

NORTH YORKSHIRE  
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

23 February 2006

Rights of Way Improvement Plan  
Progress Report

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a progress report with regard to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for North Yorkshire.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Local access forums are required to provide input into the production of Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs). There are three local access forums in North Yorkshire, one for North Yorkshire outside the National Park Authority areas and one each for both the North York Moors National Park and Yorkshire Dales National Park.
- 2.2 One Rights of Way Improvement Plan is being prepared for the whole of the County which will be gradually merged into the Local Transport Plan for North Yorkshire. This is a progress report regarding the preparation of the RoWIP.

3.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 In 2004 a public consultation exercise was undertaken in order to establish stakeholder views about improvements to the local rights of way network.
- 3.2 In early 2005 a draft RoWIP statement was submitted as part of the Local Transport Plan for North Yorkshire. During the rest of 2005 a methodology was researched and developed and subsequently implemented for assessing local rights of way across the whole of North Yorkshire.
- 3.3 The assessment was undertaken for the rights of way network by splitting the county into 30 key service centres and the rest of the county into 28 landscape character areas. Service centres were chosen as the Local Transport Plan for North Yorkshire is in the process of developing transport improvements through Service Centre Transportation Strategies and the RoWIP will merge with the LTP. The assessment looked at the availability of local rights of way for people with different abilities, walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- 3.4 In terms of service centres, this involved looking at what was available from the doorstep as well as accessibility between the service centre and the immediate peripheral communities that it serves. For the rest of the

County, which was divided into discrete landscape character areas, the study looked at areas of demand such as availability from smaller settlements or honey-pots, from train stations, bus corridors and canal jetties as well as from car parks where there was no public transport provision. The assessment also looked beyond the County at surrounding areas, particularly where urban areas lie immediately outside the County as this does have an impact on future access planning. The assessment also took on board the four shared priorities of the LTP, safety, accessibility, environmental quality and congestion, looking in particular at the safety of users of the local rights of way network.

- 3.5 This culminated in a 200 page research assessment report which was distributed to steering group and local access forum members in December 2005. All members should have received this report. A separate county level assessment will be made for horse & carriage driving and the considerations provided by the statutory guidance in assessing lawful vehicular use of the local rights of way network. This has to take into consideration recent changes in the way that National Parks will be able to manage vehicular use of the local rights of way network in the future.
- 3.6 A wider steering group meeting was held on 9 January 2006 to review the assessment report. All field officers were invited to attend this event, having played such an instrumental role in providing information for the assessment. This included Rangers from the National Parks and Area Rights of Way staff from the County Council, the first time all field staff from the three authorities had been together for such an event. All local access forum members were invited to attend from the three LAFs in North Yorkshire. Regular steering group members attended with Officers from District/ Borough Councils, AONB Officers and other access authority staff. Staff from surrounding highway authorities were invited to attend as well as representatives from Defra (Environmental Stewardship policy), the Countryside Agency and Highways North Yorkshire, who provided advice and support in finalising the assessment with regard to shared priorities, passenger transport, Service Centre Transportation Plans and Cycle Plans. There were also additional staff from the NYCC Planning Policy Unit who are preparing the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment for the Plan. Just over 100 people were in attendance.
- 3.7 The event started with an introduction from County Councillor John Fort, the chair of the steering group, an overview from Simon Smales, Assistant Director, Planning & Countryside Unit at NYCC and a general introduction to the day from the RoWIP Officer.
- 3.8 People were then allocated to workshop groups. There were seven workshop groups in total for both the morning and afternoon session. These corresponded to District Council boundaries. In the morning, groups focused on the service centre assessments for their respective

District Council area. In the afternoon, a review was undertaken of landscape character areas. The event closed at approximately 3.30pm with a closing address from County Councillor John Fort.

