility.

Developments may have a significant effect on the level of use of the surrounding network of public rights of way, particularly where they may become important routes to neighbouring areas, shops, schools, services and places of employment. Requests may be made for improvements to the local path network beyond the development boundary. In addition, access to the wider rural network may need to reflect the new numbers of residents that are likely to use them.

³ www.leicestershirehighwaydesignguide.uk/

⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

The National Planning Policy Framework has supported the principle, and the delivery of, 'Green Infrastructure'. In land use terms this is an overarching description of areas of green and blue (water) that can and do deliver a wide range of benefits. These corridors can extend from urban areas out into the countryside. The rights of way network often provides the key access for the public. Green Infrastructure also supports carbon reduction, flood alleviation and providing cool corridors in urban areas in summer.

The river corridor from Leicester to Cossington is a good example. A Green and blue corridor linking a number of green areas of parks and country parks with the river and lakes, as well as nature areas. The footpaths and cycleways give access to the corridor from surrounding communities and offer a linear route from the heart of Leicester city into the wider county rural landscape.

3.2 Recording the Network

As well as managing the path network, the Council also has a surveying function to record the network of paths. One of the key elements of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949⁵ is to require local highway authorities to record the location of all paths and then produce a legal record. The Definitive Map of public rights of way is maintained by the County Council. It is a legal record of all public highways in Leicestershire that are either footpaths, bridleways or byways.

The map is conclusive evidence of the existence of a path, its status, and its position on the ground. Only highways shown on the Definitive Map have such conclusive protection.

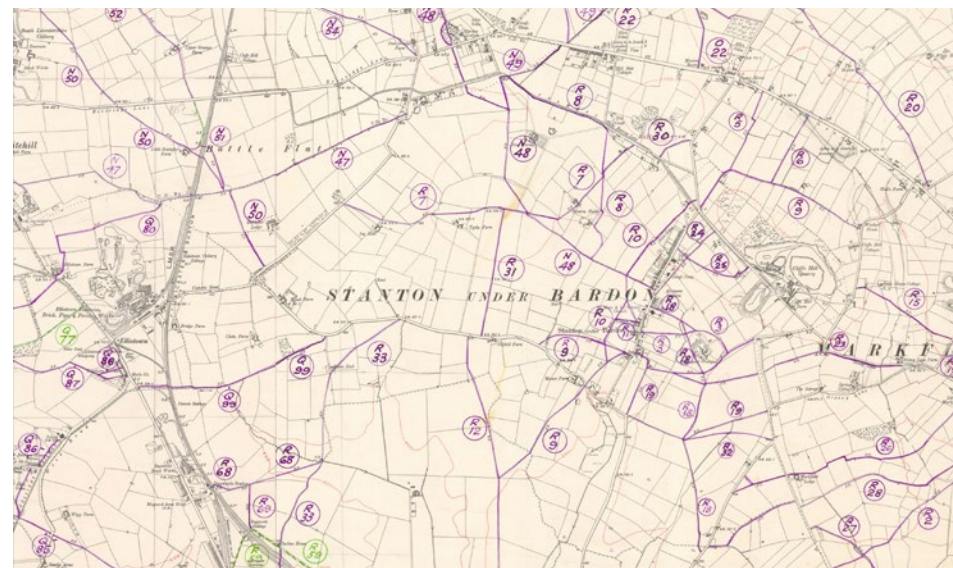


Figure 2 - Extract of 1957 Definitive Map.

⁵ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/97/enacted

A first survey was carried out and a map produced in 1952, based in part on surveys carried out by local parish councils. The Act required that the map be updated every 5 years. In 1957 a further map was published. Thereafter no further maps were produced, until the introduction of the Wildlife & Countryside Act in 1981⁶. This brought in a system of continuous review, so the map could be amended with each legal change and updated.

Each change to the map results in a legal process, known as a Definitive Map Modification Order⁷ (DMMO). For older legal orders this is an administrative task. To update the 1957 map to the new map more than 1,500 DMMO orders need to be 'made'. Once completed, the map will be subject to continuous review.

Although conclusive, the map can be changed. Anyone can apply to have a route added, provided they have enough evidence to prove a case. Claims to add routes to the map can be based on historical evidence that a highway came into being in the past or that a route has been used for many years without challenge. The evidence will be considered by the Council before deciding whether to make an order. Dealing with such orders is very resource intensive for the Council. As well as compiling witnesses' statements, historical evidence needs to be checked or collated. This enables a decision to be taken on whether to proceed or not. Even if the order is made, anyone may object and most orders have formal objections. At this point of the process the case is passed to the Planning Inspectorate for determination. In most cases this leads to a full public inquiry, although sometimes a Hearing is held.

In 2015 Government published the Deregulation Act⁸. One element related to simplifying the system for rights of way orders. It proposed to introduce a cut-off date for any new claims, closing the map for claims based on historical evidence. All historic highways not recorded by that date and not shown on a Definitive Map were to be extinguished, ending the 'once a highway, always a highway' perspective. This resulted in a large number of claims being made to the authority before the cut-off date. Over time the list of outstanding cases has risen from 40 to nearly 200.

To enact the elements relating to rights of way from the Act, further legislation needed to be drafted and time given to enact. Since 2015 only the cut-off date was enacted into law. Subsequently the Government repealed the provision, and the system is back to the position prior to 2015, albeit with a large number of claims.

The Council is required to maintain an online DMMO application claims register⁹ which lists all the claims made. This is published and updated when necessary. For conveyancing purposes, the Definitive map may be checked to see if land is crossed by a path. A full check also asks if there are any claims or proposals that may also have a bearing on the conveyance.

Government has indicated that some of the proposals linked to the Deregulation Act may be pursued to assist parties determining orders. Currently there is no firm timetable, and the changes will not be major. That leaves a large list of claims awaiting determination. Currently orders are required to be made or submitted to the Secretary of State for determination within 12 months. The new draft provisions have sought orders to be dealt with more quickly. Due to the sheer scale of claims and evidence submitted, because of the then assumed cut-off date, the threshold is extremely challenging with the resources available for the task.

⁶ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69

⁷ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/section/53

⁸ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/20/notes

⁹ www.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/cycling-and-walking/definitive-map-modification-orders

The number of outstanding cases needs a pragmatic and efficient approach to move them forward, with an appropriate process in place. The approach to outstanding cases will be a priority in the action plan. It is recognised that any further legislative and guidance changes will require a further review, depending on the requirements set out.

The 1949 Act required a physical map to be published to a set format. With further legislative updates, local highway authorities are required to have a copy of the Definitive map for inspection and also supply a copy to each District authority in two tier authority structures. Parish Councils can also request copies for their area.

All mapping data that shows rights of way is derived from the Definitive Map. This includes the information supplied to the Ordnance Survey for inclusion on national mapping products¹⁰.

With the introduction of digital mapping systems and the ability to deliver mapping to people's homes and mobile devices, the Council has provided an online version of the map¹¹. Although not the official Definitive Map, it does provide an online resource of the information for people to access.

There are also other digital highway data sets that utilise the path mapping. Government has created a National Street Gazetteer (NSG) to list all streets and provide a framework for the management of the highways network. Leicestershire County Council has included the public rights of way within the NSG. There is still more work to be done to further integrate the data and meet future data requirements. FindMyStreet¹² is a Government initiative to make the NSG data available to the public online. This includes some other meta data, such as who is responsible to maintain the route.

Modern digital data not only allows for delivery over the web it can also contain meta data to assist other parties with access to it, including asset and report data. Larger projects, such as new minerals sites and other large infrastructure projects, often need large amounts of data to plan ahead. As such, the information is an important resource for a wide audience. Whilst there is a requirement for the Definitive Map to be kept up to date it also feeds and supplies other data resources.

The management of the Definitive Map will continue to meet legal requirements. The increasing use of the path data, as well as further meta data requirements in other systems, reflects a changing landscape. It is information that feeds into bigger data sets and needs to reflect this and be compatible.

¹⁰ <https://shop.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/map-ranges/os-paper-map-ranges/>

¹¹ www.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/cycling-and-walking/where-to-walk-and-ride-in-leicestershire

¹² www.findmystreet.co.uk/

3.3 Open Access

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a new piece of legislation that sought to record all areas of mountain, moor, heath and down. In addition, this data was to also include all registered common land.

The legislation granted public access rights to this land. The County Council became the 'Access Authority' for Leicestershire to manage access to these sites. Within the county most sites are small, although there are over 100 of them and there are some larger sites. New powers allowed for byelaws and wardens, if necessary.

