

**Consultation Report on the review of the first
Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan
and outline of the second plan**

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1. Background

A Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) sets out the assessment of the adequacy of the rights of way network (the 'Assessment of Need') and provides the strategy framework for rights of way management, maintenance and development (the 'Statement of Action'). Oxfordshire County Council as the highway authority has the statutory duty to prepare and publish a RoWIP and review it to keep it valid.

Oxfordshire's first RoWIP was adopted by the County Council on 21 February 2006. On 22 March 2012, the Cabinet Member for Transport gave authority to extend the validity date of the current RoWIP to March 2014, bring it up to date with minor changes, and review for the longer term aiming for a new submission by March 2014.

Oxfordshire's RoWIP vision is: *To improve the existing public rights of way network for all users and would-be users, and improve the extent, use and understanding of the network, so that public rights of way fulfil their role as a vital part of life in the County.*

The four aims are:

- I. Public rights of way are protected and well maintained.*
- II. A better joined-up network that meets the needs and demands of users whilst accommodating the interests of land managers, the natural environment and our cultural heritage.*
- III. A public rights of way network which enables access for all.*
- IV. A thriving countryside where residents and visitors are able to understand and enjoy their rights, in a responsible way.*

The original and the extended RoWIP can be viewed and downloaded at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/rowip. Also on the website is each year's annual delivery action plan which provides more detail on what was achieved in each year.

2. The Consultation

Under s61 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, before preparing or reviewing a rights of way improvement plan, Oxfordshire County Council is required to consult with certain authorities, organisations and local communities. All of these were sent the consultation which took the form of a document containing a simple review of the first RoWIP and a survey form.

Officers consider that the consultation met the requirements of s61 as it presents an initial review of the first RoWIP and sought views on the review itself as well as the proposed structure and content of the second RoWIP. The review was based around five questions that cover the plan's achievements, shortcomings, evidence, and community involvement. There were also suggestions made for how partner organisations' roles might evolve and the outline structure and timings of the second RoWIP. Officers did not anticipate a significant response

rate as the document was necessarily technical, and organisations could not have the second RoWIP to comment on. Once the draft second RoWIP is developed a longer statutory public consultation event will be undertaken, and this is expected to occur in late 2013.

The consultation initial review of RoWIP1 and outline RoWIP2 document and survey form were devised by officers. Members of the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum made amendments at their meeting of 25th September 2012 and the Ramblers Association and Oxford Fieldpaths Society members of the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group also proposed alterations and improvements to the pre-consultation working draft.

The consultation took place over a five week period between 30 November 2012 and the 9th January 2013. The deadline for responses was subsequently extended to the 31st January. The consultation was emailed and posted to over 350 organisations including all Oxfordshire Parish Councils and meetings, district and town councils, neighbouring highway authorities, members of the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Providers Network (landowning organisations with a focus on access) the three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (the statutory Local Access Forum made up of landowning, users and other access related interests), members of the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group (users, landowners and related interest groups) and other key agencies. The consultation was also advertised on the Oxfordshire County Council consultation website <https://myconsultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/OxfordshireRoWIP/consultationHome> and members of the public invited to provide a response.

The survey form was designed to obtain stakeholder views on the review document of the first Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan, explore respondent's views about organisations' involvement and also sought views on the outline structure for the second RoWIP. Consultees were asked the following questions;

- Do you consider this review of the RoWIP1 to be, overall, fit for purpose?
- Do you agree or disagree with the answers to the five review questions?
 - o *What has the first RoWIP achieved over the six years?*
 - o *How has the RoWIP fallen short of expectations?*
 - o *Did RoWIP1 contain enough evidence?*
 - o *How has the RoWIP helped access work with within local communities?*
 - o *Does the RoWIP reflect public concern about the countryside?*
- Do you have any comments on the suggested changes to partner organisations' roles?
- Is the proposed outline structure and content of RoWIP2 acceptable, including proposed outcomes?

3. Next Steps

The consultation results show a broad agreement with the direction of travel for the production of the second Rights of Way Improvement Plan as well as evaluation of the first RoWIP – with no 'showstoppers' identified. This means that work can continue as planned, although the Countryside Access Team will need to carefully consider available resources and competing workload demands for the next stages of the project, as well as considering how best to balance aspirations with pragmatism for the document as well as working to achieve it.

Individuals and organisations have made some really valuable suggests and comments and the Countryside Access Team will incorporate these into the next steps of the RoWIP's production.. By working closely with the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum we will try to ensure a balanced approach.

4. Survey results

This section contains the consultation responses in the form of tables showing level of agreement or disagreement with questions, plus all the comments supplied for that particular question or section. Minor alterations have been made to correct spelling and some combined responses have been sorted into the relevant sections. Comments are not normally attributed to an organisation or named individual. Appendix 1 contains the list of respondents.

- **Number of responses 37**

- **Split of responses**

Parish/town council	18
District council (officer response)	3
County councillor	1
Organisation	10
Individual	5

- **Overall, is the RoWIP review fit for purpose? YES**

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Do you consider this review of the RoWIP to be, overall, fit for purpose?

