

Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan

2012-2016

**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**



**South Gloucestershire
Council** □

The **West of England** Partnership

Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan: 2012-2016

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FOREWORD

Welcome to our Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This is an update or 'refresh' of the plan we adopted in 2007 following public consultation in 2006.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan will guide us in developing and improving our Public Rights of Way network. This network is important in many different ways. It provides access to the countryside, gets people out and about, has health benefits from all that walking, cycling and riding and supports the local economy - everything from local shops and pubs to riding stables.

As a living document we will refresh the Rights of Way Improvement Plan as things change. Your continued input will be appreciated.

We hope you find the Rights of Way Improvement Plan useful. In the meantime go out and enjoy using the network.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why a Rights of Way Improvement Plan?

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 every highway authority has to prepare a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (ROWIP). ROWIPs have to assess how well footpaths, bridleways, byways and cycle tracks meet current and future needs; provide recreational opportunities; and are accessible to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

The three councils of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire came together to put forward a joint ROWIP which was adopted in 2007. We have now updated or 'refreshed' the ROWIP. North Somerset Council has a separate ROWIP but we hope the two plans will in future be combined.

Our area has a population of almost 868,000 - living in cities, towns, villages and isolated rural properties. Much of our countryside is in the Mendip Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the rest in the Forest of Avon Community Forest.

In preparing the 2007 ROWIP we looked at user needs, the existing Rights of Way Network, national, regional and local policies and undertook extensive public consultation. This work still remains valid.

Our vision is to increase the use of rights of way by developing a network of safe and attractive routes which:

- Improves opportunities for sustainable access to essential services and facilities; and
- Meets the present and future recreational needs of all members of the community, including those with visual impairment or mobility difficulties.

User Needs

We have looked at the needs of different users including those who for various reasons have limited mobility and taking account of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Walkers and cyclists need safe, convenient and well maintained rights of way for 'everyday' trips - for example getting to school, work and local shops. For 'recreational' trips their needs vary from routes for short family strolls to more challenging routes for mountain bikers. Horse riders have their own individual needs as do people with two or four wheel motorised vehicles. There can be conflicts between the needs of different users and we aim to manage these, learning from best practice. We are also conscious that rights of way go across private land and that positive working with landowners is essential.

Existing Rights of Way

We have a 1,400 mile network with around 90% being footpaths. Footpaths range from locally important links to well promoted routes like the Cotswold Way National Trail and routes along our rivers and canals. For historical and geographical reasons the provision of public rights of way is variable. Public rights of way are recorded on our 'definitive maps and statements'. From 2007 until 2011 we have processed 105 legal orders to modify these maps or to create, divert or extinguish rights of way.

The cities of Bath and Bristol have relatively limited recorded rights of way networks but these are supplemented by a diverse pattern of other paths and routes. Most bridleways and 'restricted byways' (those open to non-motorised users only) are in South Gloucestershire. Most 'byways open to all traffic' (BOATs) are in Bath and North East Somerset. As well as the network of public rights of way, our area has a wide range of other means of getting access to local facilities and the wider countryside. We have for example the Bristol & Bath Railway Path and other key routes that form part of the National Cycle Network. There is also 'access land' including commons, public parks and 'permissive' paths provided by farmers under the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Environmental Stewardship schemes and by landowners like the National Trust and Bristol Water. Vital links are provided by highway footways and verges and housing estate paths.

As highway authorities we have a duty to ensure that rights of way are adequately signposted, maintained, free from obstruction and fit for purpose. Current practice varies between the three councils. Signing problems have been identified through surveys and feedback from the public. Each council has maintenance contracts for vegetation clearance and control and there are also agreements with some Parish Councils. As well as general maintenance we have improvement programmes such as replacing stiles with kissing gates, surfacing and improved drainage.

We actively promote rights of way and there are a variety of booklets and leaflets produced. Council websites have an increasing role as does the new OutdoorsWest.org.uk site. Many other organisations are equally active in promotion.

Review of Other Documents and Information

In assessing our rights of way we have drawn upon other documents and information. Guidance notes and other publications of the Government and national agencies have been influential. We have also taken account of our community and corporate strategies. There is a close relationship between the ROWIP and the Joint Local Transport Plan 2011-2026. Our Local Plans and local development frameworks set the land use context. The management plans of the Mendip Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are also important.

Involving the Public

In 2006 we undertook a questionnaire survey and received almost 3,000 replies, enough to give a good picture of public opinion. We found that walking, jogging and cycling were the most popular activities; over half walked paths at least once a week. Three quarters of people used rights of way to enjoy the environment. Personal safety was a key concern and maintenance was also considered a priority.

These and the many other survey findings were explored in detail in four 'local assessment areas' chosen to represent different types of location: Brislington, Oldbury-on-Severn, Sodbury and Timsbury. Consultation events were held in these locations plus an area-wide event for access providers and interest groups. All these comments were taken into account in producing the draft ROWIP in May 2007. Following that we undertook further work including a questionnaire survey on the Consultation Draft and user group events.

Results of Assessment

Four themes came forward as priorities and these are still applicable:

- Theme 1, improving maintenance and safety;
- Theme 2, signing routes;
- Theme 3, providing information; and
- Theme 4, improving access for local travel.

Statement of Action

In the light of our assessment we have drawn up a Statement of Action focusing on the four priority themes and building on the progress made since 2007. We propose a total of 21 separate actions, 6 of them short term 'quick wins'.

Our first theme is to improve maintenance and safety and we use survey information to prioritise maintenance of the network. Under the second theme we plan to continue to review and upgrade signs. To provide information - the third theme - we propose to make greater use of the internet, newsletters and press releases. We also will extend the range of promotional material to promote health and recreation, give guidance to landowners and promote access by public transport. With our fourth theme to improve access for local travel we will look to enhance access to schools and other local facilities and give attention to those with mobility difficulties. We will seek road safety improvements and promote rights of way through travel planning and the planning process.

Most actions will be implemented by the councils but key partners and stakeholders will play important roles including the AONB services. We look forward to working closely with landowners. Business Plans will be prepared to guide investment and implementation and linked with the Joint Local Transport Plan Delivery Plan.

Conclusions

We believe the ROWIP is a major step towards developing a network of safe, accessible and attractive routes that meet present and future needs.

1 INTRODUCTION

Our Area

- 1.1. This Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) covers the council areas of Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire, totalling almost 100,000 ha. The population is almost 868,000 with 527,000 of these living in Bristol and the adjoining urban area within South Gloucestershire. Other significant settlements are Bath (pop. 84,000) and the five towns of Chipping Sodbury, Yate, Keynsham, Norton-Radstock and Thornbury (combined pop. 78,000). About 100,000 people live in our rural areas in a variety of large and small villages, hamlets and in isolated properties in the open countryside.
- 1.2. Drained levels adjacent to the Severn estuary rise towards the limestone Cotswolds escarpment bordering the east of the area and the Mendip Hills plateau to the south. Between is a rolling landscape of ridges and river valleys. The rural areas are characterised by a range of villages and hamlets, mixed farming and mostly small woodlands. An extensive part is within the Mendip Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the remainder is in the area of the Forest of Avon Community Forest: see Figure 1.

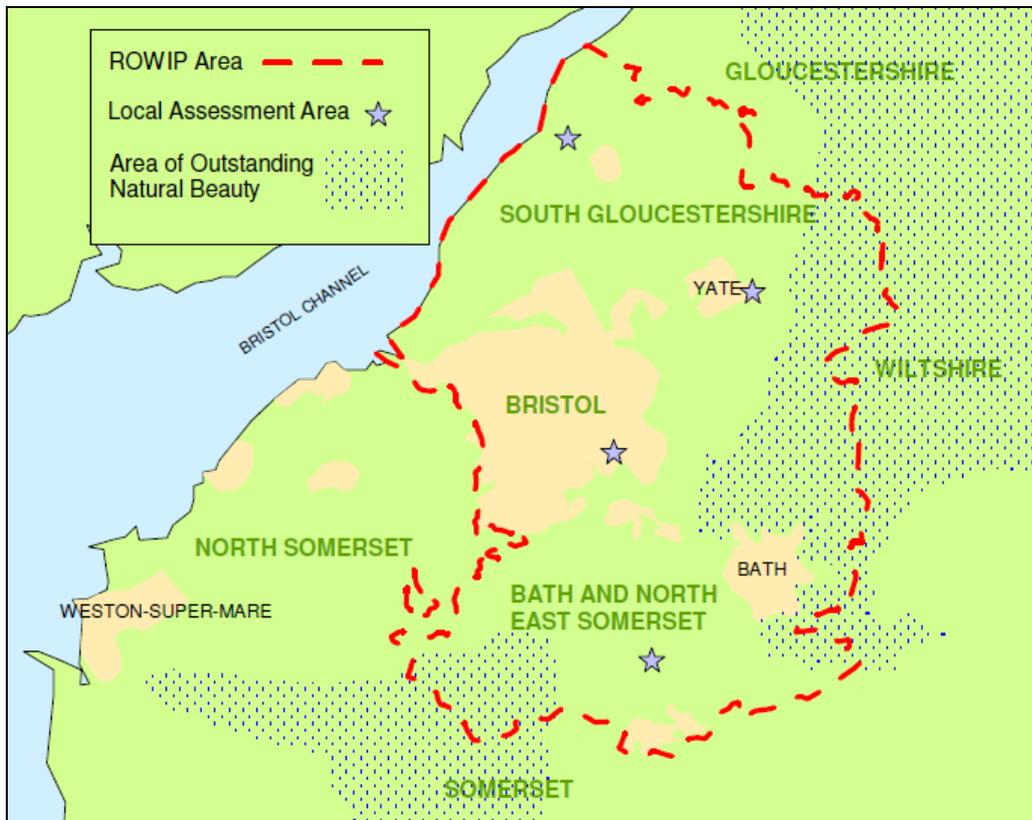


Figure 1: The ROWIP area

- 1.3. As local highway authorities we are required by section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to prepare a ROWIP. ROWIPs have to make an assessment of:
- The extent to which local rights of way meet the current and likely future needs of the public;
 - The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of their area
 - The accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems
- 1.4. As defined in the CROW Act local rights of way focus on footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways; these form the Public Rights Of Way network (PROW). The Crow Act also includes cycle tracks, routes that have been upgraded from public footpaths using the Cycle Tracks Act 1984. There are very few of these in our area and for the purposes of this ROWIP we include them as part of the PROW network. The PROW network does not include footways, i.e. pavements or other paths that form part of a road mainly used by vehicles. We look at the legal definitions further in Chapter 4.
- 1.5. This ROWIP builds upon our duties as highway authorities: see Box 1A.

BOX 1A Highway Authority Duties

As highway authorities we have a duty

- to keep and maintain the legal record of public rights of way;
- to ensure that routes are adequately signposted, maintained, free from obstruction and fit for purpose;
- to assert and protect the rights of the public.

Government guidance suggests that ROWIPs 'should build upon this work and not conflict with these existing duties or reduce the effectiveness with which they are carried out'.

- 1.6. In our assessment we have also looked at other means of 'outdoors access' such as paths in parks and woodland, permissive routes and 'access land' under the CROW 2000 Act. We have looked in detail at four areas (see Figure 1) to give us a greater insight into typical issues; these 'local area assessments' focus on:
- Brislington, within the City of Bristol – a community on the urban fringe;
 - Oldbury-on-Severn – a small village community in the north of our area;
 - Sodbury – a small market town and rural area close to the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
 - Timsbury – a large former mining village between Bath and Norton-Radstock.

Joint Local Access Forum

- 1.7. The Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) is a statutory body established by the three councils in July 2003 to provide advice on the '*improvement of public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area*'. Currently meeting three times a year the JLAF has 21 members comprising one Councillor from each authority and 18 voluntary members representing a variety of interests, including those of land managers and users. The JLAF has played an important part in guiding us in preparing and reviewing this ROWIP.

Our Approach

- 1.8. Working together to prepare a joint ROWIP has several advantages:
- It builds on existing joint working, such as through the JLAF, Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP) and the Avon Frome Partnership;
 - It recognises the strong recreational and transport links between and within urban areas and countryside in the area;
 - It has allowed people across the whole area to have a say in the improvement of access where they live and where they might visit;
 - It recognises that the PROW network, and the public perception of it, is continuous across boundaries;
 - It identifies the potential for increasing partnership working and co-ordination and for pooling expertise for cross boundary projects;
 - It increases the potential of the councils and our partners to gain funding for improvements.
- 1.9. North Somerset Council has a separate ROWIP but we anticipate that the two plans will come together in the future so that there will be a single ROWIP for the West of England.

