

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Decision Report**

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| Decision Maker: | Executive Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside |
| Date: | 16 July 2015 |
| Title: | Finalising "Hampshire Countryside Access Plan 2015-2025" |
| Reference: | 6728 |
| Report From: | Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services |

Contact name: Sarah Manchester

Tel: 01962 667921

Email: sarah.manchester@hants.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to report on the outcome of the public consultation on the draft Hampshire Countryside Access Plan 2015-2025 and to seek approval for the publication of a final plan. The draft plan was prepared in consultation with a Select Committee Task and Finish Group, and was endorsed by the Culture and Communities Select Committee and the Executive Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside. The objective is to ensure that the County Council is able to continue to provide a high quality network of public access across the County, which meets the needs of the public and the requirements of the law, through using its resources to best effect.
- 1.2. The consultation responses are appended to this report in Appendix 1 and a proposed final version of the plan forms Appendix 2.

2. Context

- 2.1. Hampshire's countryside access network is an extensive and diverse resource, highly valued by residents and visitors alike. It provides not only a transport network but enriches our quality of life, contributing to good physical and mental health, community cohesion and a strong rural economy. During 2012-13, in an average week 41% of adults in England visited the natural environment; in over a quarter of these visits people spent money during their visit and in Hampshire this equated to £580 million¹ over the course of the year.
- 2.2. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 placed a duty on Highway Authorities to publish and review a Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

¹ Natural England's 'Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment' survey 2013

Statutory Guidance was provided by Defra in 2002, which remains in force. In 2008 Hampshire County Council fulfilled this duty by publishing its Countryside Access Plans².

- 2.3. The 2008 plan has reached the end of its term. In summer 2014, following a request from the Executive Member, the Culture and Communities Select Committee established a task and finish group to support officers as they carried out the necessary research to prepare a new plan for consideration. A comprehensive needs assessment was subsequently carried out and a revised plan was drafted for consideration by both the Executive Member and the Culture and Communities Select Committee in January 2015. Approval was given for a public consultation on the draft Countryside Access Plan 2015-2025, and the Plan was endorsed pending the outcome of the consultation.
- 2.4. The 2015-2025 Plan responds to priorities identified through the needs assessment and to the current and expected financial and legal context through three policy areas:
 - “Developing a strategic approach to network management”, to focus existing and future resources so that investment is targeted where it can provide the most benefit
 - “Working with other organisations and with volunteers”, to support partnership work as an important and effective way of responding to local needs
 - “Listening, Informing, Educating”, to provide accurate and easy to use information, and to work with others in promoting responsible behaviour through education and awareness, in order to encourage use and enjoyment of the countryside access network

3. Public consultation

- 3.1. The draft Countryside Access Plan 2015-2025 was made available for public consultation from 30th January to 31st March 2015. Publicity concerning the consultation met requirements under both the standards for County Council consultations and national legislation. It comprised:
 - Publicity in newspapers through a press release which was widely reproduced, together with posts on social media
 - Notices on the HCC consultations web-page and (legal) notices portal
 - Email to all District/Parish/Town Councils, neighbouring County and Unitary authorities, a wide range of user groups, land managers and local and national organisations
 - Email to all County Councillors, Local Access Forum members and to relevant officers across the Council

² <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/countryside/access-plans.htm>

- 3.2. 39 responses were received in total, from a range of stakeholders including 16 from parish/town councils. The condensed responses are tabled in Appendix 1 together with officers' comments.
- 3.3. Many of the responses were supportive of the draft plan. There was strong agreement with the priorities and policy areas put forward, thereby endorsing the findings of the needs assessment carried out prior to the production of the draft plan. Many of those responding offered additional information, often about their local area, which will help officers in their delivery of the plan.
- 3.4. Some points were made, often by more than one respondent, which have resulted in amendments to the plan, most notably:
 - Delivery of county-wide plan: whilst there was strong support for a county-wide plan, some questioned how this should be delivered at the local level. A statement has been added in the Rationale and Overview, noting that the research carried out for the new plan showed that the 2008 area plans (which give greater detail and weighting of issues for each area) are still broadly appropriate and so may continue to be referenced and used for local delivery.
 - Use of road network: given the need to use the road network to connect between off-road routes, a number of requests were made for 'quiet roads' to be provided. Following consultation with transport and environment colleagues, an action to seek practical solutions has been added.
 - Biodiversity and Equalities: some commented on the lack of specific statements concerning conservation/biodiversity and/or provision for people with disabilities. Whilst these are embedded in work policies a confirming statement has been added to the Rationale and Overview.
 - Likely partners: it was suggested that some organisations who are regular project partners be named; this is accepted and partners have been identified within the document. A section on 'Areas of Influence', which cross-references other plans and strategies, has been added to the Plan. This replaces the table in the draft plan that showed the relationship between the 2008 and 2015 plans. This replacement makes the Plan more forward-looking, and should help partners to incorporate CAP actions and ideals into their own work.
- 3.5. The high level of support and detailed consideration evident in the responses is strongly welcomed by the Countryside Service and augurs well for continued positive relations with our partners through the delivery of the plan.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1. The County Council is legally required to revise the Countryside Access Plan. The plan attached in Appendix 2 aims to deliver, over the coming decade, what people have told us is most important through the most effective, efficient use of resources. The plan has received strong support from respondents to the public consultation. Where appropriate,

amendments have been made in response to comments. Approval is now sought to publish the final plan. Before publication, the document will be formatted for on-line publication, which will include the addition of photographic illustrations; hard copies will be made available on request.

5. Recommendations

That the Executive Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside:

- Notes the public consultation responses
- Approves the final Hampshire Countryside Access Plan 2015-25 for publication

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

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| Hampshire safer and more secure for all: | no |
| Maximising well-being: | yes |
| Enhancing our quality of place: | yes |

OTHER SIGNIFICANT LINKS:**Links to Previous member decisions:**

| Title | Ref | Date |
|---|---|-------------|
| Draft Hampshire Countryside Access Plan | Exec Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside | 19 Jan 2015 |
| Countryside Access Strategy and Rights of Way Investment Plan | Exec Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside | 15 May 2014 |

Direct Links to Specific Legislation or Government Directives

| Title | Date |
|--|------|
| Countryside and Rights of Way Act sections 60 and 61 | 2000 |
| Rights of Way Improvement Plans; Statutory Guidance | 2002 |
| Letter dated 30 th June 2014 to all Local Highway Authority Chief Executives from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management | 2014 |

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

| <u>Document</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| None | |

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

- 1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- 1.2. The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- 1.3. Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- 1.4. Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

Equalities Impact Assessment:

- 1.5. The intention of the plan itself is to improve the availability of good quality countryside access and as such will be an improvement for all.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1. No significant impact.

3. Climate Change:

- 3.1. How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption.

The strategy aims to improve safe and easy access for the public to the countryside close to where they live. For some, the improvements to paths and trails, together with some increased car parking charges with a better enforcement regime, may persuade people to travel by means other than by car.

- 3.2. How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

No significant impact.