Option	Results
yes	97% (35)
no	0% (0)
no opinion	3% (1)

Comments made:

“This is an honest appraisal of the ROWIP 1 implementation process which, as we know, has come under increasing resource pressure in recent years making it difficult for authorities to realise their initial aims and timetables. Natural England recognised the excellence of Oxfordshire’s initial ROWIP via an award in 2009 and we are confident that with the realism allied to innovation displayed here the authority will manage to be both pragmatic and ambitious in delivering ROWIP 2. I have highlighted some possible concerns re: how accessible the document might be to those unfamiliar with ROWIPs in 5 and 6.”

“Where Parish Councils ask OCC to enforce footpath improvement (where the landlord is in breach of obligations) OCC should pursue and not duck the issue.”

“I agree that the problem is lack of funding for routine maintenance and for improving the network.”

“It is a very good and comprehensive document”

“For vehicular users the status of byways, and restricted byways across county borders needs resolution. Most users assume the higher status continues - which could lead to conflict”

"Is welcomely candid in recognising those aspects for original RoWIP which have not been achieved"

"I support the move towards more local involvement to maintain and improve Rights of Way. The use of volunteers and local expertise is sensible at a time of budget cuts. I am pleased to learn that local finance such as from TOE is being used to support local projects."

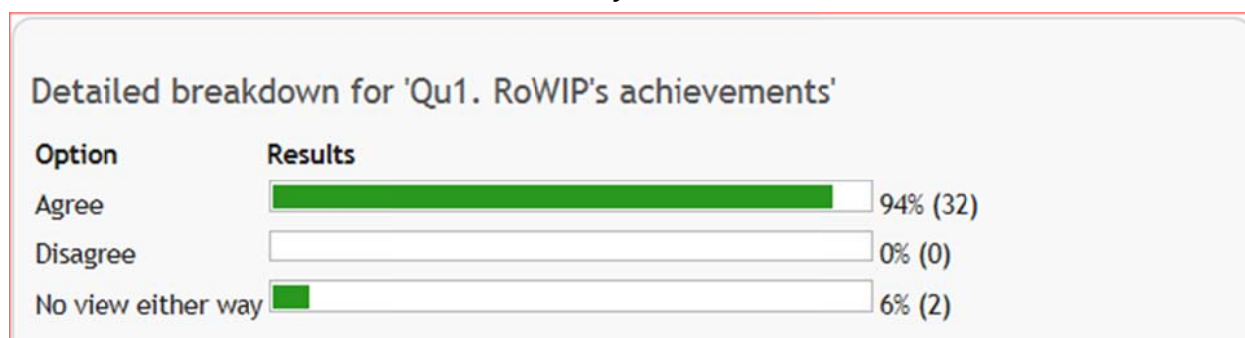
"It reflects the Countryside Access Team's thorough approach to the work they do."

"OCAF welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the achievements of the work carried out on the 2006 – 2011 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). The Forum is a statutory body set up to advise all levels of the local authority on access and rights of way issues. Broadly OCAF feels that the review was carried out in a satisfactory manner, and that the six points formed a clear framework."

- **Views about each of the RoWIP1 review evaluation questions and answers**

The tables shows the results for each question. Comments made for the questions follow on below each table.

Question 1. Do respondents agree or disagree with the review document's assessment of the RoWIP's achievements over the six years?



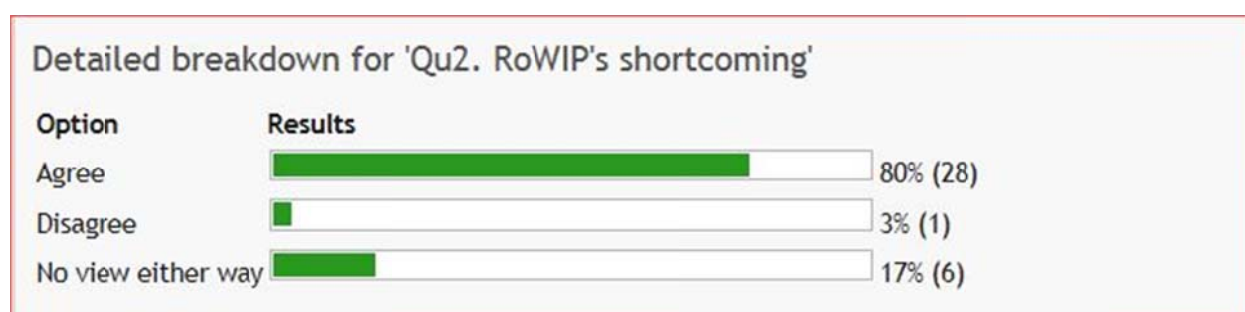
Qu 1 comments:

"Most points reflect 'work in progress'"

"Natural England recognised the excellence of Oxordshire's initial ROWIP via an award in 2009 and we are confident that with the realism allied to innovation displayed here the authority will manage to be both pragmatic and ambitious in delivering ROWIP 2. The use of alternative funds, volunteers, community-led initiatives and resources such as the interactive definitive map + local council guide."