The principal sites are:

- Charnwood Lodge - 184 acres
- Loughborough Meadows - 165 acres
- Burbage Common - 75 acres
- Burrough Hill - 75 acres

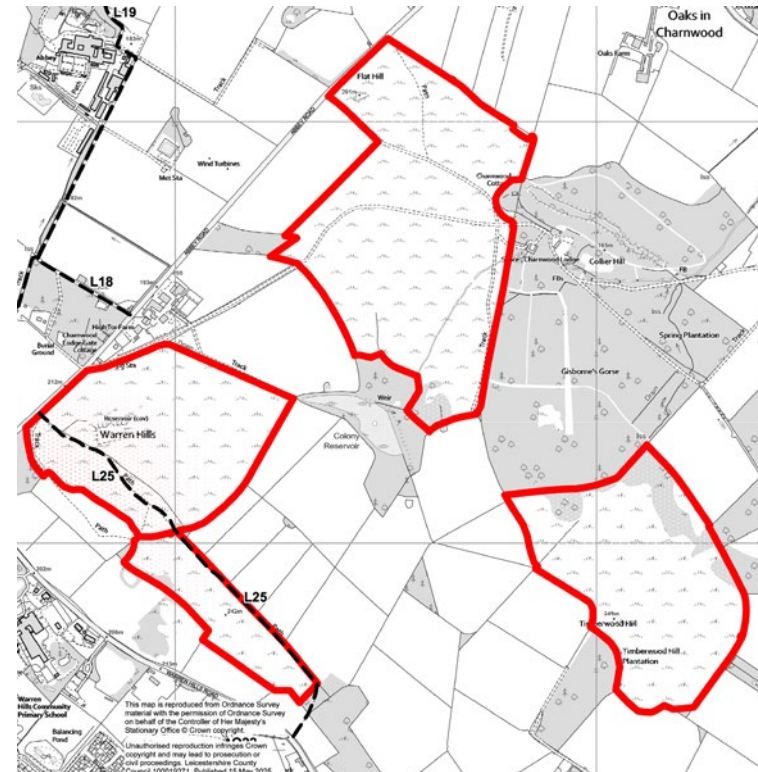


Figure 3 - Areas of open access at Charnwood Lodge.

The Access authority is asked to ensure that all sites can be accessed by the public and that appropriate signage is in place. The Council has been assisted in this work by the Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LLAF). As well as carrying out repeat site inspections, the group has liaised with the site managers to ensure people can enjoy the sites.

There is a review required of the sites by 2030. This will be carried out by Natural England.

3.4 Encouraging Use

In 2021 the County Council adopted the Cycling & Walking Strategy (CaWS). The vision of the strategy is to inspire more people to walk, wheel and ride. Underpinning this was maintaining and enhancing walking, wheeling and cycling routes and providing information and training to the public. Promoting, encouraging and enabling the use of the rights of way network by walking, wheeling and riding is carried out under our Choose How You Move (CHYM) brand, in support of the CaWS objectives.



Choose How You Move (CHYM) is the brand for our programme of measures designed to encourage and enable people across Leicestershire to choose active and sustainable travel. The key aim of the CHYM programme is to take a life-cycle approach that begins with children and includes all residents regardless of age or background to help them to travel actively through walking, wheeling and riding.

Some of the great work being done as part of our CHYM programme in collaboration with neighbouring local authorities includes:

- Creating walking, wheeling and cycle route maps
- Promotion of guided walks and walking groups in local areas
- Cycle training for all users
- Promotion of cycle groups and clubs in local areas
- Personalised travel planning for communities and businesses
- Helping schools with their school travel plans to support staff, parents and children
- Active travel grants – helping businesses empower their employees to use active travel
- E-bike trials
- Incentivised activity monitoring with Better Points rewards.

In addition to the CHYM programme, there are lots of partner organisations and individual volunteers who dedicate their time to help promote and encourage use of the rights of way network, including the Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LLAF).

3.5 Partnership Working

The Council works with a range of individuals, councils, agencies and funding partners to deliver the network we see and use.

The LLAf represents the interests of people concerned with public access in Leicestershire including both users and landowners. The forum also promotes the use of rights of way, country parks and open access for recreational use, as well as for commuting. Members of the group are volunteers.

The main role of the Forum is to advise all levels of local government, and relevant agencies on policy proposals and issues relating to access. The forum also carries out regular site visits to assess the state of public land across the county, and to advise the authority's responsible for access.

The Forum holds public meetings and will have a hands-on role in monitoring delivery of the RoWIP to see how the Actions in the plan are being delivered. The Action plan will be reviewed, including an annual update to the Forum.

Volunteers from the Leicestershire Footpath Association currently support the maintenance of the Leicestershire Round. The Council has also recently advertised for more general path volunteers to assist on the wider network. A further group of volunteers is due to start on research and site survey work to support the historic claims for paths submitted by the public.

The Trail Riders fellowship has assisted with some surface work on several byways in the county through volunteers and funding.

Under Section 43 of the Highways Act, Parish Councils have powers to carry out works on footpaths and bridleways. Parish Councils already carry out some vegetation clearance and limited works. The County Council runs a Parish Pilot scheme that supports parish, town councils and community organisations with carrying out small-scale improvements and path maintenance of local paths.

Local planning authorities engage with highway authorities in seeking appropriate funding from new development. Developers contribute the largest sums to improve access in and around developments, as part of their obligation to help mitigate the impact of the development. This includes Section 106 (S106) of the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) payments, to improve paths beyond the development itself.

Other local authorities have historically also assisted with joint bids to outside parties and some funding for access. Planning policies also highlight the importance of public access within the development framework.

The charity Sustrans, whose aim is to make it easier for everyone to walk, wheel and cycle, has been a major funding partner in the past and continues to work on schemes in the county, as well as managing some routes. The organisation has assisted with the creation of significant cycleways.

Currently the Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme is contributing towards access improvements in the area, which is backed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The National Forest has been supportive of access projects, including funding elements. This has included improvements to a route from Leicester city to Bradgate Park. The Forest also developed the National Forest Way.

The Big Lottery, which is an organisation that gives millions of pounds from the UK's National Lottery to good causes has, over time, contributed towards over £1million of work on public rights of way, mainly though cycleway development. The Aggregates Levy, which is a tax levied on the commercial exploitation of rock, sand and gravel in the UK, has also provided funding over the years.

Government funding has been a major trigger in the past. Previously most funding came from what is now Defra - Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs. A precursor to this was the Countryside Commission, which funded works and staff for nearly 10 years. The Department for Transport (DfT) is now the main source of direct Government funding. This includes the multi modal funding and a range of interrelated schemes and proposals linked to wider access and non-vehicular transport.



4. Achievements

Over the past few decades the Council has successfully managed the public rights of way network as a whole, by ensuring it is well maintained and accessible for the public. The network we see today is different to that of 20 years ago. In particular, funding has been focused on things that make paths easier to use by the public. As an example, within the county you are likely to start on a path that is signed from the roadside, is waymarked on its route and has reasonable boundary crossing points.

Since the start of the first Rights of Way Improvement Plan much has been done to improve access to the network. In raw numbers, the figures below demonstrate the size of the network and the extent of the works. During that period, the authority has:

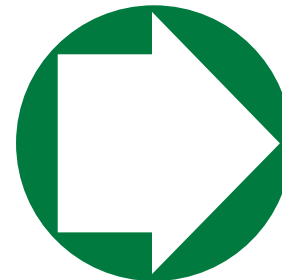


Installed more than
15,000
waymarker posts
to show the way ahead

Installed more than
1,700
hand or kissing gates
to replace boundary
structures

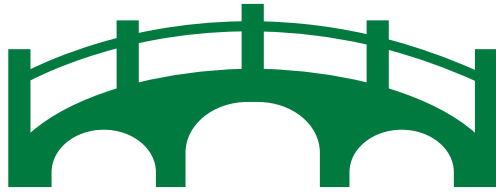


Placed
40,000
waymarkers



Managed nearly
7,000
sites where
finger posts
are required



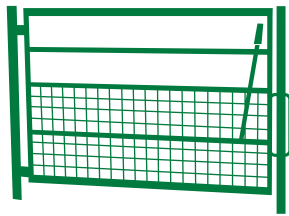


Installed or replaced
more than
250
larger bridges

Made more than
10,000
visits to clear
vegetation



Strimmed more than
1,000
miles of paths



Installed around
300
new bridle gates
with easy opening
latches for riders

Repainted
more than
25,000
posts

Installed more than
1,000
new smaller
sleeper bridges

Removed over
1,500
stiles



The main focus has been on the area improvement schemes that looked at path networks in specific areas. During the lifetime of the first RoWIP most of the network was surveyed to ensure the paths were open, in the right place and brought up to a usable standard.

The signing of the paths has been greatly appreciated by the public. Visible clear signing helps people who are unable to follow a map in a rural setting and has removed barriers to new users of routes. Making paths a little bit easier to use helps many. A hand gate is so much easier to use than a stile or field gate.

Wanting easier boundary crossings is one of the main report types we receive. This has had a fundamental impact on the route's visibility and accessibility for the public.

Going back 20 years to the start of the first RoWIP, the Council has dealt with over 37,000 reports from the public. All of these have been investigated over the lifetime of the plans. The main items dealt with include:

Just under
4,000
stile reports

Over
3,000
surface
vegetation reports

6,000
reports of
overgrowth
of verges,
hedges and trees,
both rural and urban

2,000
reports of
surface damage

Well over
2,000
reports regarding
fingerposts

2,200
gate reports

1,400
waymarking reports

1,100
bridge reports

This is the foundation for keeping the network open and available.

The Council has worked with Network Rail to replace all pedestrian and bridleway crossings on the Midland Main Line with safer crossing points. This included 6 new bridges put in place near crossings, amounting to a significant capital investment. The largest being a bridle bridge near Loughborough which is over 300 metres long. This work has also assisted in the scheme of electrification for the Midland Main Line.