Policy Context

- 1.10. The ROWIP has been prepared in the context of a range of policies and strategies and we expand on these in Chapter 4: see Figure 2. We have taken into account the national policies of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Department for Transport (DfT), Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and other Government Departments as well as the aims and initiatives of Natural England (NE), the Environment Agency (EA), Forestry Commission (FC), the Canal and River Trust (CRT) and others.
- 1.11. PROWs feature in our sustainable community strategies and these have informed preparation of Council corporate strategies. The councils' JLTP 2011-2026 recognises the crucial role of the PROW network in facilitating sustainable transport in both urban and rural areas and contributing to a range of other objectives.

1.12. Our Local Plans (LP) set the local land use framework. Influential on the PROW network are the management plans of the Mendip Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as well as the Avon Biodiversity Partnership's Action Plan. In and around Bath we have taken into account the World Heritage Management Plan. Across the area 'green space/green infrastructure strategies' have a bearing on the ROWIP and we have worked with Parks and Leisure staff to build a corporate approach to both PROWs and open spaces. Outside Bristol, Parish Plans are locally important and provide further 'building blocks' for the ROWIP. Last but by no means least are the policies and plans of bodies like the National Trust, Woodland Trust, and those of major estate landowners as well as individual farmers.

Figure 2: Policy Context



Our Vision

1.13. The ROWIP vision is to increase the use of PROWs by developing a network of safe and attractive routes which:

- improves opportunities for sustainable access to essential services and facilities; and
- meets the present and future recreational needs of all members of the community, including those with visual impairment or mobility problems.

Structure of the Report

1.14. We have prepared this report in the light of the statutory guidance published by DEFRA in November 2002. The structure is as follows:

- Chapter 2 assesses the needs of different groups of users – what do they look for from the PROW and wider access network?
- Chapter 3 assesses the extent of the current PROW and wider access network – how does it measure up to what users need?
- Chapter 4 takes into account other sources of information on PROWs – what do other plans and documents say?
- Chapter 5 summarises the comments of the public – what do people think about the PROW and wider access network?
- Chapter 6 draws together the results of Chapters 2 to 5 – what are the priorities for action?
- Chapter 7 puts forward our Statement of Action.
- Chapter 8 sets out our conclusions – next steps: taking action, monitoring and future review of the ROWIP.

1.15. Figure 3 shows how our assessment leads to our Statement of Action, followed by implementation through Annual Business Plans.

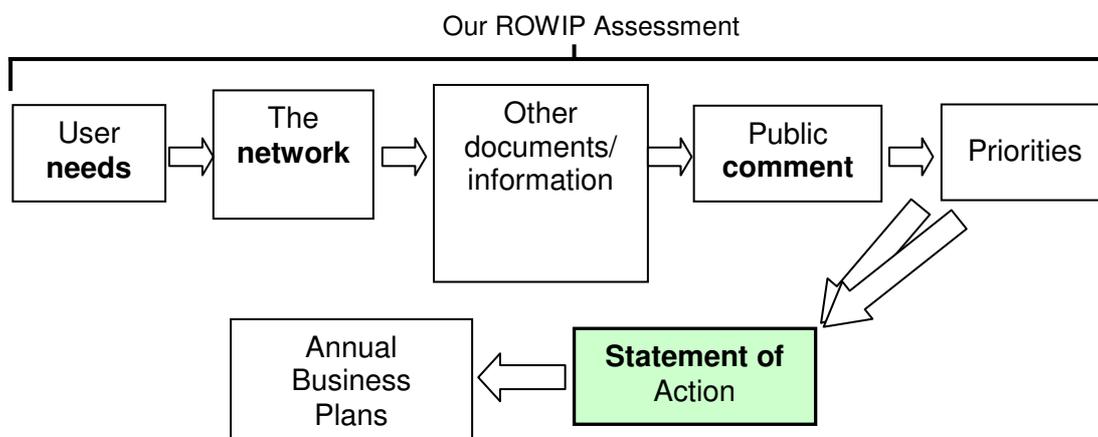


Figure 3: Assessment Leading to Action

Changes since 2007

- 1.16. Since we prepared the 2007 ROWIP the JLTP 2011- 2026 has been adopted and we have taken this into account in this update. The updated ROWIP also takes on board the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the comments made by Natural England in their August 2008 'ROWIP Evaluation Regional Report for the South West Region' (see separate Changes Since 2007 section).

Future Review of the ROWIP

- 1.17. The CROW Act requires ROWIPs to be reviewed after at least 10 years. We intend to undertake a full review in 2015 as an integral part of our work on rolling forward the Joint Local Transport Plan Delivery Plan.

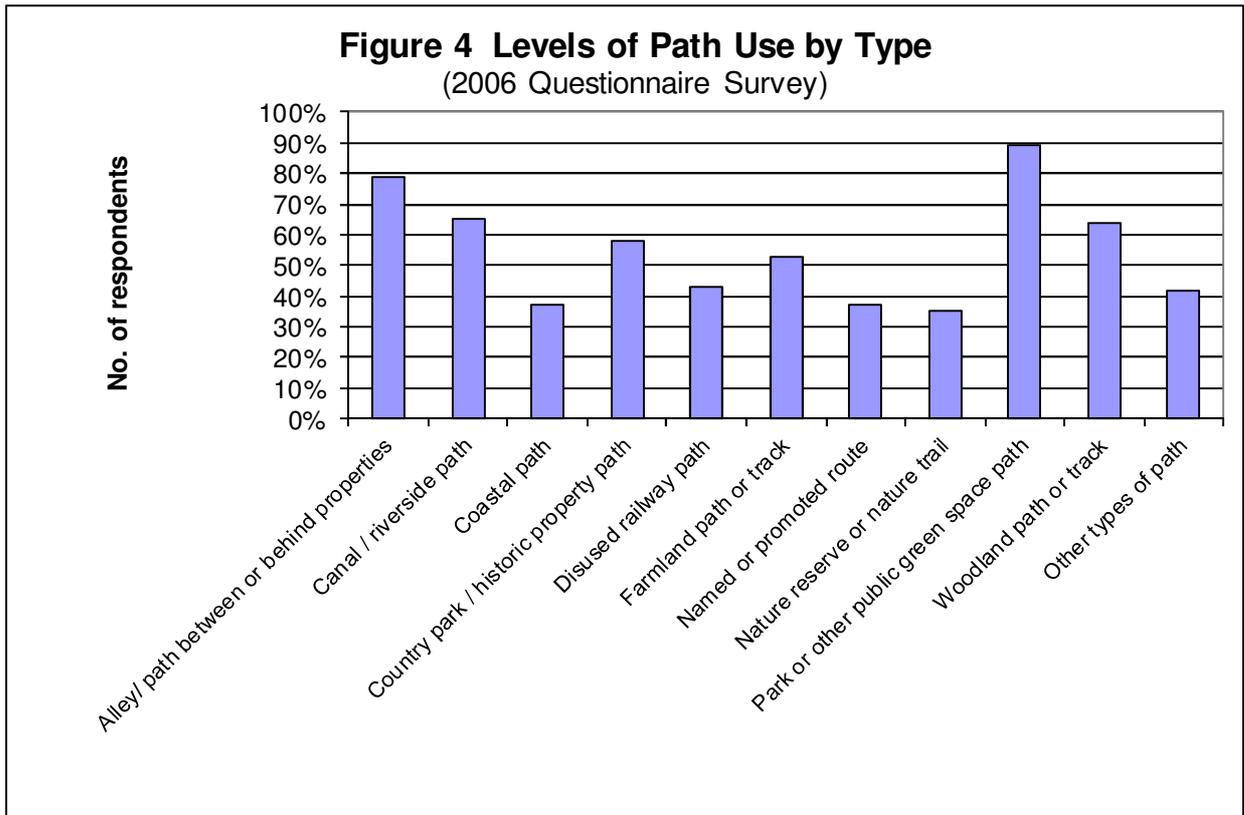
2. USER NEEDS

Introduction

- 2.1. DEFRA advise that authorities should consider the '*needs and circumstances of people with a range of expectations, interests and levels of ability*'. In assessing need we have benefited not only from the views of the JLAF but also from the comments of the public and users during public consultation– see Chapter 5. In response to the ROWIP consultation questionnaire in 2006, 70% of people thought that user needs had been adequately assessed. Others considered that some needs had been overlooked and these were addressed in the 2007 ROWIP. We have also taken on board the input of the public and stakeholders into the JLTP 2011-2026 and the many policy documents that we have scrutinised in preparing this ROWIP – see Chapter 4. We have also taken into account best practice elsewhere, recognising that there is a wide variety of need, ranging from casual use, people getting fresh air and exercise and getting to work or school, to organised walking, cycling or horse riding trips. A further assessment of user needs is not necessary at this stage.
- 2.2. With AONBs, the World Heritage City of Bath, the Cotswold Way National Trail and a range of other attractions including the Cycle Network we are conscious that we need to take into account not only the needs of our urban and rural residents but those of visitors and tourists. In this section we outline the needs of different users. In Chapter 6 we assess how far their needs are met by the PROW and wider access network based on our local area assessments and questionnaire survey. This leads to the priorities for action we propose in Chapter 7.

Current Patterns of Use

- 2.3. Our 2006 questionnaire survey has given us an insight into usage of PROW and wider access network. This has been supplemented by counts we carried out at 31 representative locations between December 2006 and May 2007, and subsequent counts, to give us an up-to-date picture of usage.
- 2.4. The 2006 survey asked people what types of path they had used in the past year. Most frequent use (Figure 4) was of paths through a park or open space (89% of respondents) followed by 'alleys' or paths between or behind properties (79%). Roughly half had used paths along canals and riversides, through woodland or at country parks/ historic properties. Farmland paths had been used by about 50% of residents in Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire but rather less by people living in Bristol. About 43% had used a former railway path. Named or promoted routes, coastal paths and nature trails had been used the least.

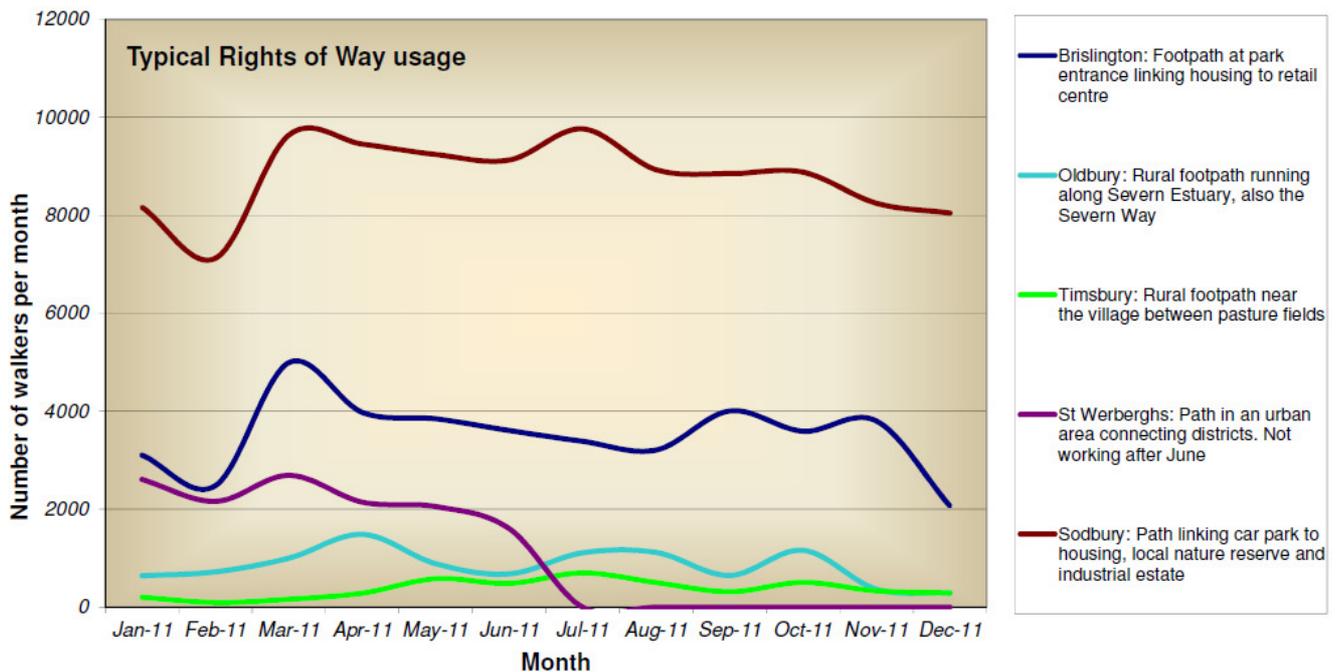


2.5. When asked how they used paths and how frequently, the survey showed that walking, jogging and cycling were the most popular. 55% of people went walking on paths at least once a week, 13% jogged and 10% cycled.