"The achievements of RoWIP1 have been considerable. One has been to give a clear focus to local communities, user groups and district councils about improving access to the countryside for all. RoWIP1 provided a sensible and realistic plan of what could be achieved. The delivery action plans have been accomplished where feasible. No RoWIP will ever be achieved in all its goals and that aspirational element is the vital element that keeps officers and user groups/communities involved and thinking about future aims and plans. "

Question 2. Do respondents agree or disagree with the review document's assessment



of how the RoWIP has fallen short of expectations?

Qu 2 comments:

"In respect of Q2 it is indicated that 'Funding has always been in short supply'. The cost of maintenance of Rights of Way is always an issue and the ambitious outcomes to expand the network as planned within RoWIP2 cannot be achieved if there is insufficient funding for maintenance of existing networks."

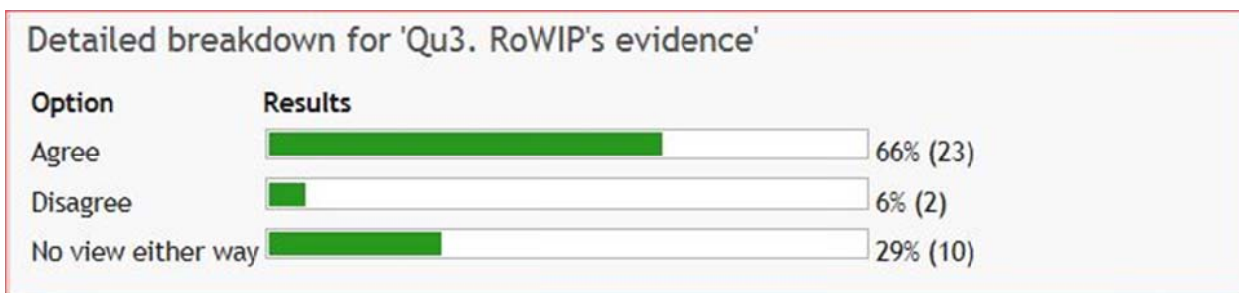
"Shortcomings. The RoWIP has not fallen short of expectations because it was always developed as a visionary wish list, and as such much of it will not be fulfilled. The money allocated to implement the RoWIP by central government was ZERO and this was before the credit crunch and recession."

"Whilst I agree with the assessment resource pressures to a large extent dictated the 'short-comings' which could also be viewed as necessary rationalisations!"

"It is difficult to draw up and act on a document that has no funding attached to it, and which is seen by some as perhaps rather tangential. For others, it is a key document that clearly lays out the aims and means for improving access to the countryside."

"We feel that the review is balanced and fair about the shortcomings of RoWIP1, many of which have been beyond the influence of officers and voluntary groups. Those that can be achieved will be incorporated into the next RoWIP."

Question 3. Do respondents agree or disagree with the review document's assessment of whether RoWIP1 contained enough evidence?

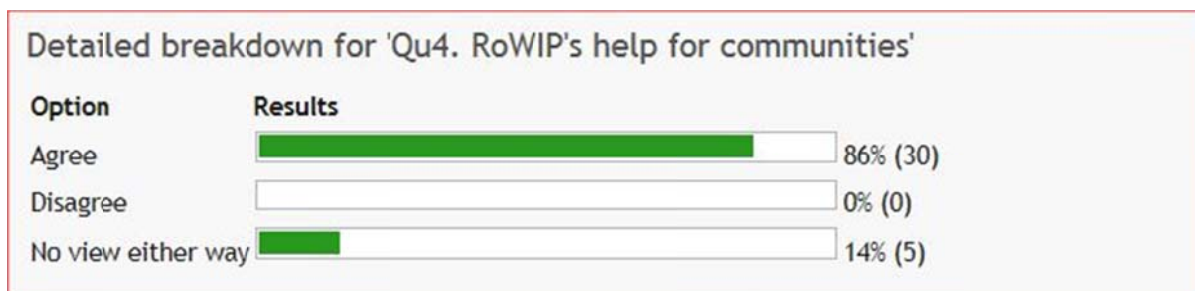


Qu 3 comments:

"Out of interest: do you feel you will have consulted enough to inform ROWIP 2 with this consultation and LAF contact etc or is the consultation process necessarily been restricted due to resource pressures etc?"

"We are happy with the evidence used for the first RoWIP, as it was thorough and wide-ranging."

Question 4. Do respondents agree or disagree with the review document's assessment of how the RoWIP helped access work with within local communities?



Qu 4 comments:

“In relation to question 4 we need much more help to establish a safe cycle route from the villages of Aston Rowant, Kingston Blount, Sydenham and Chinnor via bridleways etc to the Phoenix Trail, avoiding the dangerous B4445.”