The proposals for HS2, and the eastern leg through parts of Leicestershire, involved proposals for 42 path crossings. In the first Rights of Way Plan the Council recognised the damage done to the network by large linear infrastructure projects, such as the motorway network. The Council worked with HS2 Ltd to try to minimise local network disruption and provision of suitable crossings. With the abandonment of the eastern leg the work has ceased, but remains in place should it be revived.

Since 2006 the Council has carried out nearly 500 Definitive Map Modification Orders to keep the map up to date. The orders also deal with claims for historic routes and routes claimed through use by the public. The map has now been digitised and a version is now available online for public and business use. The data has been utilised for the delivery of the National Street Gazetteer and other data sets, including other online datasets such as www.findmystreet.co.uk. The Council has also dealt with over 600 applications to divert paths. Some of these orders are objected to and are required to be referred to the planning inspectorate for determination. The Council has engaged with that process on multiple occasions.

The service also assists the conveyancing industry to ensure potential purchasers understand if a holding is affected by a public path. Under the planning process, the Council has considered and commented on relevant applications. Some applications are very large and affect local networks. As examples, the extension to the Bardon Quarry involved the movements of several paths for a number of phases over several years. The proposals for the new East Midlands Gateway logistics park included multiple paths and changes to railway crossings, which are now all in place. Housing forms most applications, from larger urban extensions to individual units. Many enhancements to paths have been delivered by developers or, alternatively, the developer has funded enhancements delivered by the Council. The network has benefited from several million pounds worth of schemes since 2006, funded by the development process.

This year is the 25th anniversary of the National Forest. Access was always a key outcome and the main project affecting rights of way during that time was the establishment of the National Forest Way. The Council supported the establishment of the route. The primary long-distance path in the county is the Leicestershire Round. This 100 mile stroll around the county has seen a partnership with the Leicestershire Footpath Association. The group now operates with some active volunteers and the support of the County Council to look after the route.

The Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LLAF)¹³ has actively worked with the Council during the period of the plans. The LLAF represents the interests of everyone concerned with public access in Leicestershire, including both users and landowners. The LLAF also promotes the use of rights of way, country parks and open access for recreational use, as well as for commuting. It also hosts public meetings dealing with public access in the county.

¹³ www.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/cycling-and-walking/leicestershire-local-access-forum



5. Consultation and Engagement

5.1 Engagement Process

To help develop a Rights of Way Improvement Plan it is key to understand the priorities and needs of those using the public rights of way network.

In order to get an understanding of the current and likely future needs of people using, or wishing to use, the rights of way network, we undertook an engagement exercise to seek the views of the public and a wide range of statutory and non-statutory stakeholders.

This engagement process was undertaken in several ways to get a balanced view, helping everyone have their say. The range of engagement activities included:

Public Rights of Way Survey

An online survey (also available in paper format) was launched between 19th February and 17th March 2025. The survey was made available to the public via the Council's Have Your Say webpage, as well as being shared directly with stakeholders who were identified in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan Statutory Guidance, which was published by the Government agency DEFRA (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs).

Social PinPoint

Using the engagement tool Social PinPoint, an interactive map was created displaying layers of information relating to public rights of way in Leicestershire. Users were able to add a marker to a specific location/right of way and provide detail which related directly to that site such as highlighting good or bad routes, suggestions for improvements, maintenance or accessibility issues.

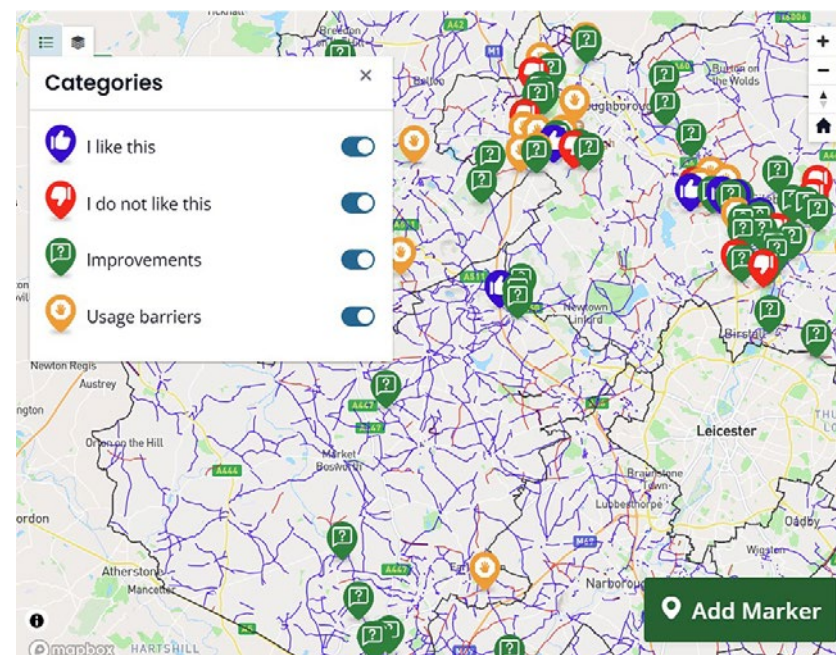


Figure 4 - Map available for people to use through the Social PinPoint engagement tool.

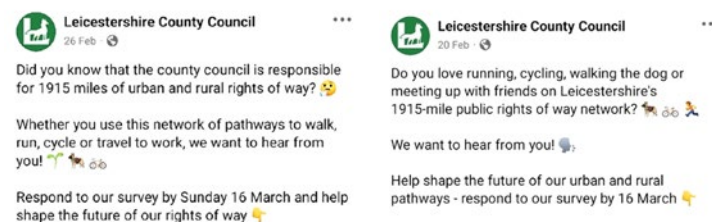
Cycling, Walking and Wheeling Forum

A public meeting of the cycling, walking and wheeling forum was held at County Hall in Glenfield on Monday 3rd March 2025, with over 40 attendees. This event was held through the established forum, which is a hybrid forum, meaning it can be attended either in person or online. A presentation was provided giving an overview of the rights of way in Leicestershire, along with the development of the rights of way improvement plan. A rights of way workshop was also included as part of the event providing attendees the opportunity to provide detailed feedback and discuss their thoughts on the network.



Social Media

We promoted the online survey, the cycling walking and wheeling forum and social pinpoint through the Council's corporate social media channels. Our posts received 711 clicks and 82 shares across the different platforms.



Images above show examples of social media posts made as part of the engagement process.

Local Access Forum

The Local Access Forum represents the interests of everyone concerned with public access in Leicestershire, including both users and landowners. It was therefore vital to work closely with its members during the engagement period, to help shape this Plan. The Local Access Forum and its members are key engagement and delivery partners in ensuring the Plan is a continued success over the next 10 year.

5.2 Engagement Survey Summary

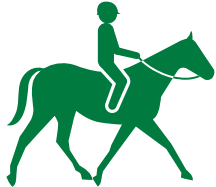
89%
were
Leicestershire
residents


39%
male
1% use another term


60%
female


35%
Walking


8%
Cycling


12%
Horse riding

How respondents use rights of way



71%
of respondents
start journeys
from home



85%
said they use
the network for
health, fitness and
well being purposes



6%
said they use
the network to
travel to work



Common Barriers to using the Rights of Way Network in Leicestershire

51% of respondents said maintenance/cleanliness
issues prevented them from using the network

29% physical access to route

27% lack of signage was an issue



What respondents said would encourage use

53% better quality of paths/cycleways/bridleways

62% would like to see paths/cycleways/bridleways better maintained

46% said better signage would encourage them great deal

38% would like to see improved accessibility including more routes with gates instead of stiles

42% would like to see more printed information on where to walk/cycle/ride on the network

Getting in touch

50%
of respondents know
how to report an issue
on the network

Moving forward

Respondents agreed most heavily used
rights of way should be prioritised for maintenance

78% of respondents agree that developers should be
encouraged to provide more riding and walking opportunities

Most would like to see 'greenways' network
introduced linking villages and towns

5.3 Engagement Analysis

Survey Overview

We received over 1,240 responses to our online survey which included responses from:

- Leicestershire residents
- Visitors to Leicestershire
- County, district or parish/town councillors
- Representative of a public sector organisations
- Representative of a voluntary sector organisation, charity or community groups
- Representative of a business or private sector organisations

How People Access and Travel on the Rights of Way Network in Leicestershire

Walking remains the highest form of activity on the network, with 35% of respondents said they walked on the public rights of way network several times a week. 60% of journeys were between 2 and 4 miles.

12% of respondents said that they had used the network for horse riding several times a week, with many travelling between 5-10 miles per journey.

8% of respondents noted that they cycled several times a week on the network, with 29% saying that they travelled between 5-10 miles.

Most people began their journey and accessed the rights of way network from home, with 71% saying they walked, cycled or rode from home. 5% of respondents used their cars to access a starting point and only 1% of respondents used public transport to access the network. 3% specified “other”, which included equestrians beginning their journeys from stables or transporting their horse to access byways. Less than 1% of respondents said they travelled along byways using motor vehicles.