- 3.9 The workshops looked at whether the key access issues which were contained in the RoWIP assessment pack for each service centre or landscape character area were a true reflection of all issues for that centre or area. Where groups felt that there were additional issues, these were added. The groups were asked to prioritise the top three issues for each centre or area. The RoWIP Officer asked workshop groups to look particularly at promotion, education, training and softer issues which were not fully explored in preparing the assessment.
- 3.10 Each group had an experienced facilitator. Facilitators included District Council Officers, County Council Officers, National Park Officers and AONB Officers who were briefed beforehand and did a very good job.
- 3.11 The priorities and additional comments have been added to a spreadsheet containing the key issues. The workshop was not designed to go into detail but to concentrate on the broad strategies for the service centre or landscape character area; however some detail was provided during workshop discussions. This will be added to the spatial database which holds improvement ideas and suggestions from the public. However this level of detail will not be included in the Plan.
- 3.12 The technical group met in late January to agree how this information is to be presented in the final report. The assessment is rather lengthy and it will need to be edited to ensure that the final document remains strategic, concise and accessible to a wide audience. The assessment was done in some detail in order to show the thoroughness of the process. It is anticipated that the top access issues will be represented by broad and concise local strategies for improving local rights of way.
- 3.13 Overall strategies will be expanded with regard to improving local rights of way across North Yorkshire and will be supplemented by local strategies to provide a local focus in a fairly large County. The local strategies in turn will lead to detailed and specific projects which can be delivered in the future. In this way there will be a cascade from strategic policies to local strategies and then to detailed projects. The strategic and local strategies will be reflected in a Statement of Action. This is a strategic project plan which will form a chapter of the RoWIP. The City of York RoWIP and the Hampshire County Council RoWIP provide examples of how this has been developed by other authorities.
- 3.14 Work has been started on writing the remainder of the RoWIP. Three chapters have been drafted so far. At this stage, it is thought there will be approximately twelve chapters, although this will be agreed at the next technical group meeting. Chapters will vary in length and complexity.

## OTHER PROGRESS

- 3.15 Members will recall that a draft RoWIP position statement was submitted for inclusion in the Local Transport Plan in January 2005. This followed analysis of the initial public consultation results from 2004 and three steering group meetings which were held between September and December 2004 in order to agree the submission. The final Local Transport Plan is to be produced by March 2006 and therefore a revised position statement was required for the RoWIP to bring it up to date at March 2006. Very minor alterations were made to the draft position statement to incorporate progress made during 2005.
- 3.16 A tender document has been submitted in order to find a suitable publisher for the RoWIP. It is anticipated that there will be two available formats for the draft and final RoWIP, though this has to be finalised. One proposed format is a user friendly 20 page RoWIP pamphlet containing clear, concise text and illustrations which is easily understood and can be made available to a wide audience. This will detail overall strategies and top local priorities and explain what the RoWIP is all about. The statutory RoWIP document will be in a different format which will probably be similar to the Local Transport Plan. Being a more technical document, it will be more bulky with Appendices.
- 3.17 At this stage, it is envisaged that a first draft of the RoWIP will be available by mid summer and it is hoped to bring this to the LAF at its meeting in August, prior to approval by the County Council's Executive, as a basis for consultation. If this timescale does not prove to be feasible, a special meeting of the LAF will be convened to seek their approval.
- 3.18 The RoWIP Officer has been in contact with the Countryside Agency in order to set up a meeting regarding the RoWIP grant funding. This is likely to take place in February 2006. As this grant funds projects up to 50% of their cost, some work is required in preparing projects for funding and delivery. The development of the Statement of Action is key to this process as it identifies partners and funders, timescales, risks and outcomes. The job description for the existing post of Mapping and Information Officer has been re-drafted to focus on the next stage of implementation. A 'new' post of Project Development Officer will be advertised in the near future to help take this work forward.

#### 4.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- a) This report is received for information.

Contact Officer:

Angela Flowers

PROW Improvement Plan Officer

01609 532774