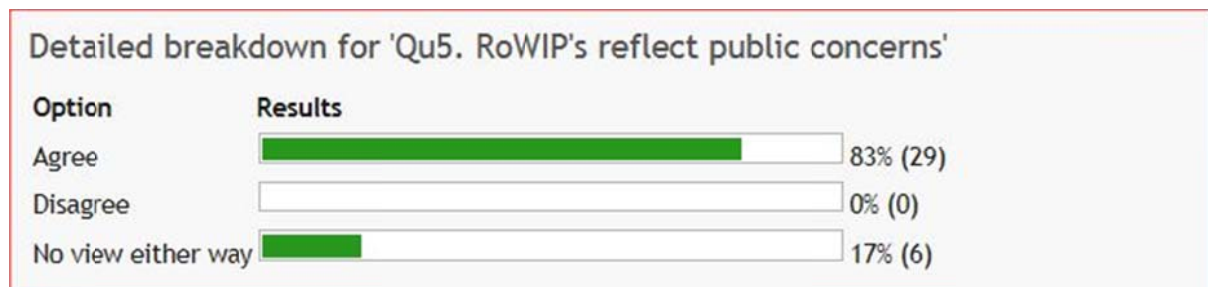
“Where a footpath crosses a major watercourse (including small rivers like the Ock) there seems to be little joined up thinking over footpath improvement and bridge improvement. Bridge repair is infinitely preferable and much cheaper than bridge replacement but monies are not allocated to keep footbridges in a reasonable state of repair.”

“Where Parish Councils ask OCC to enforce footpath improvement (where the landlord is in breach of obligations) OCC should pursue and not duck the issue.”

“Oxfordshire has shown a high level of commitment in involving local communities and interested groups in ROWIP 1 which help to supply the evidence needed for local access needs and planning.”

“The RoWIP has provided useful support for individuals and communities on access issues, for example when they respond to planning applications or strategy documents.”

Question 5. Do respondents agree or disagree with the review document’s assessment of whether the RoWIP reflected public concern about the countryside?



Qu 5 comments:

“The ROWIP has shown itself to be flexible and responsive eg via the interactive map to local concerns and this has ensured that the ROWIP is in touch, and to a large extent driven, by the local communities access needs. Local views can also be communicated via the LAF”

“Local views can also be communicated via the LAF but this obviously depends on the make-up and level of activity of your LAF and it would be interesting for us to know if you consider the relationship works well or if there are ways in which you, as an authority, think it could be improved - possibly with Natural England co-operation and support.”

“The RoWIP’s aims and plans are largely drawn from discussions, focus groups, surveys and other means of consultation and involvement of a wide range of groups and interests.”

• Comments on the suggested changes to partner organisations’ roles

“The Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are mentioned in relation to benefiting from the ROWIP in framing our current Management Plans. However, we are able to offer support to implementation of the ROWIP. This could include involvement in AONB initiatives, such as the recently launched 1SW project, which aims to encourage appropriate off road cycle access, or

through grant funding provided through our Sustainable Development Fund. Additionally, although the AONB only covers part of the Oxfordshire area, promoting the issue of access through community and neighbourhood plans would help to identify local priorities. Support of this kind may also be available through the Chilterns and Cotswolds AONBs."

"I'd be interested to know a bit more about the three changes proposed for District Councils. The issue of developer contributions to enhancing PRow is addressed in Cherwell's draft Planning obligations SPD."

"This section should include the 3 AONBs, particularly the 2 Conservation Boards which have a second purpose to 'increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB'."

"Specifically for the Cotswolds Conservation Board, the draft Cotswolds AONB Management Plan has 4 policies for Exploring and Enjoying: EE1: Harder to reach groups are encouraged to access and enjoy the Cotswolds countryside. EE2: The cultural significance and heritage of the Cotswolds is widely recognized by all who live and work in or visit the area. EE3: There is greater use of more sustainable methods of travel to and around the Cotswolds for enjoyment and recreation. EE4: There is an improved coordinated approach to the management of public access and quiet recreational activities compatible with the conservation of the landscape. To help achieve these, the Board's voluntary arm undertakes work on rights of way (recognized elsewhere in the consultation document) and leads up to 300 guided walks a year. The Board also publishes a range of self-guided walks including 'walks on wheels'; and 'miles without stiles'; and off-road cycle routes."

"[Our] Parish Council does facilitate local access. Could undertake repairs on behalf of OCC if paid for the work."

"Local councils/communities re: undertaking some maintenance works on OCC's behalf - our parish council works on a very tight budget, would we be provided with financial help to undertake our own maintenance?"

"Local councils.....closer integration with parish councils, particularly rural ones, to develop and disseminate a clear organisation/network chart linking up various organisations and providing access to them"

"Within Oxfordshire the Canal & River Trust welcomes your cooperation on improving and promoting various aspects of the existing canal towpath and we are pleased to be part of the [Oxfordshire Countryside Access Providers] group. We would request, that in recognition of our involvement in this group and our shared aims in achieving higher quality public access the Trust is listed in section 6 as an existing organisation. The Trust could be included in the section on landowning Charities with no other need for wording changes as our aims so closely match your own and those of the other groups mentioned."