What is the Network Being Used For?

The rights of way network plays an important role in health, wellbeing and social inclusion with 85% of respondents saying they accessed the rights of way for leisure, health and fitness. There is also a high percentage of users accessing the network to walk with groups or friends and to exercise their pets/ animals. It is also interesting to note that rights of way provides access to work and education, provides access to local amenities such as shops, cafes, pubs and also offers connections to other modes of passenger transport, such as bus and rail. The survey also showed that respondents accessed the network for hobbies such as birdwatching and general access to nature. A very low percentage said that they used the network to ride motorcycles or drive vehicles.

What is Preventing People from Using the Network?

As well as knowing what works well and why people use the network the way that they do, we also wanted to understand what might prevent the public from using the public rights of way network in Leicestershire. The survey showed that:

- 51% of respondents highlighted that maintenance prevented them from using the network, as well as 29% noting that physical access to routes were an issue for them. This includes things such as stiles making routes inaccessible for users with disabilities and mobility issues, gates restricting horse riders along routes, as well as issues with flooding and overgrown vegetation restricting access to paths.
- More accessible links to bridleways was also a common theme, as respondents noted that equestrians had to use the main road network to reach off-road bridleway, which can be some distance away.
- When asked what would encourage respondents of the survey to use public rights of way more often:
- Maintenance was a clear theme for all users, with 62% agreeing that better maintained paths, cycleways and bridleways would encourage more frequent use.
- When asked if more accessible routes, with gates instead of stiles, would encourage more use of the network 38% responded that it would a great deal, an additional 28% saying it would somewhat help.

We also found that 84% of people responding to the survey would like to see:

- Clearer signage when out using the network
- More printed and digital route information being more readily accessible, 70% and 79% respectively.
- To some extent respondents also acknowledged that improved personal safety measures would encourage more usage
- More facilities such as cafes, toilets, seating and picnic areas on routes.
- 36% said they would like to see better parking facilities near routes including free or reduced parking charges.

Incentives

When asked “did you know you can earn rewards when walking or cycling on the rights of way network by using the 'BetterPoints' app?” 93% said no.

Interestingly, 51% said that receiving incentives would not encourage them to use the network more often, with only 10% responding that it would a great deal.

Information Provision

We found that 80% of respondents access public rights of way information, such as maps and/or walking routes, through digital websites/Apps, for example OS Maps, Strava and google. Less people access information from the County Council's website.

A high percentage of respondents said they felt confident when using either online maps or printed maps to follow a path across fields, but more information should be available to provide help and support to those who need it. People would like to see an improvement in the wayfinding across the network to help them identify routes, with 46% agreeing that this would encourage them a great deal. When asked if more printed information on where to walk/cycle/ride would encourage more use on the rights of way network 41% responded that it would to some extent.

Reporting a Problem

Half of respondents know how to report a problem on the public rights of way network, with 21% of those not having done so before.

Overall, the respondents that had reported a problem to Leicestershire County Council found the service satisfactory. When reporting an issue on the public rights of way network 12% rated the service ok, with acknowledgement that a high number of reported issues were resolved following a report. However, some respondents highlighted that they had not received any feedback, with response times being too long and they would have liked to be informed of progress after reporting a problem.

Priorities

We want to understand what the public and stakeholder's priorities are, to help shape the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan and action plan. From the results of the survey, we can see:

- 46% of respondents tend to agree that the most heavily used public rights of way routes should be prioritised for maintenance
- 43% agreed that this should include promoted routes, such as the Leicestershire Round.
- A high proportion noted that they felt vehicles should be restricted from using unsurfaced rural lanes during winter months, as this is when most damage occurs.
- Responses to whether future improvements should focus on routes nearer to where most people live was neutral, however 29% did tend to agree.
- Most respondents believed that developers should be encouraged to provide more walking and riding opportunities.
- Respondents would like to see a 'greenways' network of high-quality rights of way routes that link towns and villages developed.

Social PinPoint

This online mapping tool allowed users to populate and pin information specific to footpaths, bridleways and byways. There were four categories to choose from including I like this, I don't like this, improvements and usage barriers. We received 125 pins, with analysis showing:

- 65% of respondents noting maintenance as an issue
- 14% highlighted physical barriers/accessibility being a problem on some routes.
- Other areas that were noted included safety and network connectivity.

This data shows very similar themes to the survey results, where maintenance and accessibility appears to be a key priority.

5.4 Consultation Process

Undertaking the initial engagement process was invaluable in helping shape the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan and its actions. Once the draft plan had been developed it was published as part of a twelve week formal consultation, to ensure everyone had the chance to review it and provide feedback.

A summary of the 12 week Consultation will be included here in the final version of the Plan.

5.5 It Doesn't End There

Once the Rights of Way Improvement Plan has been formally approved and adopted by the Council, engagement will continue to support the delivery of the actions. Engagement will also help steer the updating of the actions over the next 10 year period, to make sure that the plan remains appropriate and deliverable for all users.

We will continue to measure user satisfaction through our existing processes and ensure there are opportunities for engagement, enabling open and continuous conversations.

To read more about how we will continuously monitor our progress against the action plan see the Monitoring and Evaluation section below.



6. Assessment of the Network

6.1 The Network and its Users

The approximate 1,915 miles (3,084km) of public paths within Leicestershire is a significant resource to manage. Placed end to end this is the equivalent of looking after a long-distance path between Leicester and Moscow.

The network is made up of different types of routes shown in table 1 below:

Route Type	Waymarker Colour	User Type				Percentage of Network of each Route Type
		Walkers	Cyclists	Riders	Motors	
Footpaths	Yellow	1517	0	0	0	80%
Bridleways	Blue	349	349	349	0	18%
Byways	Red	35	35	35	35	2%
Restricted Byways	Brown	9	9	9	9	<1%
Sub Total (Miles)		1910	393	393	44	100%
Total Percentage of the Network available to each User Type		100%	20%	20%	2%	

Table 1 - The number of miles and percentage of each route type available to each user type.

The extent of paths available for use is different for each of the user types. Walkers have access to the full network. Horse riders are entitled to use 20%, while motor vehicles are restricted to less than 2%.

A network plan of the above types looks very different. This results in a more fragmented network for horse riders. As shown in figure 5, the left plan shows the rights of way network for walkers and the right plan shows the network for riders. The eastern half of the county has more bridleways than the western.



Figure 5 - Paths available to walkers and riders.

As well as the path network, users utilise the carriageway network. This includes walkers using shorter sections to link footpaths and horse riders using extensive sections to link bridleways.

Whilst the density does vary, the path network broadly covers the county. The network near to where most people live is denser, since paths tend to go from one settlement to another. However, the path network also crosses rural areas and is often considered to be a network that crosses farmland. In fact, 50% of the path network is within urban areas or within a quarter of a mile (402m) of them.



Figure 6 - Areas of the rights of way network within a quarter of a mile (402m) of where people live in towns and villages.

Analysis demonstrates that 75% of households are within one fifth of a mile (322m) of a path. This shows that the path network is on the doorstep of the wider population.

As part of the early consultation of this document the Council commissioned an online survey, including asking respondents what prevented them from using the network and the barriers they faced. In addition, analysis has been carried out on nearly 20,000 reports on issues on paths from the public over the past 10 years.

Both the survey carried out for the first RoWIP and the survey for this plan highlight that most journeys start from a doorstep, where people live, attend school, work or shop. This extends to recreational walking, be it walking the dog or simply exploring the local area.

An analysis of the public reports dealing with issues on the rights of way network underlines this, with some trends to note. Looking at reports and the distance from the reporter's general postcode there is a clear link.

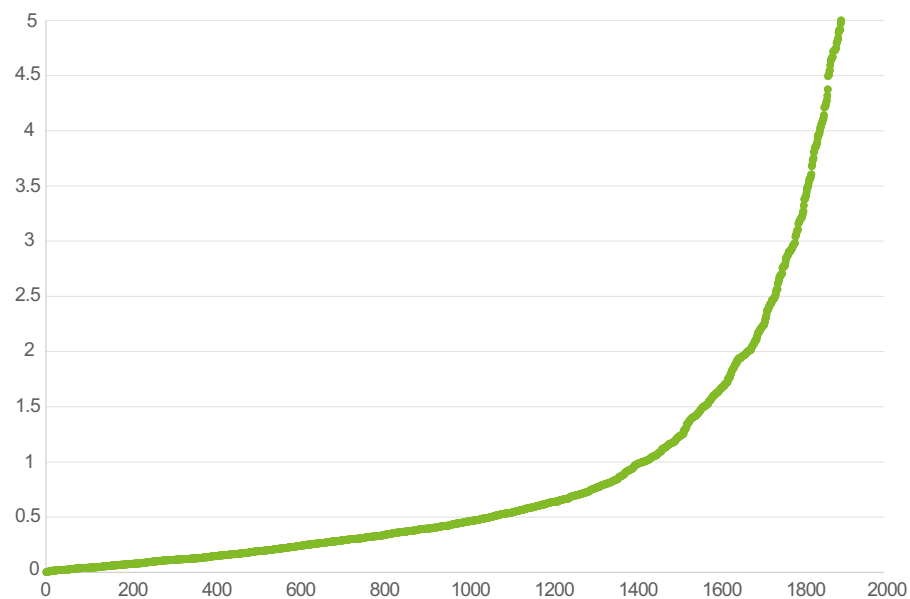


Figure 7 - Distance of Reports from the reporter's home. 51% are within half a mile.