2.6. In answer to questions about why people used rights of way, three out of four respondents said that it was to enjoy the environment. The other main reasons were for the health benefits (59%) or for convenience and gaining access to places and services (52 and 49%). Reasons for not using rights of way focused on concerns about personal safety (42%); lack of maintenance (35%); and poor state of cleanliness (33%). About a quarter said '*I tend to drive to most places*' and a similar proportion said '*I don't know where many paths are*'.

2.7. To find out more about how well used the PROW network is we have been using new counting methods across a range of sites. Pressure slabs, gate switches, sensor posts, body heat sensors and magnetometers have all been used to detect walkers, cyclists, horses and their riders. The results are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Typical Rights of Way Usage



2.8. Unsurprisingly usage picks up in the spring and there is a wide variation in use from urban fringe paths in Sodbury to quiet rural paths at Oldbury-upon-Severn. Monitoring is currently proposed to continue throughout the life of the ROWIP.

Walkers

2.9. The JLTP 2011-2026 highlights the importance of walking as part of an integrated transport system - particularly for short trips and at the beginning and end of longer journeys - and as a healthy, low carbon mode of travel. The significance of walking for recreation, health and other social reasons is also recognised in the range of plans and strategies we touch on in Chapter 1 and the documents we have studied in Chapter 4. National surveys suggest that about half of households have at least one member who regularly walks in the countryside, and that walking as a leisure activity makes a significant contribution to the rural economy. There are different motivations for walking but it is useful to distinguish two broad groups; people undertaking what might be called 'everyday' trips, for example to shops, school or work, and those enjoying recreational trips.

Everyday trips

2.10. For everyday walkers our consultation and experience from elsewhere suggests that their needs focus on:

- Effective links with local facilities such as shops and key destinations, including shorter routes to schools;
- Well drained and level surfaces with regularly cut vegetation;
- Paths clear of litter and dog mess;
- Safe routes that avoid road hazards and provide personal security;
- Lack of obstructions;
- Ability to use pushchairs and mobility scooters;
- Clear and visible signs.

Recreational trips

2.11. Recreational walkers range from those wanting a stroll or short walk (e.g. families with young children) to those looking for a day walk or long distance opportunities. We have identified the following principal needs:

- Natural surface and environment;
- Variety of scenic, circular and linear routes;
- Drainage that avoids excessive mud;
- Adequate signage and waymarks;
- Safe routes that avoid road hazards;
- Lack of obstructions, including vegetation, ploughing;
- Information about routes;
- Routes close to home for short walks;
- Availability of public transport or car parking;
- Accessible routes.

2.12. The 2006 questionnaire survey found that 21% of respondents used paths for dog walking. People who walk their dogs have particular needs for:

- Dog latches on stiles or provision of kissing gates;
- Provision of dog bins and regular emptying;
- Opportunities for their dogs to run off the lead, subject to legal restrictions.

2.13. Joggers need:

- Maintained paths clear of litter and dog mess;
- Safe road crossings;
- Variety of surfaces;
- Continuity of routes;
- Personal security;
- Access year round.

2.14. If the improvements for walkers and joggers were made our surveys suggest that use of paths and particularly parks, public green spaces, coastal, riverside and woodland paths would increase.

Cyclists

2.15. Cyclists vary in their needs, ranging from people who use their bicycle to travel to work, school or meetings to those wanting to cycle purely for pleasure or exercise. National surveys suggest that about a quarter of households have at least one member who regularly cycles in the countryside. Locally the development of the National Cycle Network and other paths and routes, many as part of the Greater Bristol Cycling City project, has stimulated demand. As with walkers we have distinguished between 'everyday' trips and 'recreational' trips but we recognise that there is interplay between them. There are also differences in the needs of mountain bikers looking for challenging rides to family groups wanting a more relaxed, safe experience. In relation to the off-road rights of way network we assess cyclists' principal needs as:

Everyday trips

- Effective links with local facilities and key destinations;
- Well drained surfaces free of potholes and with regularly cut vegetation;
- Paths clean and well maintained;
- Safe routes that avoid road hazards and provide personal security;
- Lack of obstructions.

Recreational trips

- Variety of scenic, circular and linear routes of differing length;
- Well drained surfaces free of potholes (but challenging routes for mountain bikers);
- Routes wide enough to share with other users;
- Well designed signage and waymarks;
- Safe routes with adequate crossing points where they meet the road network and convenient links where necessary on-road or along road verges;
- Lack of obstructions, including vegetation;
- Ability to use child cycles/ trailers.
- Information about routes;
- Availability of car parking;
- Appropriate surfacing.

2.16. If investment is made across the areas listed above, the 2006 surveys suggest regular cyclists would make more use of cycle paths, disused railways, canal and riverside paths and promoted routes.

Equestrians

2.17. There are at least 30 commercial horse riding stables in our area - with concentrations on the urban fringe of Bristol and at Winterbourne/Frampton Cotterell - as well as a variety of individual stables. The British Horse Society estimates that there are over 8,500 horses in South Gloucestershire and approximately 4.2 million riders and carriage drivers in the UK, about 6% of the population. From our work with equestrian users we assess their major needs as being:

- Variety of scenic, off-road and connected routes of adequate length;
- Creation of new routes and missing links;
- Level surfaces, free of potholes;
- Routes wide enough to share with walkers and cyclists;
- Adequate signage including 'caution horses' signs and waymarks;
- Safe routes with adequate crossing points where they meet the road network and convenient links where necessary on-road or along road verges;
- Lack of obstructions, including vegetation;
- Gates that can be opened easily from horseback;
- Information about routes and their promotion;
- Parking for horseboxes where safe and connected routes are not available.

2.18. DEFRA also draws attention to the needs of carriage drivers. In addition to the general needs of riders, carriage drivers look for adequate parking for manoeuvring carriages and horses, areas for harnessing up and putting to, and routes with sufficiently wide gates.

Motorised Users

2.19. Very little of our PROW network is classified as Byways Open to All Traffic and therefore legally open for use by motorised two-wheeled and four-wheeled vehicles. The demand for what the DEFRA guidance calls 'recreational motoring' is largely met by off-road facilities on private land. However, there are a number of established motor trials and events in our area using the PROW network. Such events may be authorised by the relevant council under section 33 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 and appropriate stewarding is essential. The motorised user group suggests that needs focus on:

- Increase in opportunities, including potential use of disused quarries;
- Unsurfaced routes to create most interest;
- Routes of reasonable length without dead ends;
- Routes deeper in countryside preferred to urban fringe;
- Information and signage on user entitlement for all users, details of suitable routes;
- Routes clear of obstructions, including overhanging vegetation and burnt out cars.

People with Mobility Problems

2.20. About 8% of our residents have some form of physical or learning disability. Mobility can be restricted not only by disability but also by having to push a child's buggy, stiffened joints or short term health conditions. Less than 5% of disabled people are in wheelchairs. Therefore, the accessibility of the PROW network can be improved through various means, not just by making paths wheelchair accessible. The PROW network needs to be managed and promoted to provide reasonable access to all users, taking account of the Equality Act 2010. One inaccessible section can prevent use of the whole route. A disabled user group has helped us to understand in more detail what issues are important. We have split these into everyday and recreational trips to highlight where needs are different. They include:

Everyday trips

- Maintenance of the network;
- Surfaces firm, level and non-slip;
- Paths clear of dog mess
- Space for manoeuvring wheelchairs/ mobility scooters/ buggies and passing;
- Handrails at appropriate height;
- Even steps;
- Minimising number of structures;
- Easy to use catches and gates;
- Design of signs: distinctive pictorial signs needed;
- Accessible seats/perching places;
- Spaces and facilities for horse riders to mount and dismount;
- Needs of blind and partially sighted; clear edges to paths, clear marking of steps and structures, warning of hazards, paths clear of obstructions at head height.

Recreational trips

Needs as above plus the following:

- Views unimpeded for wheelchair users;
- Equal spread of accessible walks throughout the West of England area;
- Better publicity of accessible walks, graded for ease of use with information on gradients, access barriers and facilities;
- Better information for the deaf, blind and partially sighted using a variety of media, in plain English and with careful use of colour;
- Paths and publicity must account for different mobility vehicles where more rugged paths can be accessed by all terrain 'Tramper' type mobility vehicles;
- Improved public transport links to walks;
- Special 'blue badge type' car parking needs.

2.21. The council's management of their PROW networks is guided by DEFRA's 'By All Reasonable Means', 'Authorising structures (gaps, gates & stiles) on rights of way' and 'Outdoors For All?'

Low Participation Groups

- 2.22. Data from the Day Visit Survey published in the State of the Countryside Report 2005 (Natural England) showed that disabled people, ethnic minorities, inner city residents and young people visit the countryside and participate in country activities less than others. DEFRA's 2008 Diversity Action Plan¹ aims to increase awareness of opportunities and the number, diversity and frequency of people in under-represented groups enjoying the natural environment.
- 2.23. Disabled needs and issues are picked up in paragraph 2.20. Bristol's population is made up of 12% non-White British residents (2001 Census). Because ethnic minorities are less likely to respond to questionnaire surveys we over sampled this group in the 2006 survey to increase their share of the sample to 16%. Despite this, only 8% of people who filled in the questionnaire were from the non-white British group. This low response shows that we must do more work to encourage ethnic minorities to get more involved. We also recognise that relatively few young people have responded directly to our ROWIP consultations and efforts should be made to get them to participate more in countryside access.

Minimising User Conflicts

- 2.24. The advice from DEFRA² is that proposals for improving rights of way should not unduly benefit one class of user at the expense of another. Shared use of bridleways is a particular case in point where conflicts may be perceived between walkers, cyclists and horse riders. On byways the interests of these users may in turn conflict with motorised users and horse drawn vehicles. There can be conflict caused by dogs accompanying walkers or between users and farm animals. Such conflict might involve real or perceived dangers. We see the importance of learning from best practice in management of these potential conflicts and working closely with our AONB and other partners.

Other Interests

- 2.25. Rights of way improvements are aimed at benefiting the public but we must not lose sight of the fact that landowners have a special interest. Public rights of way usually go across private land and can cause problems for farmers, golf course owners and others. The Countryside Code provides valuable advice for land managers as well as users on rights, responsibilities and liabilities. This makes it easier for visitors to act responsibly and for landowners to identify threats to visitor safety.

¹ 'Outdoors for All? An Action Plan to increase the number of people from under-represented groups who access the natural environment', DEFRA 2008

² 'Rights of Way Improvement Plans: Statutory Guidance to Local Highway Authorities in England', DEFRA November 2002

- 2.26. Positive working with farmers and land managers is essential. In our area these interests range from individual farmers to large estates including the Duchy of Cornwall and the National Trust. The AONB management plans highlight this co-operative working. The FC, Woodland Trust and private woodland owners are other interested parties.
- 2.27. Apart from private land, people also look to local authority parks and open spaces to provide recreational access as well as land held by other public bodies. We need to make sure that relevant estate managers are fully involved with implementation of the ROWIP.
- 2.28. Whilst concentrating on rights of way we also have to be mindful of heritage and nature conservation interests. These are spelled out in the policy documents we list in Chapter 4. They also include features of local interest such as stone stiles and distinctive types of gate and surface treatment. The presence of ancient monuments and other archaeological features and diversity of wildlife and habitats add to the attraction of our rights of way. We have to ensure that use of the network does not conflict unduly with wider objectives both in areas with formal designations and across the PROW network. Improvements should consider the value of features that are distinctive to a locality or period of time.

3. RIGHTS OF WAY IN OUR AREA

3.1. As highway authorities, we are responsible for the ‘definitive map and statement’, the legal record of public rights of way. In line with the DEFRA guidance we have used the maps and statements, together with other information, to make an assessment of:

- the extent to which routes and networks are available to meet the user needs identified in Chapter 2;
- areas which are deficient in PROWs for some or all user groups;
- inconsistencies or anomalies in individual PROWs;
- other opportunities to improve the network.

Definitive Maps and Statements

3.2. The definitive maps and statements record various classes of routes depending on the type of use available to the public:

- Public Footpaths** – can be used by pedestrians;
- Public Bridleways** – can be used by pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists (though cyclists must give way to other users);
- Restricted Byways** – for pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians and non-motorised vehicles (e.g. horse drawn vehicles);
- Byways Open to All Traffic (“BOATS”)** – can be used by all traffic, but are predominantly used by pedestrians and equestrians.

3.3. There are 2,282km (1,418 miles) of public rights of way recorded on the definitive maps and statements, split as shown in Table 1. Almost 90% of the network consists of public footpaths. In all we have an average of almost 23m of rights of way per hectare.