"Totally support possible changes for All Groups except for District Councils - I would not like to see OCC taking less direct planning application liaison. I do support use of CIL to improve area RoW. Local Access Forum - as a member of CPRE Oxfordshire I would like its reps to report to its members, and feel its members could be a real help in getting local people/groups to maintain Row and report issues."

"Generally agree on roles of organisations, although it must inevitably be for organisations themselves to decide what they are or are not willing and/or able to do. Note omission of reference to Sustrans (who are, of course, unpopular in some quarters), but need, in my opinion, to be taken on board, so that we know what they are doing and we can try to influence them into pursuing a line which is more in tune with the interests of other users."

“Where are ‘local area rights of way meetings’; publicised?”

“As with all councils. budgets are under considerable strain and to expect additional work, even with volunteers has impacts on existing resources”

“We strongly endorse the role of local councils and communities, and the comment, ‘Greater role in inspection of paths on OCC’s behalf’; under the column: ‘Possible changes in the future’. Both our organisations are committed to the concept of the introduction of a Parish Path Wardens (PPW) in every parish and town council throughout the County. This individual could play a key role in monitoring the state of the PRowWs in their parish and reporting problems to the County, as well as working with the parish council in liaising with local landowners etc. Many parishes may already have an individual undertaking this role. The Oxford Field Paths Society and the Ramblers would actively encourage their members to become PPWs with the aim that every parish/town council has a PPW by the year 2016.”

“Natural England (NE) has undergone extensive change during the period of the ROWIP, and for our access work this has meant a greatly reduced direct support role to access and rights of way in general. However, we will facilitate wherever we can and provide support via information (e.g. MENE) LAF facilitation and sometimes directly via schemes such as Paths for Communities. We’d be interested to know more about the Countryside Access Providers group and would like to know how this would relate to groups such as the LAF. I mentioned our interest in LAF effectiveness above and say again that NE looks to support LAF performance and is interested in any suggestions how it can be improved and/or promote existing good practice. Re: securing permanent links - this is an increasingly urgent area as agreements reach the end of their term and we need to co-operate in identifying those agreements and the potential for realising permanent access - perhaps via schemes such as Paths for Communities. Re: associated groups - NE may be able to offer help in promoting links between Local Nature Partnerships for example and access interests e.g. the LAF.”

“ Include local councils in the table in 6.1 in the section entitled "local area rights of way meetings" and 'National Trails Management Group".

“As a member of the LAF, I am aware that we could take more responsibility in promoting and increasing sustainable access to the countryside. However, as a group of disparate individuals it can be difficult to get people to take initiatives - unlike some other LAFs. Perhaps fresh (not necessarily younger) members would help this - but it is hard to take on more and people are all volunteers. I feel that because LAFs are toothless in regard to national government policy, their role is limited. Of course we can and do support our Countryside Service and the ROWIP, but it is sometimes difficult to become further involved in what can seem rather nebulous functions. I am aware that other LAFs have been much more successful in actually doing things... On the second part, [acting as access ‘champion’ to encourage highway, transport and surveying authority to modify policy strategy and delivery] I think the LAF (OCAF) is quite effective.”

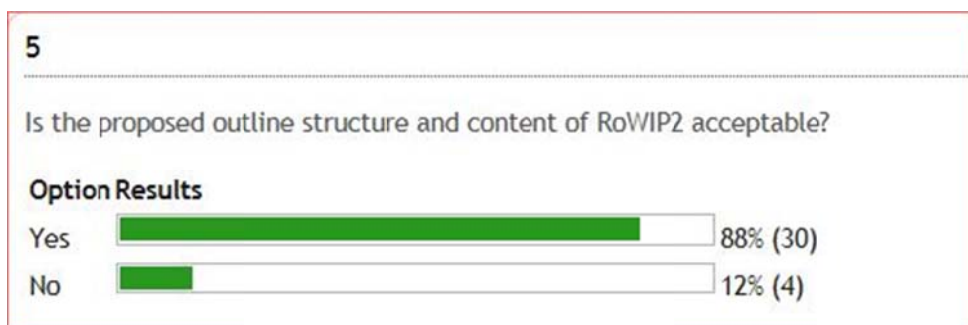
“On the role existing organisations can and could play in countryside access, we feel the RoWIP review has been fair and accurate, as well as thoughtful about how some roles could develop. We have one point about Natural England in the table on page 8. Permissive access paths are no longer available under new agri-environment schemes and therefore OCC could work with NE and with landowners to identify permissive paths currently in operation that are popular with the public and, when the agreement nears its end, to approach the landowner and find out whether he might be willing to have the path designated permanently.