This underlines that most journeys using paths start at the front door. In addition, these reports are likely to be on routes where repeat visits occur. A study of reports received shows that 51% are within 0.5 miles of where the reporter lives. 70% are within 1 mile of where the reporter lives.

Nearly all paths have reports associated with them demonstrating that the wider network is used throughout. This use is on a lesser extent.

Looking at the figures shown in map, figure 8 below, within built up areas and a quarter of a mile (402m) beyond, contains 50% of the path network. These areas contain 65% of all reports. The remaining 50% of the network contains 35% of reports. Reports are more frequent in the urban and near urban routes, near to where people live. This is no surprise and challenges the view perception that rights of way are just rural routes.

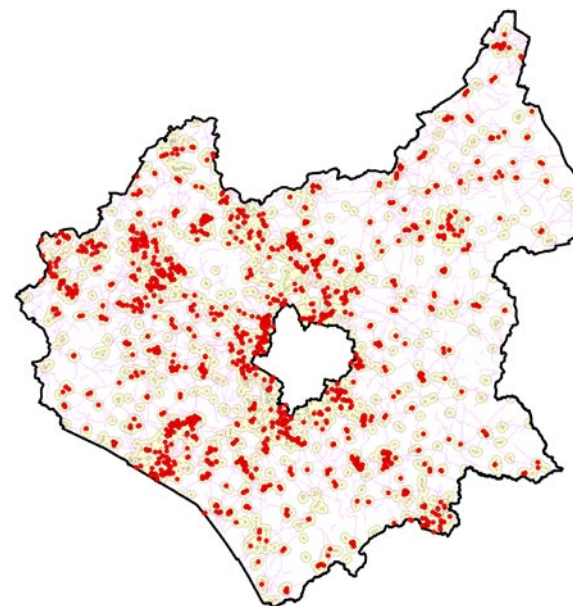


Figure 8 - Within a quarter of a mile of where people live are 65% of all reports and 50% of the network.

6.2 Our Role as a Highway Authority

The primary role of Leicestershire County Council as a highway authority is to ensure the safe passage of people wanting to use the paths. Whilst there are a series of duties and powers, the fundamental responsibility is ensuring anyone can pass and repass along any route¹⁴.

The Council receives reports from the public on a daily basis. Over the past 10 years nearly 20,000 reports have been received. This equates to nearly 40 reports per week. Each of these reports includes details on the nature of the problem found and what was done to rectify the issue. As such, it is a very good measure of what causes concerns to users and occupiers. The reports form a wide range of categories that represent the issues that the public must face when using paths. Some issues are rarely reported, others frequently reported. The number and category of reports is show below in figure 9.

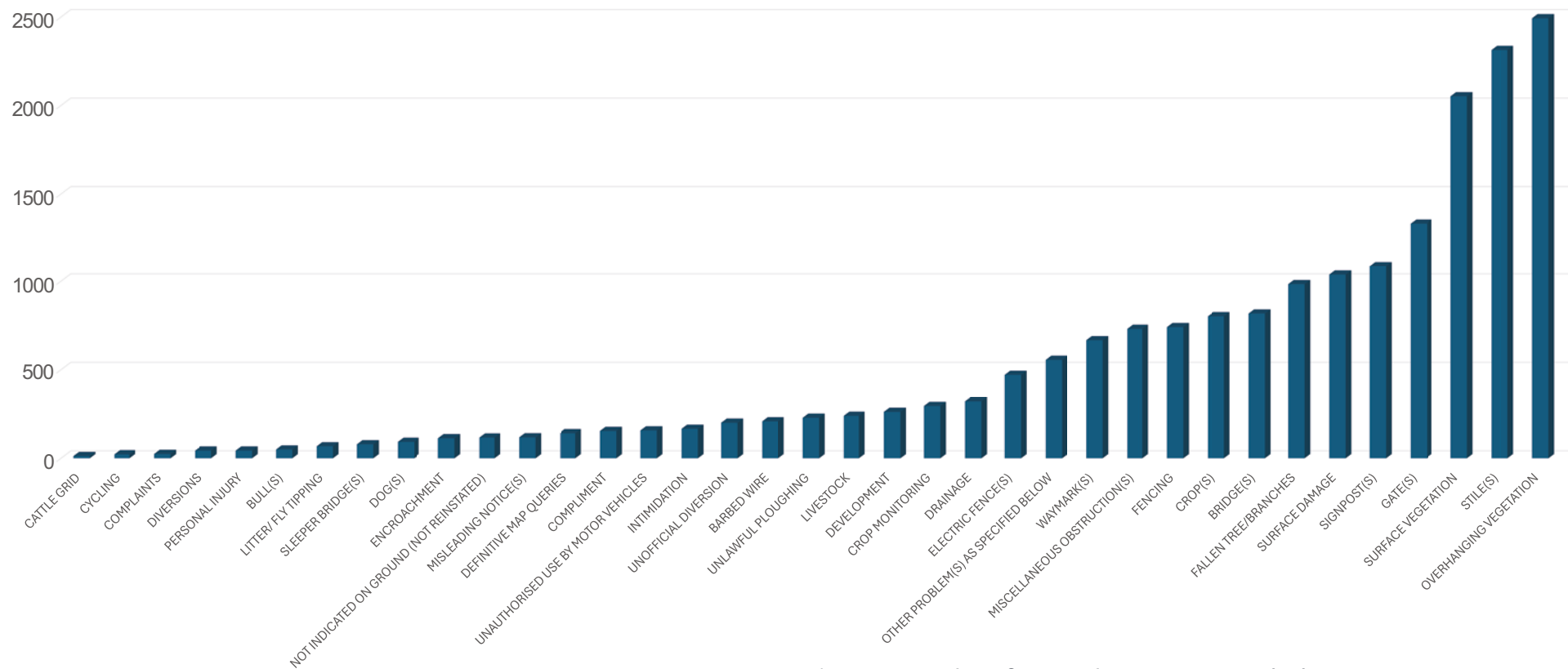


Figure 9 - Number of reports by category over the last 10 years.

¹⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/41

The primary categories of reports over the 10-year period are shown below in table 2.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Crop(s)	84	89	112	72	105	50	89	75	79	45	800
Bridge(s)	37	44	70	60	64	97	140	91	78	129	810
Fallen tree/ branches	75	59	122	106	99	102	99	102	66	103	933
Surface damage	111	97	92	86	77	109	135	87	111	117	1022
Signpost(s)	140	93	71	119	109	139	128	113	79	82	1073
Gate(s)	136	131	124	144	128	159	162	129	92	98	1303
Surface vegetation	176	208	272	211	228	101	187	134	269	260	2046
Stile(s)	207	170	159	190	201	268	392	305	205	192	2289
Overhanging vegetation	288	240	254	224	303	176	244	172	294	277	2472

Table 2 - Primary categories of reports by year over a 10-year period.

Vegetation and crops make up four of the top ten categories. Nature dictates that these are items that recur on a yearly basis. They also highlight that the parties responsible to keep the route clear aren't always the highway authority. Natural vegetation from the surface of the highway is the responsibility of the highway authority. Hedges alongside highways are invariably the responsibility of the occupier, as are crops.

It remains the duty of the highway authority to ensure that the third parties carry out their responsibilities. Stiles and gates are the responsibility of the occupier, whilst signage and bridges are the responsibility of the County Council.

The frequency and pattern by month of reports are shown in figure 10, which shows the use of the network and when peak increases in reports coincide with problems, such as vegetation growing season. This covers a period of 5 years. The pattern is consistent each year, as is the resource requirement.

The only significant variation is during the COVID-19 pandemic year. Assuming a ratio of reports to numbers using the network, there was about a 20% increase for periods that coincided with COVID-19 travel lockdowns. Overall, the pattern is very similar each year. As such, it is expected that this will repeat over the lifetime of this document.