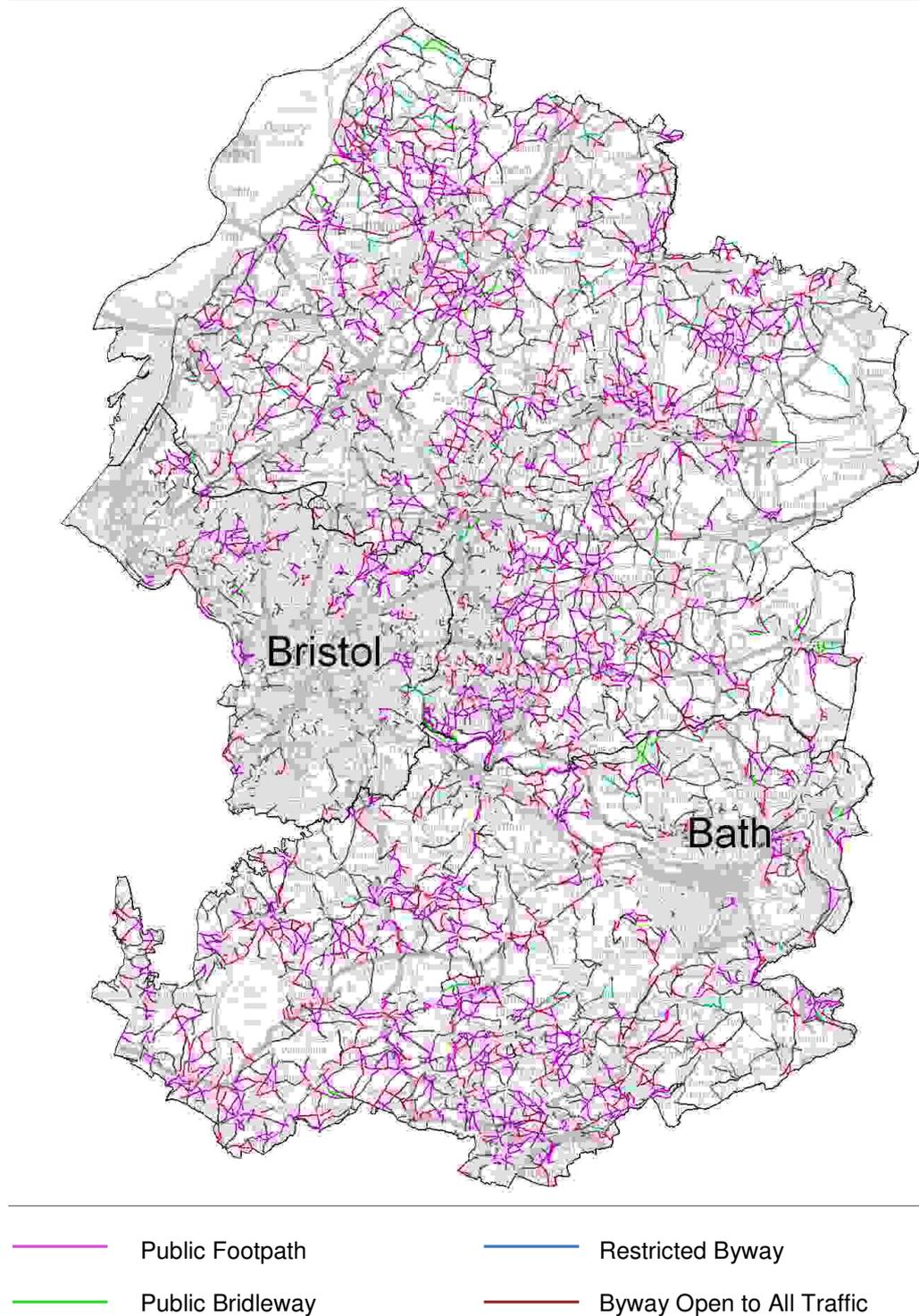
Table 1 Extent of Public Rights of Way (Km)

	Entitled Users	Bath & North East Somerset	Bristol City	South Gloucestershire	ROWIP area
Public footpaths (km)		759	161	1113	2033
Public bridleways (km)		44	6	123	173
Restricted byways (km)		1	1	25	27
BOATs (km)	All	48	0	<1	49
TOTAL		852	168	1262	2282
Estimated population (2011)		176,000	428,000	264,000	868,000
Area (ha.)		35,000	11,200	53,500	99,750
Average density of rights of way (m/ ha)		24.5	15	23.5	22.9

Extent of the Public Rights of Way Network

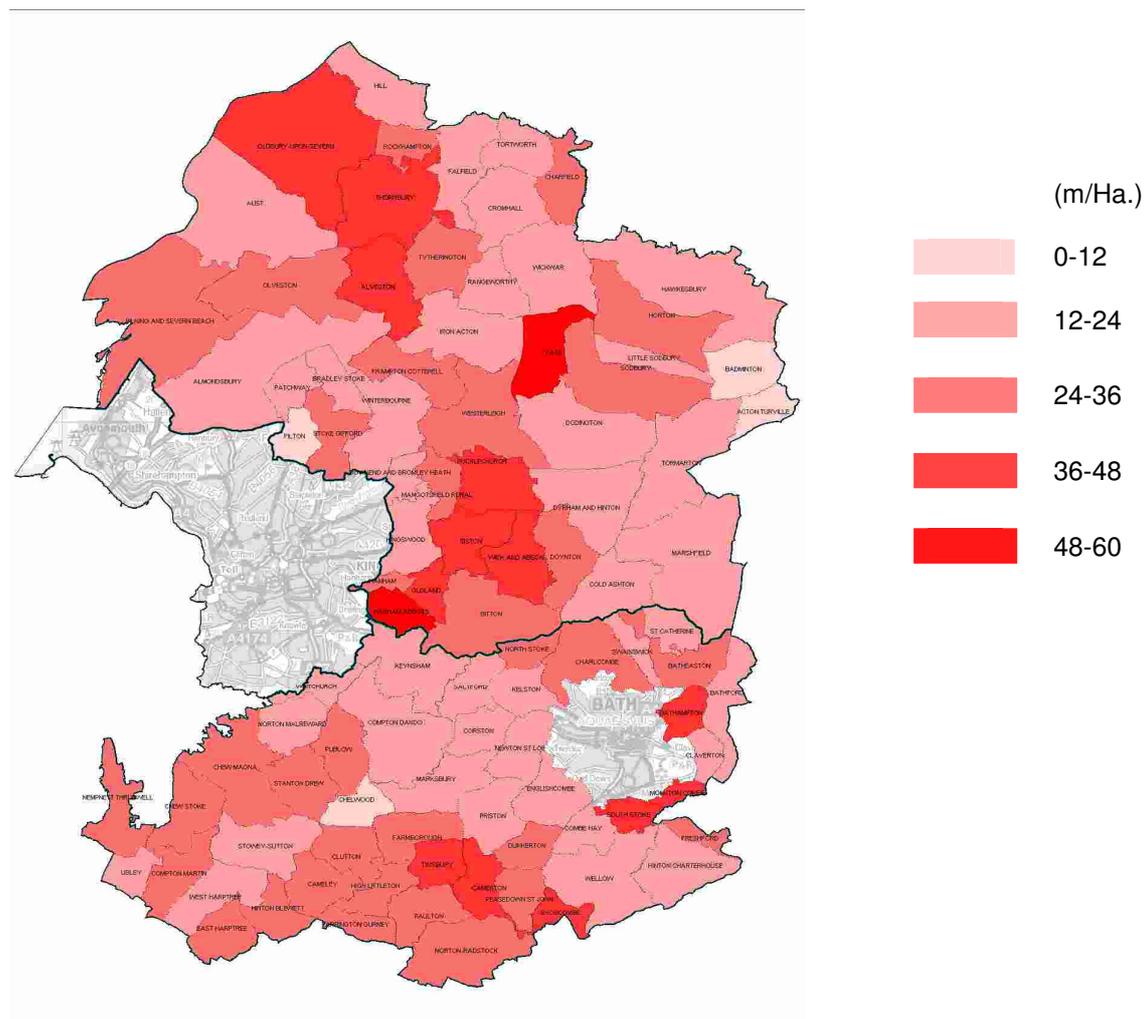
3.4. PROWs recorded on the definitive map are not evenly distributed and there are areas where there is limited density and a lack of convenient links. The PROW network is shown in Figure 6. Bristol, like other large urban areas, has a relatively small network recorded on the definitive map and statement but this is supplemented by a diversity of other paths and routes.

Figure 6: Public Rights of Way Network



- 3.5. The distribution of rights of way in both urban and rural areas is a factor of landscape, past use and development. For example, on the levels around Oldbury-on-Severn, the network of footpaths, bridleways and byways follows a similar pattern of historic settlement links as the carriageway network. It joins villages and farms and is largely linear, following the pattern of drainage rhynes. In the south of the ROWIP area, typified by Timsbury, there is a network of footpaths linking settlements, which is likely to be the result of movement between local mining settlements within a pattern of small fields in an undulating landscape. Historically, in many areas routes have been upgraded to roads and increased use of these routes by motorised vehicles has created an increasingly fragmented network of vehicle free or quiet routes.
- 3.6. Figure 7 indicates the density of the network in the parishes outside Bristol and Bath. There is a relatively high density in and around the towns of Midsomer Norton, Radstock, Thornbury and Yate but it is lower in other areas. The density in parishes fringing the urban areas of Bristol and Bath is, with some exceptions, quite low. The network is also relatively sparse in many parishes within the Cotswolds AONB.

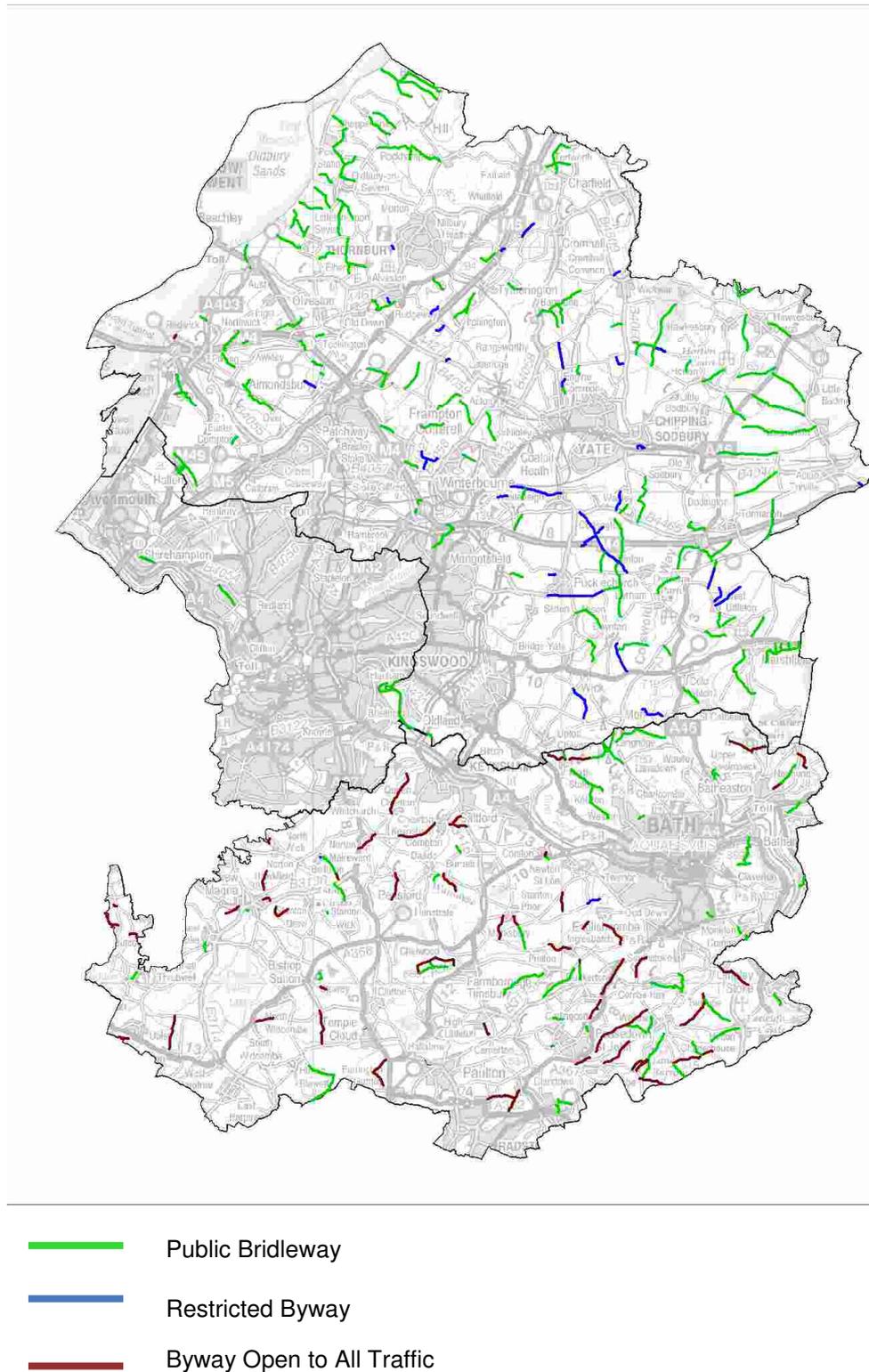
Figure 7: Public Rights of Way Density



Bridleways and Byways

3.7. Bridleway provision across the area is lower than the national average and is fragmented (Figure 8). The majority of public bridledways and restricted byways are in South Gloucestershire. Bath & North East Somerset has a relatively limited bridledway network but 50km of BOATs.

