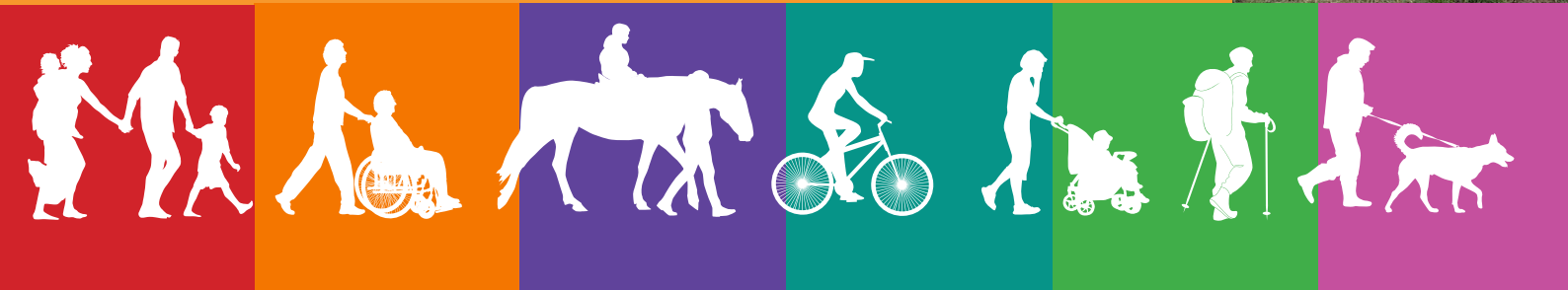


Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025 – 2035

Executive Summary



WestBerkshire
COUNCIL

About West Berkshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Every council which is responsible for public rights of way must produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). It sets out the council's goals and priorities for public rights of way.

A ROWIP has to assess how well public rights of way meet the needs of the public. This includes those who already use public rights of way and those who would like to. It must assess how public rights of way can encourage exercise and recreation and support use by those who are blind or partially sighted or have mobility problems.

The public, stakeholders and partners were consulted on their views before the ROWIP was produced. This revealed how much people value public rights of way. It showed how important they are for health, mental wellbeing and for enjoying nature. Many people use them regularly, often using them every day.



Volunteers celebrating installation of 300th gate

This, along with an extensive review of evidence, has resulted in the priorities and actions in this ROWIP.

The main ROWIP document is set out in four themes:

- **Theme 1: Looking after Public Rights of Way**
- **Theme 2: An Evolving Network**
- **Theme 3: Healthy and Prosperous Communities**
- **Theme 4: Effective Delivery**



Couple walking

Main Findings and Priorities

The public said that the maintenance of public rights of way is their highest priority.

Residents of West Berkshire highly value their public rights of way. They are one of the most used public assets with 91% of people using them once a week or more often. Maintaining public rights of way so that they are easy to use was the public's highest priority. They wanted paths to be clear of vegetation, structures to be in good condition and paths well signed. Landowners are key partners in this, and the council will provide support and advice to them.

The priority which delivers this is:

Theme 1 Priority 1: To protect the network and maintain it in the best condition possible, prioritising safety and areas of greatest need and seeking improvements where possible.

- Action 1** Engage with landowners to support them and provide advice on the good maintenance of public rights of way.
- Action 2** Survey the condition of all public rights of way every ten years, using volunteers in between.
- Action 3** Ensure priority PROWs are kept clear of vegetation and keep the priority maintenance list under regular review.
- Action 4** Resolve signage defects by April each year, alternating urban and rural locations. Add destinations at strategic locations.

Action 5 Create 1-to-3-year specific targets for dealing with unsatisfactory structures on PROWs.

Action 6 Annually review all seasonal Traffic Regulation Orders and create management plans for the PROWs involved.

Action 7 Promote the use of best practice for the surfacing of multi-user paths.

Action 8 Regular checks of signage and access points to statutory open access land (CROW Act land).