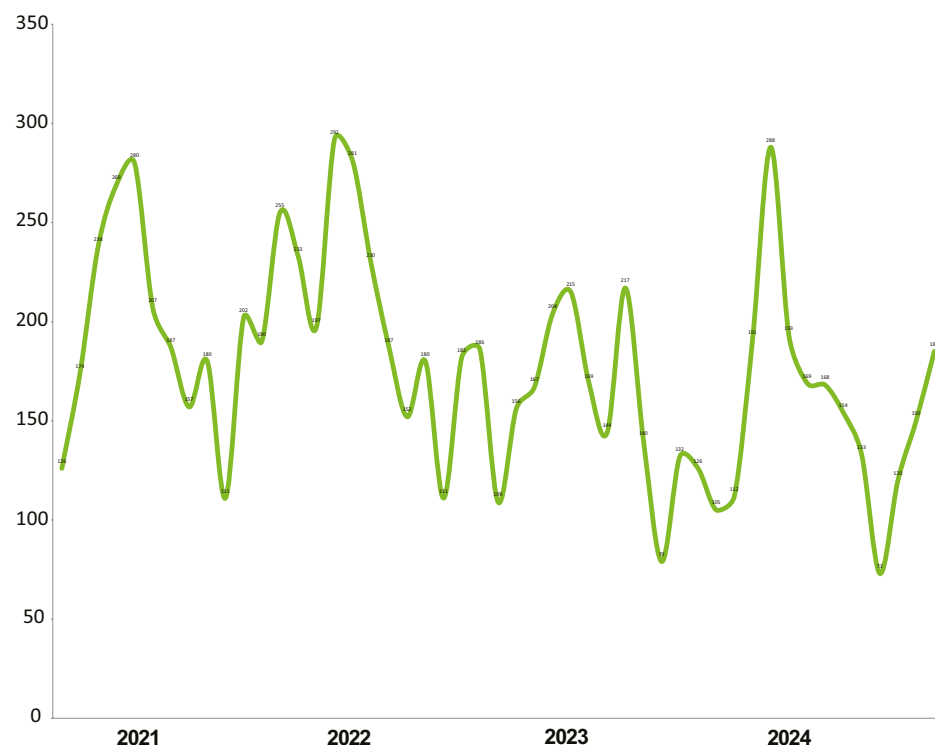


Figure 10 - Number of reports by month over last 5 years.

The number of reports and their frequency over the calendar year is largely predictable, as is the changing resource level to deal with associated responses. There is, of course, an annual average figure of reports and the state of the network.

To assess how path networks were being managed, Government established a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 178). In general, it measured the ease of use of the path network for the public. It also set a comparable standard measure between authorities to monitor performance. The first RoWIP included this as a yearly measure of performance.

Subsequently Government dropped this indicator from the national figures. However, the Council carried on recording results as a local indicator until 2018.

The measure was based on a series of checks for each path surveyed, with any failure in any category failing the whole path:

- If the path has a fingerpost at the start
- Is the path waymarked
- If it crosses any bridges, are they adequate
- Are boundary crossing adequate, such as stiles
- Is the route obstructed
- Is the path affected by ploughing or crops
- Is the surface reasonable

In 2024, as part of the development of this RoWIP, the Council carried out a survey, with a further repeat survey carried out in 2025 to give a comparable figure. The result in 2025 was a small 4% drop from 2017 and a 2% rise from 2024. Some fall was expected, as investment set out in the last RoWIP had come to an end several years ago. There is a strong correlation between investment on certain items on the network and the survey results. Other issues are linked to items such as vegetation growing seasons, which vary considerably.

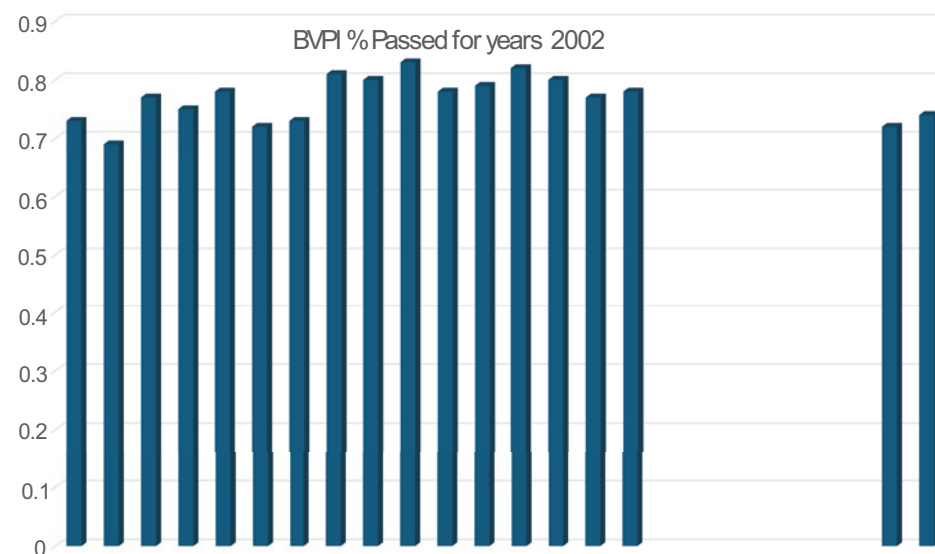


Figure 11 - Local indicator performance since 2002. Not collated 2018 - 2023.

Some failures are linked to private parties managing land that is crossed by a path, which is outside initial control of the Council (albeit effective enforcement can help to resolve issues). This includes crops, vegetations and boundary crossing points, such as stiles or gates. Wetter warm years have had a significant bearing on the number and severity of growth-related issues.

As well as consistent report numbers over time, the nature of those reports has stayed comparable too. Figure 11, shows numbers of the main report subject categories over time. The numbers of reports for each category are consistent, with the exception of the COVID-19 pandemic period. This included the restricted travel lock down periods that led to more people at home beginning to explore their local area when they had limited options.

As such, it is possible to plan ahead on likely volumes and subcategory volumes. Figure 12 shows the main report type numbers over time:

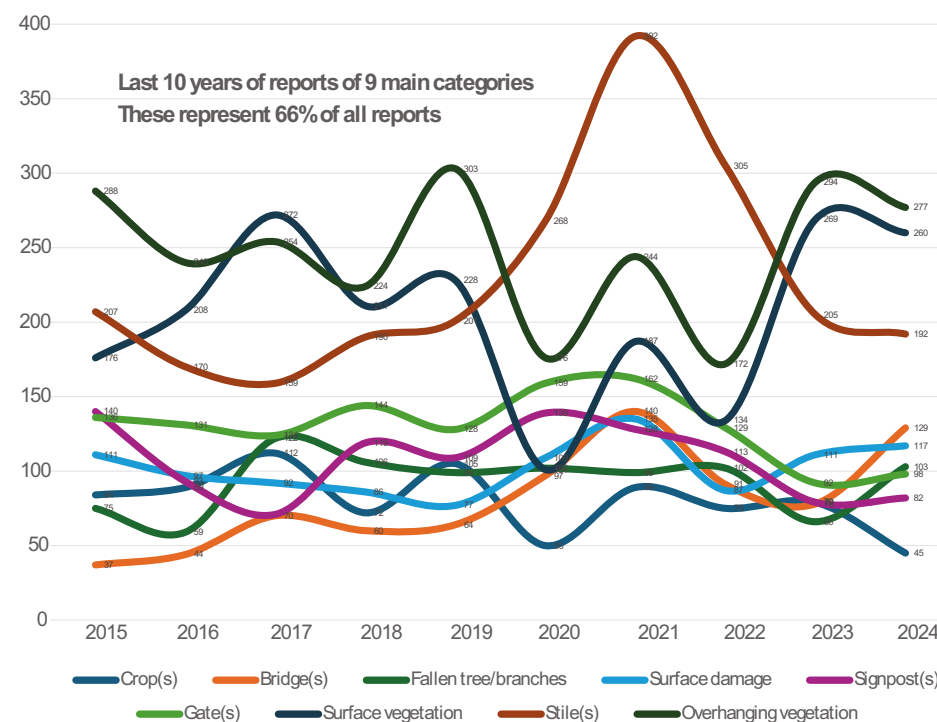


Figure 12 - Number of reports covering nine main categories over last 10 years.

Periods of COVID-19 related travel lockdown highlighted the increase in use of the local path network during later lockdown periods and the type of reports from potential new users. The standout figure was the significant increase in boundary crossing reports. The barriers and crossing points appeared to have a disproportionate effect on new or less experienced users during that period, suggesting that easier livestock barriers, such as gates, are important to attract new users.

In broad terms it is possible to predict the volume of report numbers and types of reports for the next few years, unless something significant changes. In addition, the wider concentration of reports near to where people live provides further evidence to target certain report types and locations, to maximise usage.

The Council has a cyclical programme of vegetation cuts on rights of way, with two cuts carried out each year. The first is at the end of May or early June once the first growth spurt has started. A second cut then happens in late summer. The cuts are focused on routes that are subject to multiple reports and offer a clear benefit to users. They are also tied into the wider highway cyclical programme. In total more than 40 miles of routes are in the programme.

This proactive intervention needs to be financed and balanced against available funding and calls on the rights of way budget. The balance of proactive and reactive funding is always subject to review. Proactive funding can be targeted on parts of the network that are most used. Reactive work ensures that no part of the network is forgotten and that requests from the public can be dealt with.

The issue of overhanging vegetation is still the largest group of reports received. Boundary fences and hedges alongside paths are invariably the responsibility of the adjoining landowners. As such, the Council must assess the report and then, if action is required, contact the occupier. If needed, a request that the vegetation is cut back is made.

Some of these issues may have to result in some form of enforcement. The authority has an adopted Enforcement Protocol. This sets out how any report will be dealt with and the enforcement procedure that will be followed by the Council in a consistent manner and in line with legislation.

The main method used to report issues on the network is via the 'Report a road problem'¹⁵ web page on the council's website.

This allows users to report an issue, including when out on a path with a mobile phone. A report will feed directly back to the data management system and work allocation systems and will then go to an officer for action. The report will also be updated and, if requested, the customer will be updated. This includes details of works allocated by the same system.