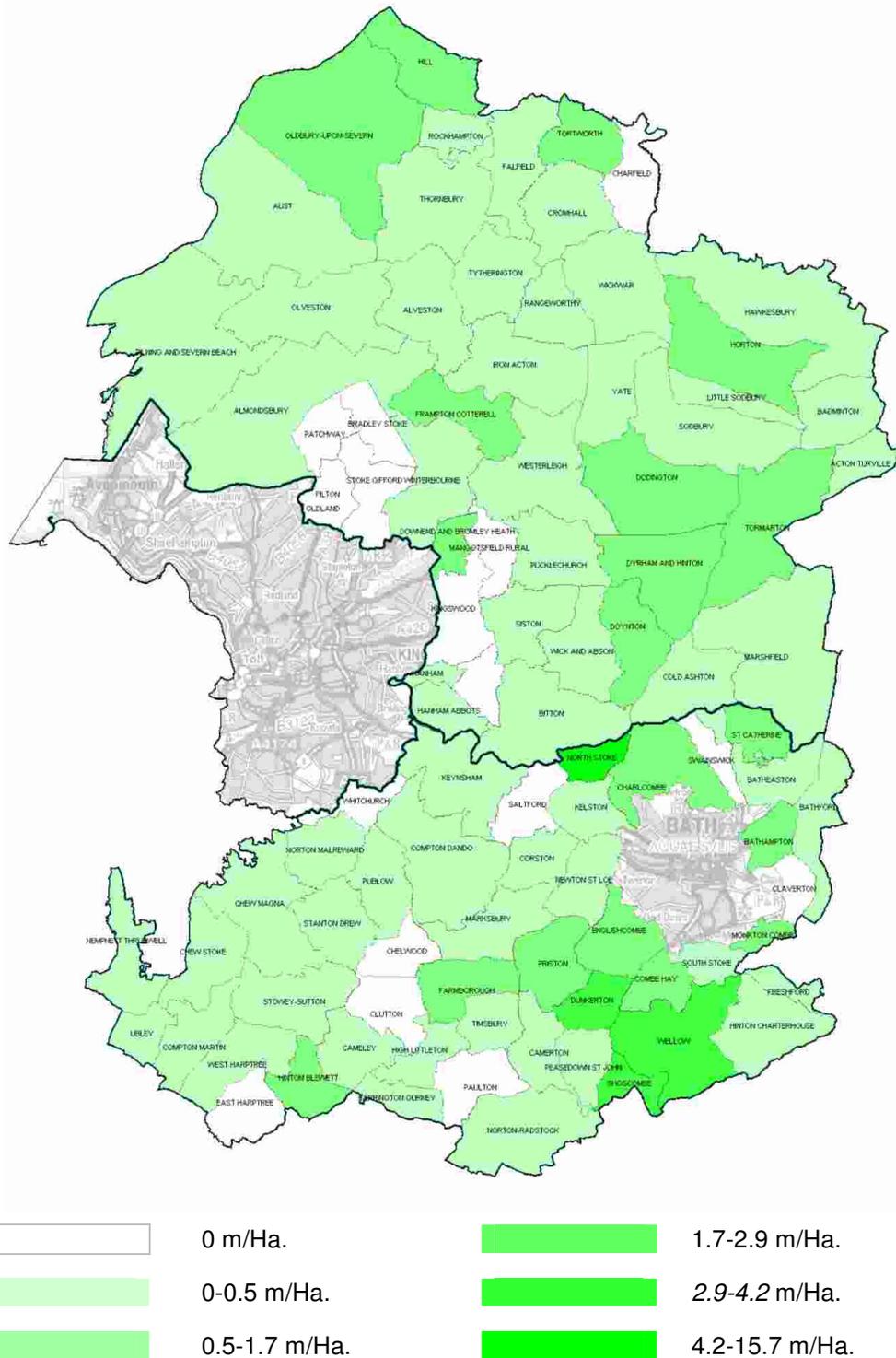
Figure 8: Bridleway and Byway Network



3.8. Figure 9 shows the density of the bridledway and byway network outside Bristol and Bath. Most striking is the relatively high density to the south

west and north west of Bath; between Bath and Chipping Sodbury; and between Thornbury and the River Severn. By contrast the network is much less developed in the eastern and northern fringes of Bristol and in some of the parishes between Bristol and Norton-Radstock.

Figure 9: Bridleway and Byway Density

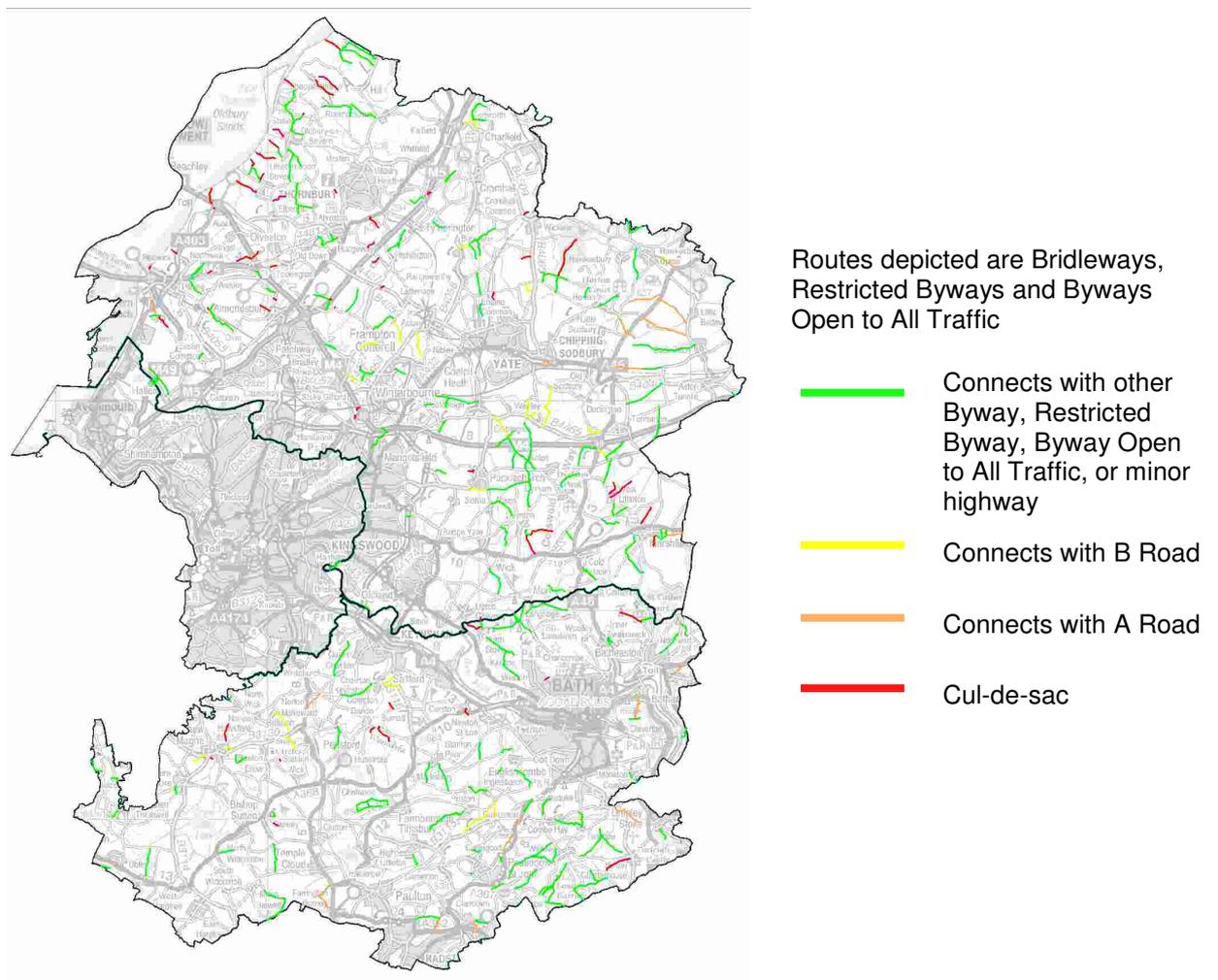


3.9. Apart from relative densities we recognise that many bridleways and byways are fragmented and do not provide safe and convenient connections. An equestrian user group emphasised that the lack of

connections can deter use. They also pointed out that lack of parking for horse boxes can also be an issue as well as more local problems such as poor gates. Figure 10 shows the 'connectivity' of the network. Whilst many routes link with other bridleways or byways or with minor roads, others connect only with an 'A' or 'B' road. Some are cul-de-sacs, offering very limited opportunities for horse riders.

3.10. For carriage drivers the choice of rights of way focuses on a small number of restricted byways and BOATs with varying 'connectivity'. Having to rely on BOATs only, motorised users have a more limited range of opportunities although most of these routes are connected to minor or 'B' roads.

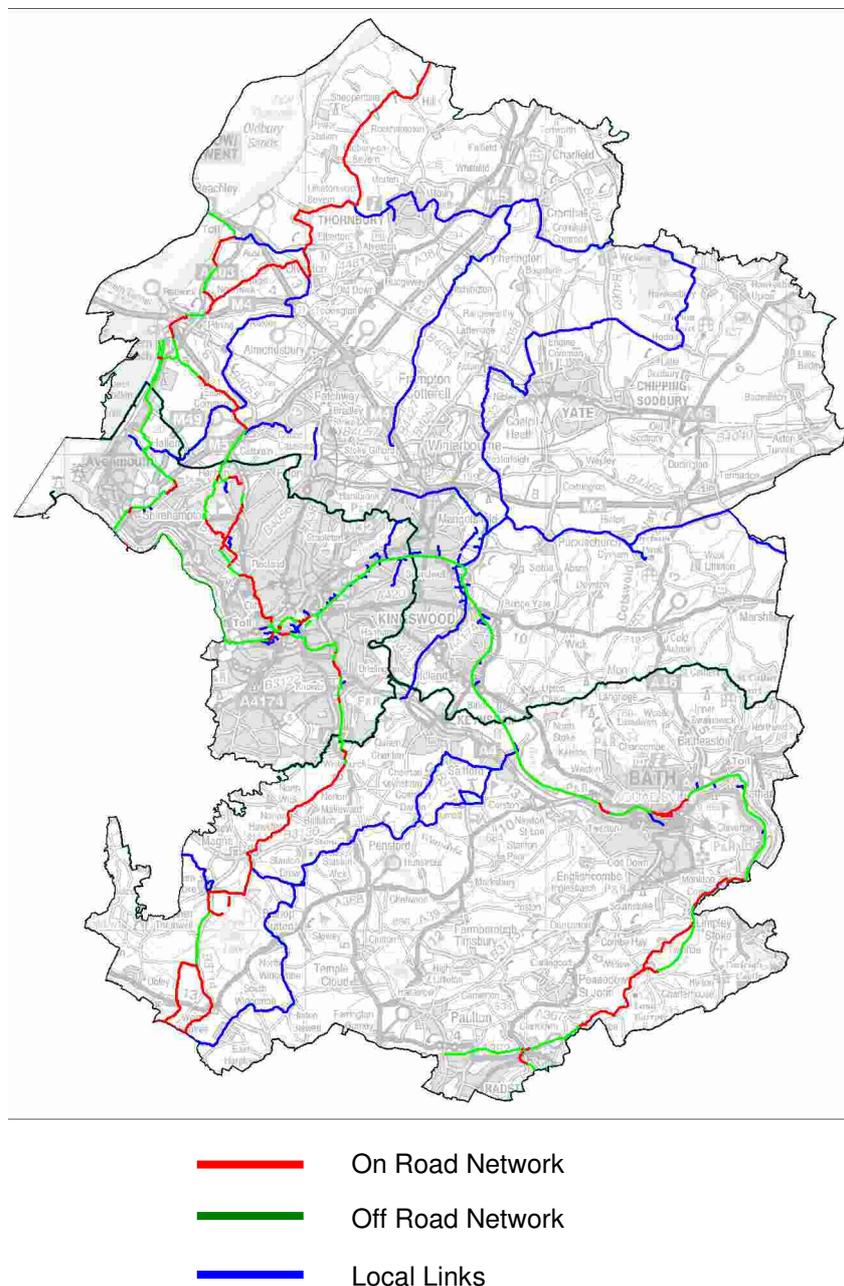
Figure 10: Bridleway and Byway Connectivity



