

Shropshire Countryside Access Improvement Plan

2018-28

Plan

1.0 Introduction

- Background to Rights of Way Improvement Plan and legal context- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- Scope of Shropshire Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP), explaining that it will cover more than what's required by the Right of Way Improvement Plan- Public Rights of Way, permissive paths, open access land (including commons), cycleways not alongside roads, canal towpaths, parks, nature reserves, verges where relevant, other publically accessible sites, forest with public access, stretches of road and pavement which link the above together

2.0 Why the CAIP is important

3.0 Context

4.1 Overview of Shropshire

- Key facts, demographics
- Landscape and biodiversity- AONB, NIA, SSSIs, RAMSAR, RIGs, landscape character link, Nature Reserves
- Cultural Heritage-WHSs, SAMs
- Countryside access network from market towns- review of six market towns

4.2 Strategic context-

- Local-Shropshire Council Corporate Plan, Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan, Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Shropshire Economic Strategy, Cultural Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Local Transport Plan
- National- Public Health England, Everybody Active Every Day, Wildlife Trusts, National Trust, Forestry Commission, Historic England, Sport England

4.3 Statutory responsibilities- of Shropshire Council, landowners and users. RoW and green space

4.4 Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board- acting as the Local Access Forum

4.5 Outdoor Partnerships

- Overview of the service- responsibilities, staffing, budget overview, volunteering
- Key Partners and consultees:
 - British Driving Society
 - British Horse Society
 - Businesses- outdoor activity and equipment providers, land agents
 - Byways and Bridleways Trust
 - Canal and River Trust
 - Country Land and Business Association
 - Cycling UK
 - Forestry Commission

- Historic England
- LEADER Local Action Group
- Local Enterprise Partnership
- Local Nature Partnership
- National Farmers Union
- National Trust
- Natural England
- Open Spaces Society
- Public Health
- Ramblers Association
- Rural Community Council
- Rural Services Network
- Severn River Trust
- Shropshire Council
- Shropshire Disability Network
- Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- Sustainable Transport Shropshire
- Town and Parish Councils
- Trails Riders Fellowship
- User groups- walking, cycling, horse riding (including Walking Forums, Riding and Carriage Driving Forum), motorised use (Treadlightly, Green Lane Association Ltd.)
- Volunteers- Walking for Health, Wild Teams, Volunteer Rangers and Parish Paths Partnerships

4.6 Current Countryside Access provision- maps of ROW, parks and sites, open access land, canals

PROW, National Trails, long distance routes, open access (including commons), permissive access, canals, countryside sites (including forestry) and town parks, river access

Trends in activity

New types of activity- e.g. Strava, Pokemon

4.7 Current use of the countryside access network

- Casual/ leisure use
- Promoted walking, cycling and equestrian routes
- All ability and easy access
- Walking for Health
- Motorised vehicles
- Walkers Are Welcome
- Walking Festivals and other events
- Other outdoor activities- challenge events, climbing, mountain biking, canoeing, geocaching, orienteering
- Promotion- Shropshire's Great Outdoors, social media, other

4.8 Results from Countryside Access Strategy 2008-2018- key headlines, improvements, gaps, case studies/ examples (see attached)

4.9 Consultation process

4.10 Evidence and consultation results

- Results of the User Surveys, MENE, Public Health and DfT data
- ANGSt data review
- Open Spaces Review
- Consultation on CAS Review

5.0 Vision

Key words/ phrases:

- Shropshire's countryside is accessible
- Third largest RoW network in the country
- Residents and visitors are aware of what's available
- Access to the countryside is recognised as a priority for the local economy, wildlife, health and wellbeing
- Local people have 'ownership' and are supported to become more involved in decision making and maintenance
- Statutory requirements and Health and Safety are priorities
- Local businesses benefit from well managed access network
- Communities are happier and healthier as a result

Principles:

- Aspirational activity will need to be funded mostly through external sources
- Investment will be need to fulfil statutory requirements and to maximise opportunities to raise income
- Improvements should be sympathetic to the natural and cultural heritage
- Partnership working will be essential to maximise opportunities

Challenges

- The UK decision to leave the European Union and any impact on the Common Agricultural Policy, Environmental Stewardship and rural development
- Introduction of the Deregulation Bill
- Impact of devolved authority for ROW in Wales
- Impact of the Government austerity measures on staff and budgets
- Localism, commissioning services to Town and Parish Councils and the aspiration for devolved authorities
- Focus on economic growth and development, potentially at the detriment of the environment
- Creation of extensive new housing, development of employment land and changes to farm enterprises
- Increase in urban populations and the potential impact on RoW
- Education of users
- Increase in leisure time as jobs become more fragmented and there is more home working

6.0 Delivering priorities for Shropshire

7.0 Objectives and priorities (see attached)

7.1 Resilient communities- local access networks are improved for active travel and leisure and local partnership approaches are developed that enable communities to identify and act upon priorities for a high quality outdoor environment and biodiversity

- Input into Neighbourhood, Town and Parish Plans where appropriate and closer working with the Planning Department to prioritise access.
- Work with Town and Parish Councils to promote the value of outdoor infrastructure for health and the economy
- Development of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan- desire lines, links between communities.
- Master planning of six market towns to plan countryside access and green space provision at a town level in response to new housing and employment land development.
- Develop Supplementary Planning Guidance for access.
- Seek to secure CIL funding, where appropriate, for new multi-user routes in new developments
- Continued support and development of Parish Paths Partnerships.
- Consider circulating Parish Access Plan template to Parish Paths Partnership groups to further encourage local involvement.
- Identify further support for Volunteer Rangers, 'Friends of' groups and work with young people.
- Engage more with the cycling community, including mountain biking, to identify opportunities and address issues.
- Training and support for different user groups on Rights of Way, planning issues and responsibilities as a user and landowner and identifying local access priorities.
- Renegotiation of contract with Community Payback team.
- Better partnership working to help support volunteering and site management and to deliver landscape scale projects.
- Discussions with businesses about Corporate Social Responsibility
- Development of countryside access is sympathetic to biodiversity, heritage and relevant designations.
- Consider campaign to educate users and reduce user conflicts.
- Work with Highways Department on minor highways, quiet lands and verges that link off-road routes.