“The Local Access Forum feels that volunteer and community involvement is key, and that the county council should make the most of it in the future, especially the vast network of local residents who walk the paths in their communities every single day and are aware of every issue. These residents could be used far better for monitoring paths, reporting issues, and also

for help with the practical maintenance of paths, provided that they are managed well and have appropriate levels of investment and support by county council staff. As part of starting to build local community interest and involvement, efforts should be made to be to raise the basic level of awareness among the public of what PROWs are, the different types, and what their rights and responsibilities towards them are both as users and as owners of PROWs. This could include much more promotion of OCC's interactive map on websites and community newsletters to encourage people to use it for identifying paths for recreation and commuting as well as reporting issues on PROWs. This could lead on to talks at village halls to try to gather people who are interested in their PROWs to form work parties to help with the practical maintenance and management of the PROWs, perhaps focusing attention on areas with poor networks first. There are also many existing volunteer groups that might adapt to PROW work where they do not do this already. e.g. there are over 80 conservation groups and there are lots of Community Action Groups and 'Transition Towns' that offer potential."

"It is important to coordinate activities of different groups especially where they may be looking at maintenance of the same public right of way. This can present difficulties and it is necessary to constantly check what is being done by the different organisations. As OCC has details of all organisations involved they would be in the best position to do this."

- **Is the proposed outline structure and content of RoWIP2 acceptable? YES**



Comments:

"It is clear that despite the difficult funding environment, considerable progress has been made in areas with a strong and enthusiastic volunteer base. I suggest that as a way of spreading the benefits across a wider area of the county, a project to improve the crossings of major roads be instituted. This could include signage to motorists to ensure they are made aware of walkers / riders wishing to cross - so improving the perceived and actual safety of users and encouraging greater use. The A420 could be a starting point for this project."

"Assessment of need. It is important that the ROWIP2 recognises that volunteers need support (third bullet point). However, whilst volunteers give their time for free, there are costs in running volunteers - coordination, training, insurance, tools and equipment and in some instances, expenses. ROWIP2 needs to include this point. 7.4 -statement of action. The consultation document mentions the contribution of access to the economy and to health and wellbeing. ROWIP2 should build on this and include a section demonstrating the benefits of access to the economy and health and wellbeing."

"The shortcomings are noted and there is room for more to be done in the long term."

"Keep it simple and do not make wordy just for its own sake. Clarify the issues and make clear statements about what can and can't be achieved and what practical timescales things can be done by. e.g. what will be achieved at end of 2 yrs, 5yrs etc and what remains an aspiration and unlikely to be achieved."

"I cannot help feeling that, for all its good/laudable intentions, RoWIP2 is setting too many demanding intentions thereby risking that there will be shortfall in achieving them."

"Yes. I would change it by adding references to need to scrap 2026, to target no-go-areas and to include Sustrans in list of organisations referred to."

"There needs to be more recognition of the importance of rights of way in providing safe routes to school. Also safe commute routes for pedestrians and cyclists are a missing link - work to improve this is in our view essential."

"As with all councils. budgets are under considerable strain and to expect additional work, even with volunteers has impacts on existing resources"

"We strongly endorse the fourth outcome and would maintain that the introduction of Parish Path Wardens would be one of the most effective ways of ensuring this outcome. Sometimes parishes are grouped together and District Councillors asked to ensure that PRow matters are considered. We suggest adding another outcome to the effect that: The PRow improvement suggestions as outlined in map 1 of Annex 2c of the Rights of way Improvement Plan 2006-2014 are implemented to an agreed programme. We suggest adding to the Statement of Action: The need to provide a joined-up user-friendly integrated rights of way network, and Incorporate all the LTP3 aims with regard to implementing the new Rights of Way recommendations. Also it is suggested that the 'Double Diamond' initiative to repeat the 1953 survey of all the Parish Councils' PRow is considered for inclusion as an action."

"I'm sure the overall the structure will be fine but this outline obviously ideally needs to be read with the original ROWIP to hand to understand what it will look like. The outline refers to possible outcomes followed by the Assessment of Need and a Statement of Action but I think some people may be a bit unclear to say from this what it will look like It might have been useful to have a simple table showing the main contents of ROWIP 2 and reiterating ROWIP 1 's aims/structure? That being said there will be a draft ROWIP 2 available for comment which should make the above clear. We'd be interested to know how widely it will be advertised/promoted."

"I have had the opportunity to feed in my comments. Of course, I would like to wave a magic wand and have many more bridleways and horse-routes, and safe off-road links for equestrians, but at least I feel that the Countryside Access Team is now much more aware of the needs of horseriders and carriage drivers than in the past, and very receptive and helpful in trying to improve things with limited means."

"The RoWIP is very extensive and with reduced likely resources it needs to prioritise the work involved."

"OCAF concurs with the point about the challenges that lie ahead in a changing world of government plans and reductions in resourcing. The next RoWIP could run the risk of being too general in an attempt to cover every eventuality. However we are confident that the consultations will ensure that realism and aspiration can sit together and produce a strong bedrock for future improvements to countryside access in Oxfordshire."

- **Other comments supplied about the RoWIP review and the first and second RoWIPs**

".....use and understanding of.....Recognising the, sometimes, differing aspirations of countryside users vs owners / managers, would it be worth considering some of the major differences, which may be barriers to effective communication, as part of RoWIP2? For

example, and I know you are aware of these, but should the concerns be more explicit, dogs / no dogs (stock, wildlife); bridleways vs footpaths; user expectations etc?"