The Wider Access Network

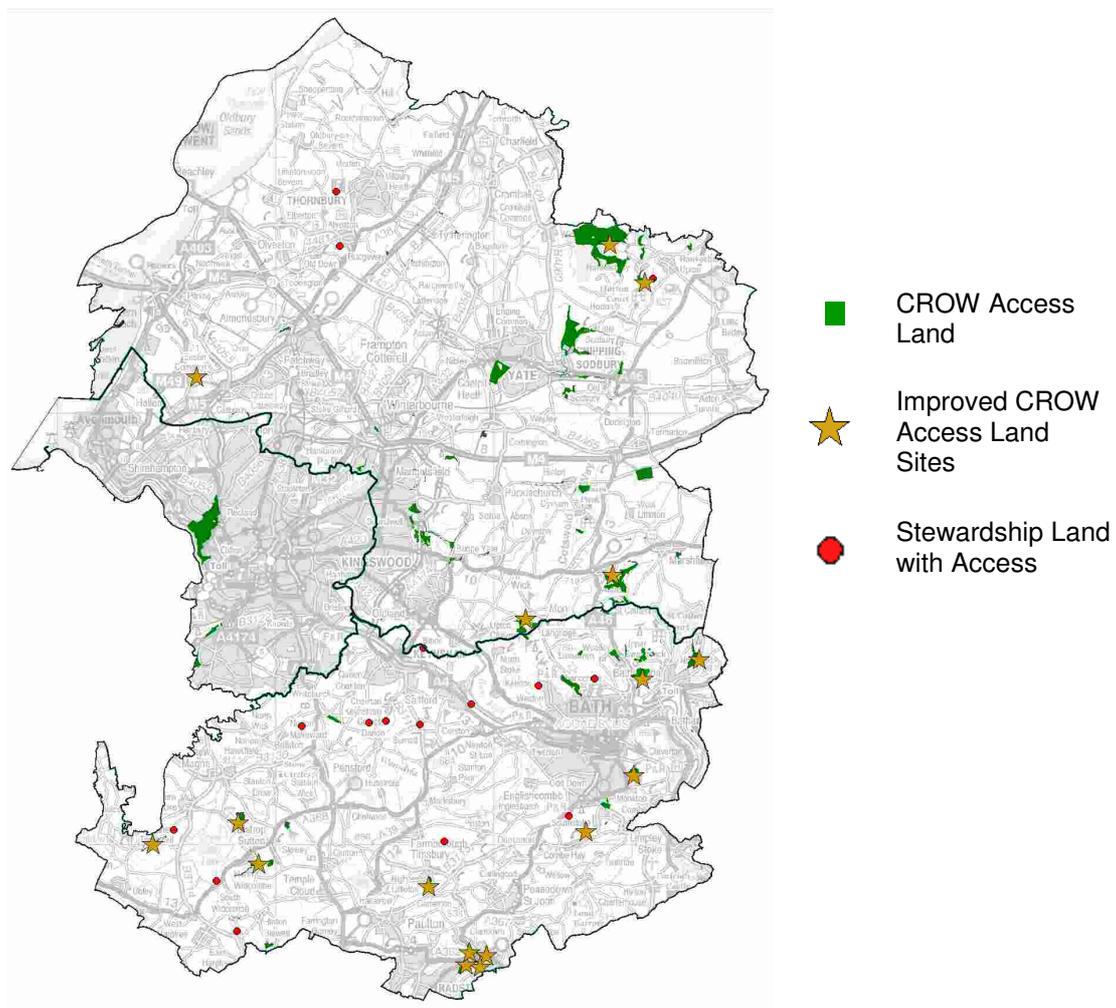
3.11. As well as the PROW network, people look to a range of other means of getting access to local facilities and the wider countryside. A prime example is the Bristol & Bath Railway Path, a 13 mile, very well used off-road route for walkers and cyclists along the former railway between the two cities. Former railways have also been successfully transformed into recreational routes on the edge of Bristol at Whitchurch and in the south of our area with the development of the Norton-Radstock Greenway and the Colliers Way. All these routes are key parts of the National Cycle Network (Figure 11). The disabled user group told us that these routes have had the additional benefit of opening up new access opportunities for people with mobility problems.

Figure 11: National Cycle Network



- 3.12. There are over 100 parcels of land defined under the CROW Act as ‘access land’, either open country or commons, which the public can lawfully use (Figure 12). Prominent is the concentration of extensive commons around Yate/Chipping Sodbury and on the edge of Kingswood. The Clifton and Durdham Downs within Bristol provides access opportunities for urban residents and similar open spaces give access to the countryside for people in the Bath area. South of Bristol there is a scattering of smaller commons.
- 3.13. Other land accessible to the public includes a variety of town and village greens, parks and recreation grounds. Some agri-environment schemes under the DEFRA Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) give permissive access to the countryside although these schemes are time limited. Permissive paths have also been provided by estate owners such as the National Trust, Bristol Water and the Avon Wildlife Trust.
- 3.14. Another important part of the wider access network is the range of pedestrian paths in built up areas that provide links for example within housing estates. We recognise too that vital links to and between PROWs are often provided by highway footways and verges.

Figure 12: Access Land and ESS land with Improved Access

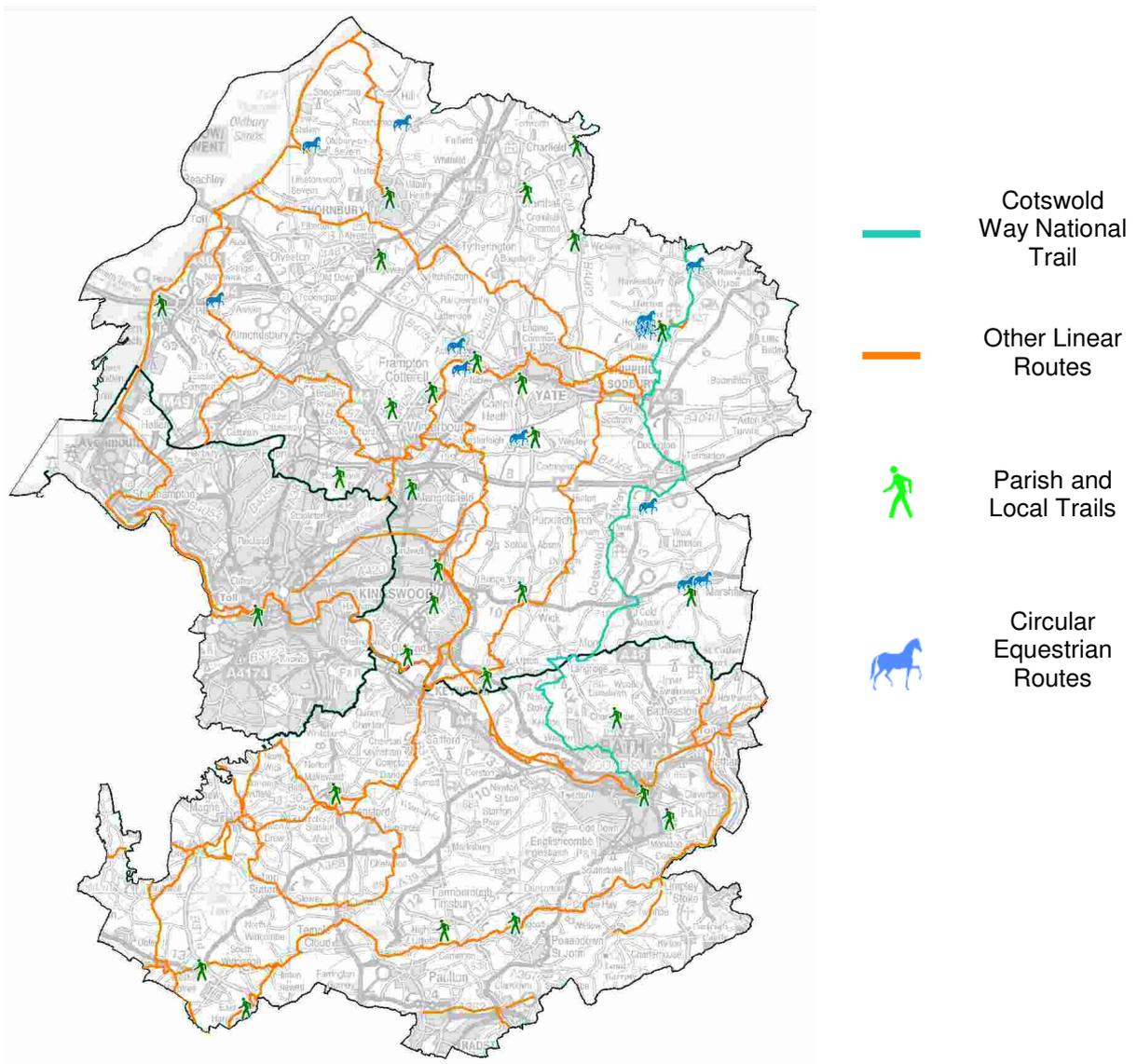


Promotion

3.15. All three councils actively promote their PROW networks. A wide range of colourful, informative and easy to use leaflets and booklets are produced. Some examples are given below and in Figure 13.

- West of England cycle maps
- Bristol to Bath Railway Path
- Cotswold Way National Trail
- Sea Mills Circular Walk;
- Malago Greenway;
- The Colliers Way;
- River Avon Trail;
- Easy Access Booklets and Trails;
- Exploring the Countryside Walks
- Frome Valley Walkway
- Gordano Round Walks;
- Monarch's Way;
- The Severn Way;
- Triangular City Walk
- Three Peaks Circular Walk;
- Community Forest Path;
- Walking to Health Project;
- Leigh Woods & the Avon Gorge;
- Two Rivers Walk;
- The Dramway;

Figure 13: Promoted Routes



- 3.16. Increasingly the councils' websites and the OutdoorsWest website are playing an important role. Maps and leaflets are available for download and links provided to other organisations such as Sustrans, Bristol Ramblers and Cotswold Way National Trail Team.
- 3.17. Whilst it is not a statutory obligation to promote PROWs, all three councils are committed to doing so and recognise the benefits in encouraging greater use and understanding of the network. Our 2006 questionnaire survey (see Chapter 5) showed that:
- only 38% of people had used a promoted route (or knew that a route they were using was promoted);
 - 23% of people gave '*I don't know where many paths are*' as a reason for not using paths more often, highlighting a possible information gap;
 - the desire for more information increases with age although younger groups are keener on websites.
- 3.18. Emerging from the user needs meetings (see Chapter 2) are ideas for promoting equestrian routes and parking for horse boxes. Motorised users wanted to see promotion of usable routes and signs that show their entitlement to use byways. For disabled users, more information on wheelchair accessibility, gradient, camber and surface of paths, gates and locations of accessible toilets are all important. The need for 'pictorial' signing was also seen as important for many people. More can be done and this is developed in Chapter 7 - Statement of Actions.

Modification and Public Path Orders

- 3.19. There are constant demands to change the PROW network and any changes are made or reflected through legal orders. Table 2 summarises the number of modification orders made between 2007 and 2011. The number of orders is expected to grow in future (see Box 2A). Through an improved strategy for managing the Definitive Map and Legal Order work we will monitor the volume of orders. The city of Bath is not covered by a complete definitive map but Bath & North East Somerset Council has a rolling programme of definitive map modification orders to produce one (see Box 2B).

BOX 2A Modification Orders

All routes recorded on the definitive map and statement are public rights of way in law. However, Definitive maps are not complete. Other public rights of way are in existence that are not recorded and routes can be added to the record through definitive map modification orders. These orders add public rights of way to the definitive map and statement if it is demonstrated that a public right to use the route has developed in the past, or that the landowner has expressly dedicated the route for public use. The legal tests considered in preparing and making these orders and the need to consider objections through independent inquiry make them lengthy procedures.

Table 2: Number of Modification Orders Made 2007 to 2011

	Bath & North East Somerset	Bristol City	South Gloucestershire	ROWIP area
2007	1	1	0	2
2008	2	1	3	6
2009	0	0	3	3
2010	0	1	0	1
2011	2	3	6	11
TOTAL	5	6	12	23

BOX 2B Bath City Definitive Map Modification Order Project

Like many urban areas, the City of Bath was not required to produce a Definitive Map and Statement in the 1950s. This legal position was changed in 1983. Bath and North East Somerset Council recognised the value of having an up-to-date and accurate Definitive Map and Statement to safeguard PROWs and to manage the network more effectively and efficiently. The project to complete a Definitive Map and Statement for Bath commenced in 2003.