The second highest priority for the public was protecting existing public rights of way.

Of particular concern were negative impacts associated with development. The public wanted good outcomes from development and improvements to be secured, with new and improved routes created for a wide range of users.

The council also carries out important legal work which protects public rights of way.

The priorities and actions which deliver this are:

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

Action 16 Ensure that high-quality, multi-user access improvements are included in and around new developments, addressing the needs of the area. Ensure that maintenance of new or improved routes is secured.

Action 17 Seek new and improved traffic free links for pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists including road verges and permissive access. New links and improvements to be defined and listed with target completion date.

Action 19 Improve understanding of the needs of equestrians on the PROW network, including a review of desired improvements from the 2010 ROWIP.

Action 20 Produce a report of all unsatisfactory equestrian gates and obstructions for equestrians. Engage with British Horse Society over priorities for resolution.

Theme 2 Priority 5: To uphold the council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement.

Action 21 Incorporate legal changes into a new Consolidated Definitive map and Statement by 2030.

Action 22 Incorporate Definitive Map anomalies into the annual work programmes.

Action 23 Consider all applications for definitive map modification orders, including for the recording of unrecorded or under-recorded PROWs, and determine these in line with priority criteria.

Action 24 Review regularly the path orders priority criteria and charging schedules.

Public rights of way are important for health and wellbeing. People value them highly and say they improve their quality of life. However, not everyone has the same opportunity to use and benefit from them.

Three quarters of the public said they use public rights of way to improve their health. However, disabled people, those in poorer health, younger people and those of 'non-White' ethnicity use public rights of way less. Improving the condition and accessibility of public rights of way will help more people to access them, including disabled people. More and good quality information is also important.

The priorities and actions which deliver this are:

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents.

Action 13 Plan public rights of way work strategically alongside other council teams, e.g. Highways, Leisure, Health, Planning and Environment. Develop working partnerships to deliver projects.

Action 14 Ensure that priorities in this ROWIP are included in relevant external plans and strategies and in Neighbourhood Development Plans.

Action 15 Support projects to increase walking and cycling for short journeys.

Theme 3 Priority 6: Improve the accessibility of public rights of way so that more people can use them for enjoyment, health and mental wellbeing.

Action 25 Use data on infrastructure to prioritise removal of unnecessary obstacles and make surface improvements around populous areas.

Action 26 Replace stiles with new easy access gates or gaps at 10 locations per year. Involve volunteers where possible.

Action 27 Use data on infrastructure to prioritise accessibility improvements. Upgrade 5 structures per year to improve accessibility, e.g. bridges, steps.

Action 28 Record existing accessible routes and ensure they are maintained as accessible.

Action 29 Gain a greater understanding of inclusive access, including for disabled people and under represented groups. Design suitable access provision and promotion.

Action 30 Create and publicise 5 new accessible routes per year, at least one of which should be of the scale of a capital project.

Theme 3 Priority 7: Improve information provision to enable more people to use public rights of way, support the economy and reduce conflicts.

Action 31 Include accessibility information in all new promotion.

Action 32 Improve public mapping to show levels of accessibility, public transport, and other information so people can make informed choices.

Action 33 Review existing promotional material to be consistent with this ROWIP.

Action 34 Produce at least 3 promotional items each year.

Action 35 Support partners in developing new promoted routes, considering in particular those with health and wellbeing needs, those in deprived communities, and the rural economy.

Action 36 Encourage responsible use of the countryside via publicity and use of the Countryside Code.

There is wide variation in the provision of public rights of way in different parts of the district. Some of the most populated areas have fewer and disconnected routes.

There is wide variation in the provision of public rights of way in different parts of the district. Some of the most populated areas have fewer and disconnected routes.

The difference of provision means that not everyone has the same opportunities. There are more people, fewer and more disconnected public rights of way, more traffic and poorer health outcomes in the eastern Kennet Valley and south of the district compared to the north. This has an impact on public rights of way users. Going forward, the council will need to consider how to address these inequalities.