7.2 Healthy People - People are more active through better planned development and access to the countryside, and participation in a broad range of outdoor recreational activities and active volunteering

- Continued support for active volunteering, including the Wild Teams and Walking for Health
- Involvement in and monitoring of the Social Prescribing pilot.

- Joint approach needed with the Health and Wellbeing Board to help prevent chronic health conditions, including working more closely with Adult Social Care, Public Health and other organisations to reach those who need support most.
- Consider developing new programmes for young people, including the roll out of Healthy Shropshire for Schools, if external funding can be secured and developing 'Daily Miles' on sites.
- Programme of events and activities.
- Develop and maintain easy access and all-ability trails.
- Promote joint working with Public Health as a good practice example to other Authorities.
- Better engagement with disability network and groups to identify opportunities and get feedback on current facilities.
- Better monitoring and identification of existing routes.
- Increased use of dog-friendly sites where the landowner agrees.
- Better promotion of fully-gated routes on the Shropshire's Great Outdoors website.
- Supporting other outdoor activities e.g. fell running, orienteering, canoeing
- If a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan is developed, the Outdoor Partnerships Service will seek to be actively involved, ensuring that walking and cycling for local journeys is a priority.
- Development and promotion of multi-user routes, improving connectivity of off-road routes, linking roadside verges and considering 20mph schemes for linking routes.
- Investigate opportunities to increase access and recreation on existing sites and develop new ones where appropriate.

7.3 Prosperous Economy- the local economy is supported by developing the extent and quality of the countryside access infrastructure, including parks and sites, and by working with businesses to access Shropshire's rich and varied natural environment and heritage.

- Development of externally funded projects that increase investment in key assets for economic growth.
- Further the aspiration for a new Country Park around the north west of Shrewsbury.
- Increase access alongside waterways by revamping the Severn Way, developing a new route alongside the River Teme and working more closely with the Canal and River Trust.
- Involvement in rural development programmes for the future, building on the LEADER experience.
- Working with outdoor activity providers and other relevant businesses to access funding, identify development opportunities and grow their businesses, possibly through a new business network.
- Increase the understanding and capacity of Council managed countryside assets to help mitigate climate change.
- Increase awareness of the role of access to the countryside as a driver for businesses and individuals to relocate to Shropshire.
- Offer opportunities for training for young people, including student placements and apprenticeships.
- Ensure high quality parks and sites management

- Support Walkers Are Welcome towns, festivals and events through User Forums, website and social media.
- Seek to develop new multi-user routes along disused railways and support the Canal and River Trust to develop canal towpaths for all users.
- Work with Theatre Severn, museums and cultural attractions to develop more joined up promotion and development.
- Work with other partners, such as the National Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Historic England to maximise economic benefit, whilst protecting natural and cultural heritage.
- Support routes from, or linking to, rural pubs, cafes and other relevant businesses.
- Develop and promote the Shropshire's Great Outdoors membership scheme.
- Further develop the Shropshire's Great Outdoors website and social media outlets.

7.4 Outdoor recreational assets are safe and well maintained to meet statutory obligations and new opportunities now and in the future, within current financial restrictions

- Development of the new Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board, ensuring better advice to the Council and other agencies and stronger links with other agendas, such as community, health and the local economy.
- Advise Central Government on changes to the Common Agricultural Policy with regard to countryside access.
- Prepare for likely increase of claims for unrecorded Rights of Way as a result of the Deregulation Bill.
- Further prioritisation of outstanding Formal Applications and anomalies, along with case files from the Discovering Lost Ways project in the north.
- Revision of the Definitive Map and Statement.
- Secure capital funding for major infrastructure repairs.
- Continue ploughing and cropping campaign.
- Better mapping and signage of Rights of Way across Country Parks and Heritage Sites.
- Show route closures on Shropshire's Great Outdoors website and changes to routes.
- New guidance for users in easy to follow booklet, along with user awareness campaign.
- New policies needed on Planning, Drones and Neighbourhood Disputes involving Rights of Way.
- Contact climbing groups regarding the safety issues associated with quarry faces on Countryside Sites.
- Continue to develop income generation, including business sponsorship, and secure other sources of funding to help sustain developments in the future.

8.0 Risk management- impact of further reductions in funding, impact of new roads and other development, lack of multi-user connections

9.0 Monitoring and evaluation- annual updates to spreadsheet/ case studies/ BVPI

Policies (these will be integrated into the main sections on each objective)

- Prioritisation of maintenance
- British Standards for gates, gaps and stiles
- Easier access
- Enforcement
- Ploughing and Cropping
- Surfacing
- Motorised vehicles
- Statutory provision for gates and stiles
- Definitive Map Modification Orders
- Public Path Orders
- Neighbourhood disputes
- Planning- Supplementary Planning Guidance
- Drones
- Safeguarding

10.0 Action Plan