By 2011 over 233 paths (about 28 km) had been recorded. Often cited as an example of best practice the project is expected to be completed by 2017. Further information on it can be found at www.bathnes.gov.uk under Public Rights of Way.

- 3.20. The CROW Act states that any public rights of way that existed in 1949, and not recorded on the definitive map and statement by 2026 will then be extinguished and the public rights lost; however, this provision has not yet been enacted. A national programme to research and propose orders for such routes, called ‘Discovering Lost Ways’, was trialled by Natural England in pilot counties but has since been abandoned. A Stakeholder Working Group set up by Natural England has recommended that detailed changes in existing law and procedures are needed.
- 3.21. Apart from modification orders, the trends in public path orders give some indication of pressures on and changes to the public rights of way system (see Box 2C). Table 3 summarise the public path orders that have been made between 2007 and 2011.

Box 2C Public Path Orders

Public rights of way can be created, diverted or extinguished by means of Public Path Orders. There are various grounds for making a Public Path Order, for instance to enable development or in the interests of the landowners or of the public. In a similar manner to definitive map modification orders, these orders consider legal tests and objections and may lead to independent inquiry. Changes in legislation have broadened the grounds for public path orders, which can now be promoted for reasons including crime prevention and security; health and safety on school premises; and nature conservation. The power to make public path orders has previously been at the discretion of councils.

Table 3: Number of Public Path Orders Made 2007 to 2011

	Bath & North East Somerset	Bristol City	South Gloucestershire	ROWIP area
2007	9	2	9	20
2008	9	1	14	24
2009	4	0	2	6
2010	10	4	5	19
2011	2	4	7	13
TOTAL	34	11	37	82

3.22. The CROW Act also allows for orders to close or divert rights of way for crime prevention purposes in designated high crime areas. When the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (CNE) came into force it created another option for controlling public use of alleyways to combat crime and anti-social behaviour, irrespective of whether or not they are in a designated area. The CNE Act also allows a conditional restriction of an alley so that it can be closed only at certain times of the day, or on certain days, such as at night or weekends. Although a 'gating order' restricts public use, the highway status is retained so that it can to be returned to public use at a later date. The need for gating orders will be kept under review, with demand likely to be greatest in urban areas.

Maintenance

3.23. The councils have a duty, as highway authorities, to ensure that routes are adequately maintained, free from obstruction and fit for purpose. Our consultations have shown the importance that individuals and user groups attach to maintenance. In Bath & North East Somerset we survey approximately 5% of the PROW network annually to record its ease of use. In South Gloucestershire we aim to survey at least 10 – 20% a year. In Bristol we survey 25km a year. This information is red into our maintenance programmes and helps us gauge how our maintenance programmes are progressing.

3.24. When appropriate, PROWs are generally cleared, strimmed and/or sprayed up to any boundary or physical constraint. Where there is no boundary, land is treated up to 1m either side of paths. Overhanging vegetation is dealt with within reason, although adjoining landowners are often responsible for its clearance. In our area approximately 172km of PROWs are covered by scheduled maintenance contracts. In addition to this a number of Parish Councils carry out vegetation and light maintenance to paths within their boundaries. Both the equestrian and motorised user groups highlighted the problems caused by burnt out cars.

- 3.25. Signing is a legal duty where a PROW leaves a metalled road. Its importance is underlined by our consultations. All the councils collect data on missing signs through surveys, staff inspections and reports from the public. Replacement and repair works are carried out periodically by the Path Warden/Ranger and where appropriate by contractors.
- 3.26. Enforcement policy is virtually identical in all three council areas. Initially we try to negotiate with landowners wherever possible to maintain healthy relationships and not incur lengthy legal procedures at public expense. Although enforcement is generally a last resort it can be seen to be a deterrent in extreme cases. The main enforcement issues arise from obstructions, encroachments, ploughing, cropping and new development. Direct action, whether by notice or under Common law powers, is preferred to expensive prosecution procedures to ensure the network remains unobstructed.
- 3.27. In our area we have recorded a large number of outstanding obstructions to the network. These are resolved through negotiation in the first instance, followed by enforcement notice where required. The equestrians also pointed to the obstruction posed to them by gates and cars parked across routes. These can also be a problem for disabled users and parents with child buggies.
- 3.28. In our area we have carried out numerous improvement schemes, e.g. the replacement of stiles with kissing gates, surfacing, drainage at some 980 sites. Substantial lengths of BOATs, bridleways and footpaths have had surfacing and drainage improvements to enable use by all. Recent larger works have included all weather surfacing schemes at Novers Hill in Filwood, Lamp Lighters Path in Avonmouth, and Imperial Path in Brislington, the latter two being fully accessible and the upgrading of surfacing at sites including Bond Lane in Thornbury, St Ivel Way in Warmley and at Hankley Wood in Wellow. Works on the PROW network have been completed by council officers, contractors and a number of volunteer groups such as the Avon Ramblers' Volunteer Wardens and the Cotswold Wardens.
- 3.29 On examination of the current maintenance practices across the three councils it is clear that there is not a consistent approach in place. This has raised the need for a joint Rights of Way Management Standards (ROWMS) document to be produced. This is covered further in Chapter 7 – Statement of Action.

4. REVIEW OF OTHER DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION

4.1. In line with the 2002 statutory DEFRA advice we have also looked in detail as part of our assessment at a range of plans, documents and other information. Looking at these has helped us set potential PROW use and demand in the context of other plans and initiatives and draw conclusions about problems and future opportunities. Below we summarise documents that have been especially influential.

National Picture

4.2. As well as the documents and information published by DEFRA, DfT and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), we have been guided by the DCLG Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 on 'Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation' and by the publications and initiatives of Natural England and its predecessor organisations. These include:

- Coastal Access – how best to improve access to coastal land;
- Diversity Review – tackling the needs and perceptions of under represented groups;
- Millennium Greens initiative to provide new areas of public open space;
- Capturing Richness – countryside visits by black and ethnic minority communities;
- By All Reasonable Means – inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people;
- Walking the Way to Health – initiative to get more people walking in their own communities;
- National Trails – the Cotswold Way which starts in Bath and passes through South Gloucestershire towards Chipping Camden;
- Greenway Handbook – guidance on planning and creating traffic-free, off-road routes to meet the needs of walkers, cyclists and/ or horse riders.

4.3. The Department of Health's (DoH) advice is that adults should aim to take at least 30 minutes of physical activity on at least five days a week. Children and young people are advised to take one hour each day³. The importance of such activity in decreasing the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke and diabetes - and associated factors such as hypertension and obesity – is highlighted in the 2010 Health White Paper⁴. Walking and cycling are seen as the easiest and most acceptable forms of physical activity with clear implications for ROWIPs.

4.4. Research and initiatives will continue and we are aware that as work progresses on implementing ROWIPs, a body of best practice will develop which will be used in our own PROW work. Work will also continue with Natural England on their preparation of a Coastal Access Report for the Severn Estuary under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

³ Chief Medical Officer's Report, Dept of Health 2004

⁴ 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our Strategy for public health in England', DoH November 2010

Community and Corporate Strategies and the JLTP

- 4.4. Our three sustainable community strategies include objectives for promoting recreation, leisure and healthy living. These in turn have influenced our council corporate strategies and the JLTP 2011-2026. The JLTP has a series of strategies aimed at contributing to 5 overall goals; particularly important in our ROWIP assessment has been those summarised in Box 3A.

Box 3A JLTP Strategies Linking with ROWIP

Reducing Carbon Emissions

- Promotion of lower carbon travel choices, providing alternatives to the car, influencing travel behaviour and managing demand;
- Adapting to climate change by increasing the transport network's resilience to extreme weather events and seasonal changes.

Supporting Economic Growth

- Provide for increased public transport, walking, cycling;
- Influence travel behaviour;
- Manage demand through highway improvement, management and maintenance;
- Ensure access to employment growth areas;
- Support delivery of houses and jobs through the emerging Core Strategies;
- Maintain, manage and ensure best use of transport assets;

Promoting Accessibility

- Improve accessibility for all residents to health services, employment and other local services;
- Assist neighbourhood renewal and the regeneration of deprived areas;
- Improve access to services for rural residents;
- Provide a transport network that complies with the Equality Act 2010.

Contributing to better safety, health and security

- Significantly reduce the number of road casualties;
- Achieve improvements in road safety for the most vulnerable users and sections of the community;
- Improve air quality in the Air Quality Management Areas;
- Encourage and facilitate more physically active travel;
- Improve personal security on the transport network.

Quality of Life and the Natural Environment

- Enhance the public realm, public spaces and the urban environment;
- Minimise the impact of transport on the natural and historic environment;
- Promote better access to leisure activities and the countryside and neighbourhood links;
- Promote and facilitate active health.

- 4.5. Access to the countryside is seen as an important asset in the West of England Tourism Development Plan endorsed by the West of England Partnership in March 2007. A well-managed PROW network can help to attract tourists to an area to enjoy the countryside and, elsewhere in the country, the 'Walkers are Welcome' scheme has proven to be an effective driver for local economic growth.
- 4.6. Our Local Plans and set the local land use framework and we recognise that new developments offer opportunities for the PROW network as well as challenges. There is significant growth planned across the ROWIP area which should provide opportunities to improve the access network as well as posing challenges to the existing network. We have identified the following policies as of special interest to the ROWIP:
- Policy SR.9 of the Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan (adopted October 2007) safeguards all public rights of way and other publicly accessible routes for walking, cycling and riding from development which would adversely affect its recreational and amenity value;
 - Policy L3 of the Bristol Local Plan (adopted 1997) safeguards a network of Greenways within the city;
 - Policies T6 and T12 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan (adopted January 2006) safeguard a series of cycle/ pedestrian routes. Policy LC12 offers special protection to promoted and aspirational routes as well as recorded rights of way.
- 4.7. Our Local Plans and Core Strategies are at different stages but the importance and provision of green infrastructure, open space, outdoors recreation and access are issues addressed in our respective core strategies and other Local Development Documents. We will take into account these documents as they become available; in turn the ROWIP will inform their preparation.

AONB Management Plans

- 4.8. The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 provides a wealth of information and sets out a range of policies to protect the AONB's unique assets. Objective A2 looks to the Local Access Forums and ROWIPs to develop, promote and maintain public access and quiet recreational activities. Objective A3 seeks to meet the needs of all sectors of the community, particularly under-represented groups.
- 4.9. Policy EEP3 of the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2008-2013 identifies the need to achieve '*a co-ordinated approach to the appropriate management and promotion of public access and quiet recreational activities with planning to ensure access for all*'. The Cotswold Conservation Board envisages action being taken to encourage and promote the increased use of rights of way through ROWIPs. The Management Plan contains a wide range of policies, actions and tasks of relevance to ROWIPs and the management of PROWs ranging from access for all to conserving the historic environment and local distinctiveness.

Other Documents and Information

4.10. Other documents that have guided us in our assessment include:

- Avon Biodiversity Action Plan 2004;
- Avon Frome Strategy 2007 - 2017;
- Bath World Heritage Management Plan;
- Walking Strategy for Bristol:Our Vision for 2011–2021;
- Bath & North East Somerset Green Infrastructure Strategy;
- South Gloucestershire Green Infrastructure Open Space Audit 2010
- Bristol Green Spaces Strategy;
- West of England Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework, May 2011
- Parish Plans;
- Register of Historic Battlefields/ English Heritage information on historic landscapes/ DCMS information on ancient monuments.

5. INVOLVING THE PUBLIC

Introduction

- 5.1 In Chapter 2 we examined our existing PROWs and in Chapter 3 the needs of different users. The crucial question is how far the network currently meets users' needs. In assessing this we have been guided by the many reports and policy statements that have already been published and which we draw from in Chapter 4. This Chapter looks at the question from the point of view of the public.
- 5.2 Public involvement focused on the following:
- Information made available on our dedicated website www.rowip.org.uk (daily average of 170 hits since launch of ROWIP Consultation Draft in 2007);
 - Questionnaire survey, 2006;
 - Focused consultation in 2006 in the four local assessment areas;
 - 'Whole area' events in 2007 for access providers and interest groups;
 - Public response to May 2007 ROWIP Consultation Draft;
 - User group events July 2007.
- 5.3 Through this public consultation we have gained a wealth of comments and information which we have drawn upon in our assessment and statement of action. Where comments have focused on specific areas and routes we will use these to guide us in the detailed implementation of the ROWIP.

Questionnaire Surveys

- 5.4 These surveys were carried out in each of the three council areas between April and August 2006 and we received a total of 2,862 responses, enough to give us a reliable picture of public opinion. The responses gave us valuable information on current patterns of usage, user needs and the current state of the PROW network which we have drawn upon in Chapters 2 and 3.
- 5.5 In relation to *potential improvements*, keeping paths clear of litter and dogs mess and regular maintenance came out top with about seven in ten people saying they were important or very important. Better lighting or improving surfacing were also considered priorities (56% and 54%). About half the respondents wanted more signage and information. This proportion went down to a quarter for the creation of new paths and a third when it came to the removal of stiles and obstacles.
- 5.6 People were asked what *type of information* they would like to see on PROW signs. About two thirds thought it very important that signs show the type of transport allowed and the route destination. About half said that route names and maps would be of value as well as distances.