The Public right of way 'report it' form on the webpage is supported with mapping that shows the paths. There have been requests from the public for background mapping to include more detail including field boundaries to allow reports to be more precisely placed.

When reporting a problem the Council would also like to encourage the use of photos from the reporter of the issue at hand. This allows reports to be more quickly actioned and speed up the response. This helps inspectors find the issue more quickly.

¹⁵ www.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/road-maintenance/report-a-road-problem

The Council monitors how long a case takes from receipt to the matter being closed. In broad terms half of all reports are dealt with within 12 days. Two thirds of reports are resolved within a month. The closure times for reports is shown in Figure 13.

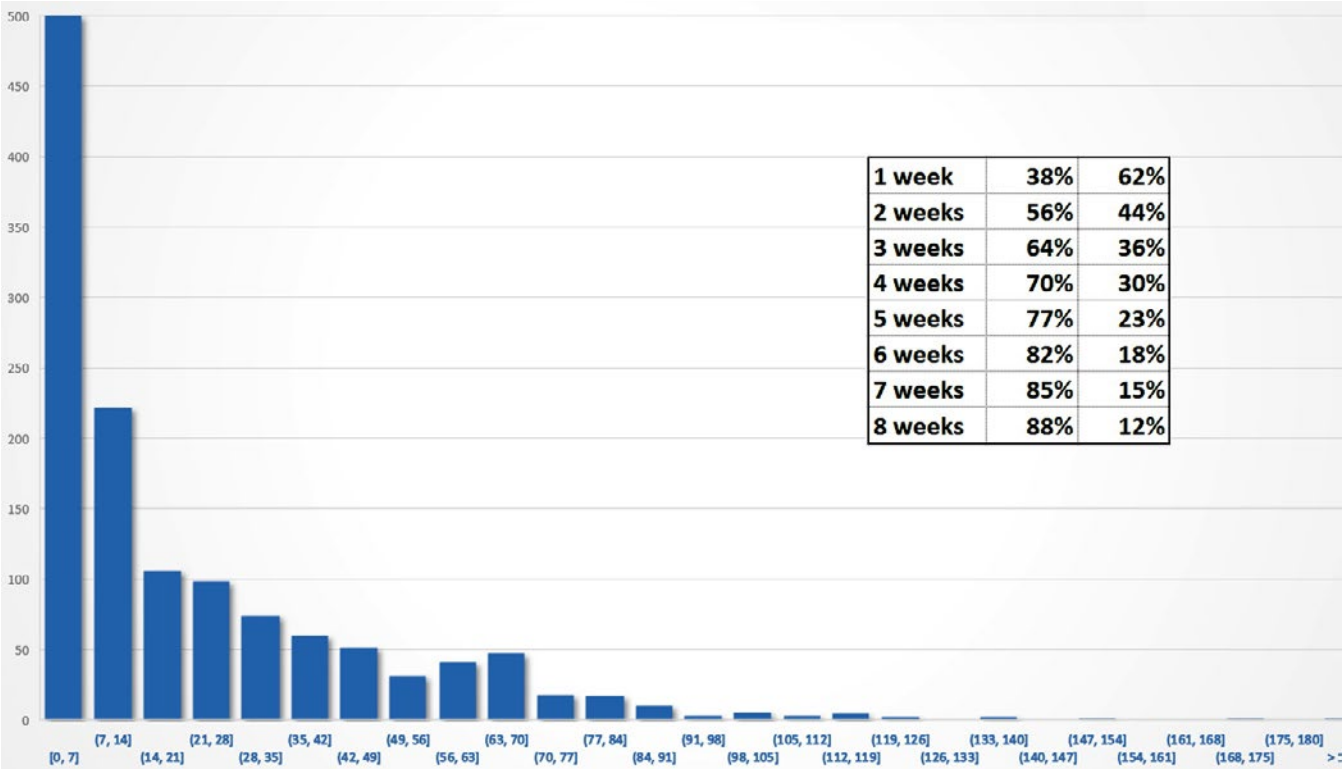


Figure 13 - Time taken to resolve reports from public.





7. Action Plan Summary

The assessment of the network and its users is key to developing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This evidence contributes to the development of planned future actions, which will deliver outcomes that successfully manage and improve the network for users over the plan period.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) legislation requires local highway authorities to prepare and publish “a statement of the action they propose to take for the management of local rights of way, and for securing an improved network of local rights of way, with 10-year to the matters dealt with in the assessment”. The Current Action Plan appended to this document represents the statement of action the Council is proposing to take over the next 10 years as part of this RoWIP.

The Action Plan is a living document, which will be monitored and reviewed annually and updated with new or amended actions in response to the changing priorities and funding available. This approach is intended to ensure that the RoWIP continues to be relevant and fit for purpose over the 10-year period, delivering the outcomes that support the successful management and improvement of the rights of way network for all of the people that use it.

Delivering the Action Plan

Delivering the actions set out in the action plan is a collaborative and collective effort across many parties, with the Council at its heart driving forward the positive change and sustainable management of the rights of way network. As set out in the partnership working section of this document, the Council worked successfully in partnership with many organisations to help deliver past RoWIP's. It will continue to do so with this latest RoWIP.

Funding and Resourcing Delivery

Funding and resources to support the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the network comes from a variety of sources. The Council's ability to deliver on many of the actions in the RoWIP action plan will be governed by the availability of funding, both capital and revenue, and the vital ongoing support of our partners.

We all want to see improvements to the network for current and future generations of people that use the network. Although the Council has limited resources to deliver on some of the actions at the scale and ambition that we would like, the ambition and determination to work towards improving the network with our partners remains.

Works to manage and improve rights of way are often delivered through combining funding and resources from across different parties. Some of the key sources of funding includes:

- **County Council budgets**

Balancing the needs and priorities across all areas of an Council's responsibilities and how they are funded is a difficult task, and any spending must always provide value for money. The funding for all the work the Council does to support managing and improving the rights of way network and its users is set out each financial year in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The MTFS can be viewed online on the council's website.

- **Direct Government Funding**

Grants from central Government that are applicable for projects that support the rights of way network are an important source of funding. This type of funding can be for specific infrastructure projects such as new bridges, or for wider programmes that improve the network or help users access it. Therefore, bidding for the limited funding that is available from central Government and its agencies continues to be an important part of the efforts to secure money towards rights of way projects.

- **Land Developers**

As in all areas of the country, land development affects many areas of Leicestershire. Delivering housing and economic growth is vital to supporting a prosperous society, but new housing and employment sites must be delivered in a sustainable way that works with the natural environment, which of course includes the impacts on public rights of way. All development sites are required to be sustainable and encourage and enable active travel, which will include either directly undertaking work to improve rights of way or making contributions through Section 106 (S106) monetary contributions towards the delivery of improvements by another party. Many improvements to the network are related to new housing and employment development

- **Farming Community**

Farmers throughout the county provide structures and clear paths for the public. When you cross a stile or walk through a field of crops cleared for the path, it is a farmer that has done the work. Farmers have also been very supportive of the waymarking programmes of the past to help keep users on the paths. And lastly, many works that need access for plant and vehicles require access being granted across private land.

- **Charitable Organisations**

The Council works with many charitable organisations to help deliver improvement to the network. This includes national bodies like Sustrans who are responsible for the national cycle network, and the Canal & River Trust whose work includes caring for the canal towpaths.

- **Other Councils**

Other councils, such as district and parish councils, have funding opportunities that are not available directly to the County Council. Working in close partnership with other councils is a great way to get projects delivered that benefit local communities and help to achieve aligned goals in local areas.

Local planning authorities (LPA's) perform a vital function in ensuring any development is undertaken in accordance with guidance, making sure developers mitigate the impact of their development and contribute towards rights of way where they are impacted. This is through S106 contributions and direct delivery of works

- **Volunteers**

The value of volunteers in supporting the rights of way network cannot be understated, they help care for rights of way across Leicestershire. The Council works with many volunteers, from individuals to associations, and every hour that every volunteer dedicates to helping keep our rights of way network up to standard is valued.

- **The Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LLAF)**

The role that the Forum has in representing the interests of people concerned with public access in Leicestershire, including both users and landowners, as an invaluable one. Members of the group are volunteers, and they have a hands-on role in the delivery of any RoWIP, including this one. The Forum is essential to the successful delivery of the action plan and will be a continuous partner in informing the plan over the next ten years.



8. Delivering Outcomes

Making a Difference in our Communities



Enabling Health And Wellbeing

Improving and successfully managing our rights of way network helps remove barriers to enabling more people in our communities to be physically active and more often.

Physical activity is proven to significantly improve people physical and mental wellbeing, increasing life expectancy. The Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines (1) has long established that adults should aim to be physically active every day for at least 150 minutes a week to stay healthy.

150 minutes of physical activity a week helps:

- Reduce the risk of developing breast cancer by 25%
- Reduce to the risk of dementia by 30%
- Reduce depression by 30%
- Reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis by 50%
- Reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 40%
- Reduce the risk of developing heart disease by 40%

In the Annual Chief Medical Officer Report 2024, Chris Whitty stated: **“Making walking and cycling more practical and safer, and access to green space easier and more equitable, would go a long way toward removing barriers to improving physical activity levels and could significantly improve the health of England’s increasingly urban population.”**

Even in a rural county, access for all to green spaces is a key part of helping to improve public health.