"Coordination with the Green Infrastructure plan for Oxfordshire is essential, in order to raise the profile of countryside access. This can also be used to make a case for access to funds from developer contributions such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)."

"Better joined up network - it would be great to have a link to the Phoenix Trail from Emmington to avoid cycling along the B4445 towards Towersey; a very fast stretch of road."

"Overall I believe the plan is focused in the right direction. However I would like to draw attention to the momentum that is building behind the project I am involved with to get more viable countryside access between the villages of Aston Rowant, Kingston Blount, Towersey, Chinnor and linking up with the Phoenix Trail to access Thame and Princes Risborough. In particular, currently in order to access the Phoenix Trail from most of these villages requires travelling along dangerous roads and being exposed to high speed traffic. Ideally we would like to see access being achieved from Emmington and Henton to the Phoenix Trail (currently a small section of approx 500m is a footpath) creating a viable route to travel either on foot or bike to access the amenities available in Thame and Princes Risborough without the need to travel on dangerous roads. Therefore aiming to encourage more people to reduce their use of the car to make these short journeys."

"We note under para 1.3.4 that there is a £40,000 annual scheme for resurfacing rights of way. The first 60 metre section of Sewell's Lane in this Parish which is a surfaced 'occupation road', but currently designated a bridleway, should be a priority to be surfaced under this scheme."

"I am pleased that at long last the public are being consulted on this plan. With the CROW Act and more people taking to the countryside for walking, cycling and horseriding, we need to ensure that the bridleways, byways and footpaths are fit for purpose. Many of the rural areas have byways that are almost impassable for most of the year, either because of overhanging branches, ditches or flooding problems. Riparian owners also need to be challenged to ensure that any RoW which are blocked are cleared and made accessible to the public. I have examples in my area, where byways have been the victims of flytipping, poor maintenance and flooding, and nothing has been done about it until I have taken the matter up with the various councils. It is also the case that in some areas of the county, in particular near the Cotswolds area, some of the countryside rights of way have been gravelled and made much more accessible to the public, whereas in my area (the Vale) some of them have been neglected for years. Our rights of way are an asset and an amenity which should be enhanced and enjoyed by the public, not left to be wiped out of their existence by years of neglect and non-maintenance."

"Rather than answer your own questionnaire I prefer to address the most obvious deficiency in South Oxfordshire---HIGHWAYS. Many improvements to rights of way could be made using their neglected assets. It should not be necessary to point out that verges, footways, cycleways and unmetalled county roads (UCRs) are also highways, but , in South Oxfordshire, Highways neglects these groups almost totally. It is not a highways department, but CARRIAGEWAYS. For example, consider the footway on the eastern side of the B481 in Rotherfield Peppard, between Dog Lane and the Greys Green road--totally overgrown and out of repair for 25 years; and the footway from Henley to Nuffield which has not been maintained by Highways themselves for at least twenty years. Consider also the UCRs around Dunsden--Foxhill Lane, Row Lane, Sandpit Lane and the one from Shiplake Row to Hampstead Hill--all disgraceful. Cycleways are virtually non-existent in South Oxfordshire. As for verges, those near Ambrose Farm, at the bottom of Gangsdown Hill could be used to make that non-junction of two paths less murderous. These and other examples could provide extensive improvements to rights of way routes. ALL non-carriageway responsibilities in South Oxfordshire, should be removed from Highways and transferred to Countryside Services, with the proportionate budget."

“Could members of the Local Access Forum get together and run a workshop to give a background to all aspects of RoW eg. background, basic legal issues - who can use the different types of RoW, how different users should treat & interact with each other (i.e. cyclists use bells to alert horse riders, pedestrians), assisting with maintenance how to use OCC's interactive map, and reporting of issues via OCC's interactive map? I would like to see the issue of RoW being littered with signs for events such as mountain bike events, cycle rides, sponsored walks and lost dog posters. I would like to see a Code of Practice for such signs/groups and have OCC or some other designated volunteer group distribute the protocol to organisations putting on such events/postering.”

“The Canal and River Trust has published a Towpath Design Guide which was developed following consultation with a wide range of user groups including those representing cyclists (the CTC and Sustrans). The Towpath Design Guide recognises that there are often competing types of users on each stretch of the towpath network. It offers advice on the how best to provide or improve facilities for cyclists. The Towpath Design Guide should be referenced prior to planning and design route improvements for cyclists on towpaths or other type of route administered by the Canal and River Trust e.g. routes around reservoirs. The guidance is comprehensive and advises on the development and design process as well as implementation issues such as surface treatments - it also has a useful set of Appendices which provide detailed information that should be considered.”

“Not enough time for parish councils to respond”

“We are pleased to see that the County has included the idea of a parish path warden under possible changes in the future. We think that every parish should have someone, or a small group, that maintained the footpaths in the parish. We think that many parishes in the county probably already have such a person or persons but we would like to see every parish in the county have one.”