Equestrians and cyclists in particular have to use roads to connect their journeys, especially in the parts of the district where there is more traffic.

The priorities and actions which deliver this are:

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents.

Action 13 Plan public rights of way work strategically alongside other council teams, e.g. Highways, Leisure, Health, Planning and Environment. Develop working partnerships to deliver projects.

Action 14 Ensure that priorities in this ROWIP are included in relevant external plans and strategies and in Neighbourhood Development Plans.

Action 15 Support projects to increase walking and cycling for short journeys.

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

Actions listed on page 3/4 .

Environmental sustainability, protecting the natural world and adapting to climate change are important in a changing world.

Sustainability and protecting the outstanding natural assets of the district are important priorities. Also important is responding to climate change and the effects it will have on public rights of way. Public rights of way also have a role to play in supporting people to make sustainable travel choices.

The priorities and actions which deliver this are:

Theme 1 Priority 2: To improve environmental sustainability of public rights of way maintenance and contribute to environmental and climate stewardship.

- Action 9** Include environmental sustainability in all public rights of way works and plans.
- Action 10** List public rights of way within ecologically sensitive or heritage sites and create appropriate management plans.
- Action 11** Identify popular ‘honeypot’ locations and work with partners to disperse recreational pressure.
- Action 12** Plan measures to reduce the impacts of climate change on PROW structures and surfaces, including management of drainage.

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire’s residents.

Actions listed on page 5 .

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

Actions listed on page 3/4.

The ROWIP is ambitious. To deliver it fully will need allocation of resources, new ways of working and linking with partners with common goals.

The consultation process engaged with many organisations. Some of these were existing partners, but many were new. There was interest in working together to maximise opportunities. The existing volunteer group already delivers valuable work but there is more that can be achieved. There are also opportunities to work in partnership with parish and town councils.

The priorities which deliver this are:

Theme 4 Priority 8: Ensure that this ROWIP is resourced and delivered, and that progress is monitored and the plan reviewed.

- Action 37** Seek additional resources to deliver this ROWIP as necessary.
- Action 38** Work with partners to ensure the priorities of this ROWIP are included in strategies, policies and funding bids.
- Action 39** Produce annual targets against the Actions in this Delivery Plan, to be approved by the Portfolio.
- Action 40** Assess this ROWIP after 5 years to ensure it continues to align with West Berkshire’s priorities and new information.
- Action 41** Review this ROWIP after 10 years.

Theme 4 Priority 9: Increase involvement and working with partners, communities and volunteers.

Action 42 Develop working partnerships both within the council and with external partners to develop and deliver projects.

Action 43 Explore and expand volunteering opportunities. Seek a Volunteer Support Officer (voluntary) to expand volunteering and community action.

Action 44 Develop partnerships with Parish and Town Councils to deliver improvements to the PROW network and priorities of this ROWIP.

Theme 4 Priority 10: To continue to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction and seek ways to improve

Action 45 Continually improve visibility of reporting mechanisms for the public, and achieve timely provision of feedback.

Action 46 Periodically seek customer feedback on provision of services.



Keeping paths clear



Users of a downland bridleway



Hedge laying in Beedon

Delivery, Monitoring and Review

The actions in this ROWIP go beyond what is required by law for maintaining public rights of way. Some aspects of the ROWIP may be delivered using existing resources and workstreams, but additional funding will be needed to deliver many of the actions.

More detailed targets, based on the high-level actions in this plan, will be put forward in a Delivery Plan. These targets will be formed by reviewing the current delivery of actions, available resources and priorities.

Call to Action

West Berkshire is proud of its PROW network. However, there are some gaps in provision and areas for further improvement. It is anticipated that delivery of the priorities and actions set out in this Plan will help consolidate existing strengths and help to build a network that will continue to serve future generations of residents, visitors and other stakeholders.



Trail Riders on a downland byway



New retaining wall in Beenham