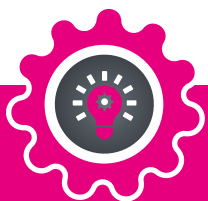
The Rights of Way Improvement Plan helps deliver our Local Transport Plan (LPT4) five Core Themes and objectives under our Cycling and Walking Strategy (CaWS), by delivering outcomes that make a difference to our communities.



Protecting The Environment

Protecting the environment is a duty for us all. The rights of way network provides one of the easiest ways for people to access nature. Encouraging and enabling access helps people value the environment and want to help protect it. Over 20,000 reports from users have helped the Council to maintain the rights of way network in Leicestershire, in turn helping to protect the environment.

Many of the paths that make up the network are in, or next to, a wide variety of habitats that all support healthy biodiversity. Sharing the responsibility to maintain the environment on our paths through proper use and management is vital to ensuring the network continues to work in harmony with nature, promoting biodiversity in all its forms.

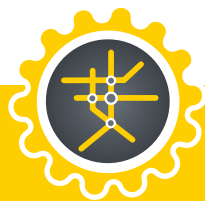


Embracing Innovation

Embracing innovation is often about improving existing practices. In the context of the RoWIP this includes ensuring all users can continue to access the rights of way network through innovative ways of managing and improving the network with the funding available.

An essential part of embracing innovation is engaging with users, including through the Local Access Forum and working with volunteers and partners to help shape innovative ways of managing and improving the network, and identifying resources to support delivery.

Innovation is also about identifying and utilising new technology. Innovation in digital mapping helps us digitally record the network and enables it to be viewed online. Innovation in the way we record asset information can also help improve the way we manage the network.



Enhancing Our Transport Network's Resilience

Connecting our communities is important, and the rights of way network plays a vital part in this. The network helps people travel around the surrounding environment without the need to use a car, helping to mitigate the negative impact on our roads and the environment, enhancing Leicestershire to be a special place to live, work and thrive.

The rights of way network is a great asset to Leicestershire, and as such it requires maintaining and improving over time to ensure it continues to be a reliable, resilient and accessible transport network asset for all its users. Through using a maintenance approach based on assessing risk, which helps prioritise maintenance across the network, it ensures the network can continue to be a safe and accessible asset for people to enjoy.

A well maintained network fit for all supports equestrians, walkers, wheelers, cyclists and off-road motor enthusiasts alike in accessing and enjoying the countryside.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan helps deliver our Local Transport Plan (LPT4) five Core Themes and objectives under our Cycling and Walking Strategy (CaWS), by delivering outcomes that make a difference to our communities.



Delivering Economic Growth

Housing and employment developments are key to supporting the delivery of economic growth. Many developments interact with existing rights of way and ensuring that all new development is designed with active travel at its heart, with due consideration to working in harmony with the environment and the network, ensures that future residents and workers have sustainable access to green and blue spaces via the rights of way network.

There are many businesses that make up a thriving rural economy, and rights of way have their place in supporting growth.

The British Horse Society in their Making Way for Horses report stated that: **“Rights of way and other forms of off-road access are essential facilities for this industry to flourish, and to save riders from having to risk their lives riding on the roads”.**



9. Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective and efficient monitoring and evaluation of the rights of way network is vital in providing the necessary data that helps enable successful management of the network. This includes tracking the progress towards delivering the actions in the RoWIP action plan. It also helps identify if any changes need to be made to the actions, or whether new actions need to be added to the action plan in future.

9.1 Inspecting the Network

Inspecting routes in an efficient and appropriate way is part of how the network is successfully monitored. This is undertaken through an inspection regime. The authority's inspection regime, which informs this RoWIP, is split into two categories, annually inspected and reactively inspected.

Annually Inspected:

- Most routes with a sealed surface currently receive an annual inspection. Sealed surfaces include surfaces such as asphalt.
- It is intended to ensure that all paths with a sealed surface are subject to an annual inspection within the first two years of this plan.

Reactively Inspected:

- All remaining unsealed routes will be reactively inspected following reports received by people who use the network. This includes the public, user groups and our network of partner councils, volunteers that work with the authority through the Local Access Forum.

As part of efforts to ensure that up-to-date data on the rights of way network is recorded, the whole network is reviewed to capture all sealed public rights of way routes that are the Council's responsibility to maintain. This data then informs the inspection regimes.

In addition to the inspections set out above, are areas that may benefit from funding.

Scheme Inspected:

- Within the Action Plan are proposals to carry out improvements to routes around certain urban areas and the linear Greenways network linking towns and villages.
- Each scheme will include one-off surveys of all paths in the scheme to assist with proposals for funding and works.

9.2 Evaluating Performance of the Network

As mentioned in the “Assessment of the Network” section in this document, the Council has used the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 178) as a way to monitor performance of the paths on the network in the past, and intends to use this method going forward during this plan period.

The measure is based on a series of checks for each path that is inspected:

- If the path has a fingerpost at the start
- Is the path waymarked
- If it crosses any bridges are they adequate
- Are boundary crossing adequate, such as stiles
- Is the route obstructed
- Is the path affected by ploughing or crops
- Is the surface reasonable

These inspection criteria then provide an overall percentage as the performance indicator to help track the performance of the network over time, to help inform future management and improvements.

9.3 Monitoring and Evaluating the RoWIP Action Plan

Monitoring and evaluation of this RoWIP’s action plan will be undertaken annually.

The action plan will be updated every financial year, to show progress made against each action. This annual review and update will also include engaging with our Local Access Forum to ensure that progress and any updates can be collectively and collaboratively discussed to inform any changes and future actions.

This progress of the RoWIP and its action plan is part of the wider delivery of measures to improve active travel use in Leicestershire under the Cycling and Walking Strategy (CaWS), which itself supports the delivery of the Council’s Local Transport Plan (LTP). The current LTP4 vision is **‘Delivering a safe, connected and integrated transport network which is resilient and well managed to support the ambitions and health of our growing communities, safeguards the environment whilst delivering economic prosperity’**.



10. Additional Guidance and Information

Further information on wider public rights of way policy and guidance can be found at the various sources below.

Leicestershire County Council Websites

- **Where to walk and ride in Leicestershire:**

Our Where to Walk and Ride webpage contains lots of useful information to help you access the rights of way network in Leicestershire. You can access an interactive map helping you find a specific route and navigate the wonderful rights of way network.

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/cycling-and-walking/where-to-walk-and-ride-in-leicestershire

- **Public rights of way information for parishes and communities:**

If you want a quick reference guide to rights of way you can find out more here:

<https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/parishes-and-communities/public-rights-of-way>

- **How to report an issue on a public rights of way:**

You are able to report any problems on a rights of way by using our 'Report it' form.

<https://leicestershirecc-self.achieveservice.com/service/report-it>

This allows you to report problems such as overgrown paths, crops, obstructions, misleading signs, or damaged bridges, stiles or gates.

- **Local Access Forum**

Local Access Forums are at the heart of collaborative management of the rights of way network by involving the community. Every local authority that looks after rights of way has a Local Access Forum, and you can get involved too. Find out more here:

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/cycling-and-walking/leicestershire-local-access-forum

Leicestershire Highway Design Guide (LHDG) - Guidance for Land Developers

The Leicestershire Highways Design Guide (LHDG) is a key reference point for the council's policy, principles and technical guidance relating to the delivery and adoption of proposed highway and transportation assets that form part of the new development in the county. This includes developments that impact public rights of way.

The LHDG is also the foundation on which the Council provides highway observations on planning applications in its role as local highway authority (LHA). The LHDG can be accessed at:

www.leicestershirehighwaydesignguide.uk

Choose How You Move

- **The Choose How You Move (CHYM) website has lots of information about walking, wheeling and cycling in Leicestershire, including:**

Walking/Wheeling:

An interactive map of over 150 walks:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walks

Downloadable maps grouped by geographical areas or interests, such as family fun, history or long distance trails:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walking/walking-maps

Guided walks:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walking/guided-walks

Walking groups:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walking/walking-groups/

Cycling:

An Interactive cycle map:

<https://leicestershire.activemap.co.uk>

Downloadable maps by area:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/cycling/cycle-maps

Adult cycle courses:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/cycling/cycling-courses

Cycling clubs and groups:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/cycling/cycling-clubs-and-guided-rides

- **Earn rewards whilst walking, wheeling and cycling on the rights of way network**

The Choose How You Move rewards challenge is powered by BetterPoints and allows you to earn points for walking, running and cycling. Track your journeys using the free BetterPoints app to earn points and redeem them for high street vouchers or donate them to your favourite charity. Find out how here:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/betterpoints

Government Website

- **Rights of Way, Local Authority Responsibilities**

If you want to know more about the many varied roles and responsibilities that local authorities have in regard to public rights of way, you can find it here:

www.gov.uk/guidance/public-rights-of-way-local-authority-responsibilities



Birstall village
Loughborough 6

Route 1
Thurmaston 1
Coston 4 48

Route 1
Leicester 5



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