“On a local scale there are 2 improvements that might be useful to the community: 1) that the owner of the golf course might be persuaded to make the private part of the peripheral path into a permissive path, 2) That a path should be created from golf course to join footpaths in Milton (as there once was before golf course was created)”

“The view of [this parish council] is that RoWIP is indispensable to secure, retain and enhance effective and sustainable use of countryside, within and across parish boundaries. Excellent document”

“It was ambitious and achieved much in a time of tight finance. We are lucky to have in Oxfordshire such a dedicated team looking after our ROWs”

“Overall the structure and content is good but as mentioned above I wonder how accessible it is to members of the public without much knowledge of rights of way and/or the ROWIP process. All the information is there but they'd have to be keen to access it all and cross-reference the various documents etc. Perhaps more use of maps/tables/graphics etc might have made it more accessible eg showing areas where improvements have been made and. where there are still gaps/issues etc . But then again if they've reached this far they probably are engaged anyway! - it will be interesting to see how many responses you get and what they say. We recognise that whilst it is often desirable to consult a widely as you can much of the groundwork for ROWIP 2 has already been done and we have confidence in the expertise and professionalism of local RoW officers to be aware of local needs as part of their daily work.”

“Local footpaths often have sheep/cattle to walk through, and are very muddy and wet in winter and therefore unsuitable for pushchairs/wheelchairs.”

“There is no mention of disabled users. I feel this is a mistake and some recognition of their needs should be reflected in the document.

“Overall I have been impressed by the range and scope of RoWIP1, and the energy and enthusiasm put in to producing it and to delivering the plans. I think the consultation has been wide and thorough.”

You have highlighted additional staff in the text. It is unlikely that additional staff will be forthcoming in the near future and therefore it might be useful to consider 'employing' volunteer field officers who could be used to undertake similar work to your field own officers. (There would need to be reimbursement of travelling costs etc).

“Although it is not usually such a problem around Charlbury, particularly in the summer, this year several rights of way have become very difficult to use without substantial footwear. due to the amount of mud which makes paths very slippery. This is especially the case on bridleways which can be almost impassable for walkers. It would be useful to have a supply of wood chippings which could be put down by voluntary groups to provide a better walking surface without any permanent change to the environment. However it is difficult to find where such material is available at no cost. We would welcome advice on this matter and perhaps it is available from OCC hedge/tree maintenance. We would welcome any support that could be given or publicity in preparation of Charlbury's bid to become a Walkers are Welcome Town”

“Summary - The Forum feels that Oxfordshire County Council has carried out the majority of the tasks set out in the RoWIP to a high standard. If the austerity measures had not been put in place it is felt that the County Council staff would have delivered just about all the actions listed in the Plan.

Conclusion - The Forum wishes to acknowledge the good work the Countryside Access Team have carried out, both in production of the RoWIP and delivering the actions documented on the plan. We look forward to the development of RoWIP2.”

List of respondents

Black Bourton Parish Council
British Horse Society (BHS), Oxfordshire
Canal and River Trust
Charlbury Town Council
Cherwell District Council (officer response)
Cotswolds Conservation Board
CPRE Oxfordshire
Didcot Town Council
Drayton parish council
Faringdon Town Council
Forest Hill with Shotover Parish Council
Group looking to improve countryside access between villages local to Chinnor
Grove Parish Council
Henley Town Council
Hinton Waldrist Parish Council
Horspath Parish Council
individual
Individual
Individual
Individual
Kennington Parish Council
Kidmore End Parish Council
Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor Parish Council
Middleton Stoney Parish Council
Natural England
North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
OCAF Member
Oxford City Council, Parks and Leisure (officer response)
Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (Local Access Forum)
Oxfordshire County Councillor
Pyrton Parish Council
Ramblers Association/Oxford Fieldpaths Society
Stanford in the Vale Parish Council
Swyncombe Parish Council
Sydenham Parish Council
Trail Riders Fellowship
Wiltshire Council (officer response)

Consultation on the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review

1. Which group or organisation, if any, are you representing?

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Your name/position</i>
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2. Do you consider this review of the RoWIP to be, overall, fit for purpose? (please tick)

Yes

No (please make any suggestions in box below)

3. Do you agree or disagree with the answers to the five review questions? (please tick)

<i>Review Question</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>No view either way</i>
Qu1. RoWIP's achievements			
Qu2. RoWIP's shortcoming			
Qu3. RoWIP's evidence			
Qu4. RoWIP's help for communities			
Qu5. RoWIP's reflect public concerns			

Additional comment:

4. Do you have any comments on the suggested changes to partners organisations' roles? (please identify the group for each of your comments)

1.

2.

3.

5. Is the proposed outline structure and content of RoWIP2 acceptable, including proposed outcomes? (please tick)

Yes

No

How would you change it?

6. Please use this space or a separate sheet for any other comments

Thank you for taking the time to reply. Now please email the form to countryside@oxfordshire.gov.uk or fax it to 0845 6069614 This consultation closes at Midday on **January 9^h 2013**.