

**North Yorkshire County Council****North Yorkshire Local Access Forum****11 October 2017****Countryside Access Service Review Update****1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide NYLAF with an update on progress on a comprehensive review of the Public Rights of Way Service.

**2.0 Background**

- 2.1 In Autumn 2015, following the completion of a restructuring and savings exercise, the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) team started a fundamental review of its purpose and operational work models and practices. The aims were to ensure that the savings made were sustainable in the long run and that the service could continue to meet its statutory responsibilities while providing the best level of service for the available funding.
- 2.2 The review is a 'root and branch' review of the PRoW Service and how the Council delivers its responsibilities for managing public rights of way. The intention is that the review will deliver a service that provides greater transparency over why it does what it does and therefore why it doesn't do other things. An important part of this approach is the development of service standards which will be published towards the end of the programme.
- 2.3 The NY Local Access Forum received a detailed report on initial route prioritisation proposals in February 2016. North Yorkshire County Council BES Executive Members received an update report in April 2016. Executive Members were happy that the review should continue along the lines set out. North Yorkshire Transport, Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee received a report in October 2016. NY Local Access Forum received an update report in November 2016. On 21 July 2017, BES Executive Members received a report providing the results of a consultation on a new service statement and route categorisation approach. Executive Members agreed the proposed service statement and route categorisation model at that July 2017 meeting.

**3.0 Update on Review Progress at October 2017**

- 3.1 Paragraph 3.2 sets out the scope of the review programme, and provides an update on what has been achieved to date.
- 3.2 The workstreams within the review of the Public Rights of Way service are:

**3.2.1 To refresh the service's policy framework.**

*Update: A new statement of service delivery principles was agreed in July 2017 following public consultation.*

**3.2.2 To deliver a revised, comprehensive and transparent route categorisation of all the paths on the network, resulting in publishing a category map of the entire network on the Council website for the first time.**

*Update: A new route categorisation model was agreed in July 2017 following public consultation. The consultation ran during February and March 2017. 369 on-line responses and 31 written responses were received. The service is now working to implement the new model within its CAMS IT system. When this is achieved a new on-line map showing the path categories will be published on-line. This is expected before the end of November 2017.*

*A second phase of this element of the programme is to develop an approach to engaging with parish councils and user groups to allow the value placed in the path network by those communities to be measured and to influence the path categorisation model. Develop workable proposals around measuring community value by the end of December 2017.*

**3.2.3 To refresh the model used by the team to prioritise the resolution of defects reported to it.**

*Update: The existing issue prioritisation model was examined and we concluded that the existing model should continue to be used. The model prioritises our response to a report of a defect using the following three factors:*

- *The category of the route,*
- *The effect that the reported defect has on the ability of people to use the network,*
- *The health and safety risk posed by the reported defect i.e. potential severity of injury x likelihood of injury.*

*The implementation of the new route categorisation model will change the specific scores assigned to individual reported defects. The model ensures that while in general defects on higher category paths will be prioritised, defects that cause a risk to the public and defects that stop people using paths will tend to come to the top of the pile for attention even when they are on lower category paths.*

**3.2.4 To revise all existing detailed work processes to ensure consistently efficient approaches are taken to reported network defects. New procedures will be developed for all of the 'volume' issue types reported by customers.**

*Update: Work has been undertaken on almost all of the service's work processes. New approaches to reports of ploughing and cropping obstruction, waymarking, and signposting have been implemented. Together these issues cover about 25% of defects reported to the team.*

*Formal assessment of the new processes will start once they have had time to bed down. Informally, staff working in those parts of the county where we get*

*most ploughing and cropping reports, suggest that the more assertive approach has been successful in a high proportion of cases. This gives the service reassurance in its direction of travel, while recognising that other types of reported obstruction will be more complex and difficult to deal with.*

*The review of working procedures has proved much more involved than anticipated and has effectively involved taking the service back to basics, and building new processes from scratch.*

*We intend to implement new approaches to obstruction cases by December, with the remaining processes going live by Easter 2018.*

- 3.2.5 To ensure that the service maximises the benefit from the continuing support of its existing group of countryside volunteers, by ensuring that the volunteer role is set out clearly within the new working procedures, and by ensuring that we manage our offer to the volunteers and other groups more efficiently.**

*Update: All of the work done on developing revised working processes have included an important role for the countryside volunteers, and have brought the countryside volunteers into the flow of work processes. The task of working through the existing procedures has reinforced the desire within the service for countryside volunteers to play a key role in supporting the service to work more efficiently.*

- 3.2.6 To decide on the future of the team's core IT system.**

*Update: A further systems appraisal was undertaken in summer 2017 by NYCC Technology and Change. A decision has now been taken to retain CAMS as the service's current core IT system. This decision provides stability, removes the need to undertake a time-consuming system change, and provides a basis to consider the potential to develop new IT functionality within CAMS.*

- 3.2.7 To explore the potential to make use of new IT functionality around managing volunteers, enforcement activity, mobile working and statutory reporting.**

**To develop integrated on-line defect reporting for customers, to reduce administrative work and to provide better real time feedback for customers.**

*Update: Now that a decision has been taken over the core IT system (3.2.6), we are starting to explore the potential for new IT functionality. Work has also started on a business case to develop on-line reporting for countryside access customers.*

- 3.2.8 To examine how we can work with existing community and user groups who want to work on maintaining or improving the network.**

**To set out our approach to requests from communities to improve the network to ensure consistency in response and that expectations are realistic.**

*Update: Two formal pilot schemes are operational (Lower Wharfedale Ramblers [LWR] and Burton in Lonsdale Parish Council). LWR is well*

*established and has been used as the benchmark for future partnerships agreements. A formal review of the LWR pilot was undertaken in July to inform future expansion. We remain convinced that allowing third party groups to work on the network unsupervised will play a key part in maintaining and improving the network in future. We will continue to seek opportunities to work with 3<sup>rd</sup> parties utilising the framework developed as part of the pilot as this aspect of the review transitions into Business As Usual.*

**3.2.9 To set out a published statement of service standards.**

*Update: A statement of service standards will be developed and published once all of the new working processes have been implemented.*

**4.0 Review Timetable.**

4.1 While progress has been made, the review programme has fallen significantly behind its initial timetable. The route categorisation work took longer than expected due to technical difficulties in mapping the network and conflicting pressures within and outside the service area. The process review work has proved more involved than expected. Table 1 sets out a revised outline timetable for activity relating to the route categorisation and process review elements of the review programme.

Table 1: Review programme – revised outline timetable

Oct – Dec 2017	Implement revised route categorisation in CAMS, allowing us to publish service statement and category maps on-line.  Develop and implement new approach to reports of obstruction.  Develop workable proposals around measuring community value
Jan – Mar 2018	Develop and implement new approach to reports of bridges, structures, terrain and surfaces.  Develop new approach to reports of seasonal vegetation.  Decision on whether to move ahead with measuring community value, or to take a different approach.
Apr – June 2018	Implement new approach to reports of seasonal vegetation.
July – Sept 2018	Publish service standards.

**5.0 Recommendation(s)**

5.1 It is recommended that North Yorkshire Local Access Forum members take note of the content of the report.

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Background Documents:

Report to NY Local Access Forum 4<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Report to BES Executive Members 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016

Report to NY Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Report to NY Local Access Forum 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016

Report to BES Executive Members 21<sup>st</sup> July 2017