- 5.7 The questionnaire concluded by asking people whether different aspects of the PROW network had *got better, worse or stayed the same* over the last three years. About seven out of ten people thought that there had been little change in the ease of use, the number of routes or the amount of information available. For the others, more people felt things had got better rather than worse.
- 5.8 On the strength of the 2006 survey results we identified six themes focusing on:
1. *Improving Maintenance and Safety*
 2. *Signing Routes*
 3. *Providing Information*
 4. *Enabling Local Travel*
 5. *Promoting Health and Recreation*
 6. *Improving the Network.*

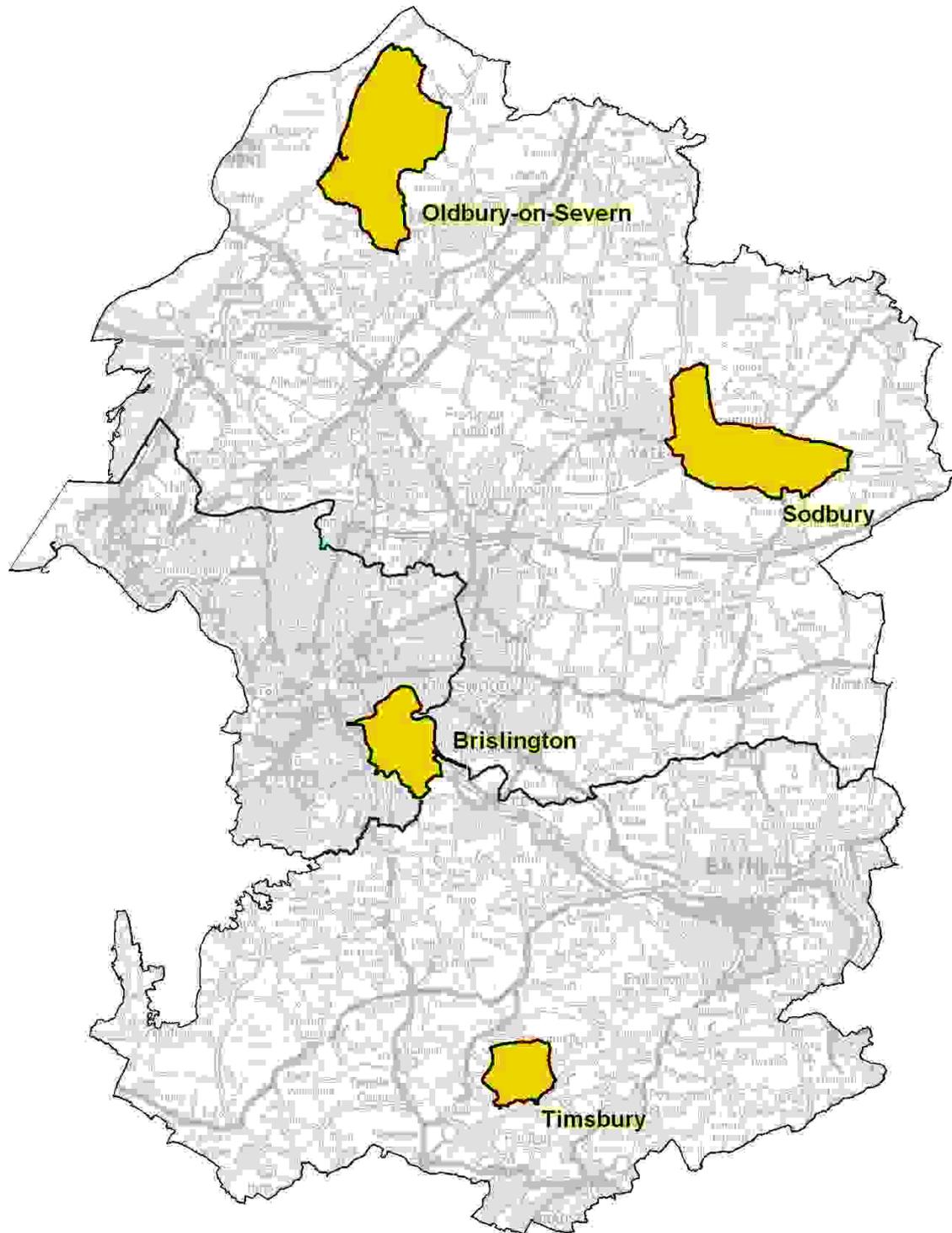
Local Assessment and ‘Whole’ Area Consultation Events

- 5.9 Consultants were commissioned in November 2006 to organise a series of public consultation events to explore in detail the six potential ROWIP themes identified as a result of the questionnaire survey. These events were held in January 2007 and targeted at the four local assessment areas followed by ‘whole area’ events for access providers and interest groups.
- 5.10 As outlined in paragraph 1.6 above, the four local assessment areas were selected as representative of the different kinds of communities in our area. Table 4 sets out a profile of the areas. Figure 14 shows their location. The PROW network serving the small village of Oldbury-on-Severn is more extensive than that for the market town of Sodbury. On the other hand Sodbury is fringed by large commons that provide access land opportunities. There is some access land close to the large village of Timsbury and the density of the PROW network is similar to Oldbury. Brislington, as might be expected of an urban fringe community, has a more limited PROW network.

Table 4 Local Assessment Area Profiles

	Brislington	Oldbury	Sodbury	Timsbury
Public Footpaths (km)	10.4	61.7	37.8	18.7
Public Bridleways (km)	0	15.5	2.4	0
Restricted Byways (km)	0	0	0	0
BOATs (km)	0	0	0	0.6
TOTAL (km)	10.4	77.2	40.7	19.3
Population (2001)	22146	708	5167	2580
Area (ha.)	738	1891	1549	470
Average density of rights of way (m/ ha)	14	41	26	41
Area of AccessLand (ha)	0	0	1068	55

Figure 14: ROWIP Local Assessment Areas



ROWIP Local Assessment Area

5.11 The key findings of the events were as follows:

- Different users, each with own requirements (see Chapter 3);
- Continuity of routes is important, including use of roads where necessary;
- Maintenance of the network is essential;
- Safety and personal security are concerns on some routes;
- Deficiency of routes for cyclists and horse riders;
- Easier access needed to some routes;
- Information not easily available/ lack of knowledge of availability;
- Signage not always adequate;
- Changes in network need to be better publicised;
- Health benefits should be promoted;
- Some concerns about landowners' actions/ need for diversions;
- Concern that some routes will suffer from visitor pressure;
- Full use not always made of volunteers.

5.12 Added to the results of the 2006 questionnaire survey, the in-depth local area and 'whole area' consultations enabled us to explore the original six themes in more detail. It became clear that the theme relating to 'Promoting Health and Recreation' overlapped with the theme 'Providing Information' and so we combined them. We also found that there was some confusion about the original Theme 6 'Improving the Network'. As a result we reduced the original six themes to four and these featured in the draft ROWIP published for consultation in May 2007.

Public Response

5.13 The ROWIP Consultation Draft was circulated widely. 1,000 copies of the full document were sent to all Council Members and parish and town councils as well as to a range of statutory and other organisations, user groups and interested individuals. To achieve wider public involvement we also produced 2,000 summary leaflets and distributed these at a variety of venues including:

- Council offices;
- Libraries;
- Leisure centres;
- Tourist Information Centres;
- Cotswold National Trail launch event;
- Bristol's Biggest Bike Ride;
- Walk & Bike to Work Breakfast;
- Bristol Harbour Festival;
- Bristol Bike Forum.

5.14 A questionnaire was included in the Consultation Draft document and in the summary leaflet. As well as the questionnaires returned to us by freepost we received separate letters and emails. All of these comments have been taken into account in producing this final ROWIP.

Input into 2007 ROWIP from the Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF)

5.15 In 2006 the JLAF (see paragraph 1.7 above) visited the four local assessment areas and carried out working group discussions. The JLAF made formal comments on the Consultation Draft ROWIP in August 2007. The points raised include:

- Capital and revenue funding required to implement the ROWIP;
- More emphasis on health, and access for disabled people; stimulate demand and add routes where possible;
- More emphasis on tourism;
- More informal discussions with land managers;
- Access for non-car owners;
- Scope for voluntary changes to the PROW network;
- Legal protection for routes on public land;
- Comprehensive access audit.

5.16 In response to these suggestions we strengthened the sections on promotion, health and tourism in the 2007 ROWIP document and held user group meetings with equestrian, disabled and motorised user groups. The Statement of Action covers the audit and other network related issues.

User Group Events 2007

5.17 From the 2006 questionnaire surveys we realised that the needs of equestrian, disabled and motorised users were under represented. Additional meetings were held (see Chapter 2). The main points that emerged were:

- Equestrian users – road safety, missing links, promotion and publicity, easy to use gates;
- Motorised users – limited network in some areas, vegetation, improved signage and linked trail routes;
- Disabled users – maintenance, pictorial signage, information, focus on key paths.

Themes

5.18 With all the information from our consultees we refined the themes to form the basis of our 2007 Statement of Action. The four themes are:

Theme 1: Improving Maintenance and Safety

- Personal safety
- Keeping paths open and useable
- Dogs and livestock.

Theme 2: Signing Routes

- Easy to follow routes
- Clear and legible routes
- Detailed informative routes.

Theme 3: Providing Information

- Promotion and increasing use of the network for leisure, tourism and health benefits;
- Website development
- Responsible use.

Theme 4: Improving Access for Local Travel

- Social exclusion
- Schools
- Useful links - accessing and supporting local services and green spaces
- Sustainable communities.

Input into 2013 ROWIP Refresh

5.19 Since carrying out the research and consultation which informed the 2007-2011 ROWIP, the councils have continued to engage with the Joint Local Access Forum and PROW Liaison Groups. Additionally, the three councils have engaged with members of the public and other interested parties as part of the production of the JLTP 2011-2026. Having reviewed this information, we are confident that the engagement carried out before the 2007-2011 ROWIP remains relevant and that there is no need for extensive, new consultation prior to the adoption of the 2012-2016 ROWIP.

6 RESULTS OF ASSESSMENT AND SOURCES OF FUNDING

- 6.1 Questionnaires, user group meetings, area events, the Joint Local Access Forum, mapping and monitoring have all helped us to build up a picture of what the PROW network is and what it could be. Delivering this picture needs action and below we outline the key findings from Chapters 2 to 5:

Chapter 2 User Needs

- The principal needs of walkers and cyclists focus on either everyday or recreational use;
- Equestrian users, mainly horse riders, need linked routes for recreation;
- Motorised users have their own recreational priorities;
- People with a mobility problem have particular needs.

Chapter 3 Rights of Way in Our Area

- Footpaths make up the majority of the PROW network but the pattern of paths is variable;
- Continuing demand for Modification and Public Path Orders;
- In addition to PROWs there are a range of other access opportunities for walkers including parks, Access Land, town and village greens; for everyday walking there are other local links;
- The network of bridleways and byways is more limited;
- Off-road provision for cyclists is dominated by the Bristol to Bath Railway Path, the Ring road cycleway and other sections of the National Cycle Network complemented by local links.

Chapter 4 Review of Other Documents and Information

- The JLTP and a range of other policy documents seek to encourage more walking and cycling;
- The AONB Management Plan seek to provide for recreational walking, cycling and horse riders;
- Access has to be balanced with protecting natural and heritage assets.

Chapter 5 Involving the Public

- Continuity of routes is important, including use of roads where necessary and safe;
- Maintenance of the network is essential;
- Safety and personal security are concerns on some routes;
- Deficiency of routes for off road cyclists and horse riders;
- Easier access needed to some routes; health benefits should be promoted;
- Information and signage often inadequate; tourism and recreational opportunities should be promoted;
- Four priority themes emerged: Improving Maintenance and Safety; Signing Routes; Providing Information; and Improving Access for Local Travel.

6.2 Given the current uncertain state of public finances, it is likely that there will be significant changes to the availability of funding for improvements identified in the ROWIP. The three council's own capital and revenue budgets fund the majority of PROW works; however, two potentially significant sources of potential funding for improvements to the PROW network in the future come from the JTLP3 and the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. Funding through the Aggregates Sustainability Levy has now ended; however, funding through Paths For Communities has recently been made available to Local Community Partnerships. Tourism, health and education initiatives also represent previously untapped sources of funding. Voluntary groups and members of the public have made important contributions over recent years both in terms of voluntary labour and small donations for improvements to the PROW network.

7 STATEMENT OF ACTION

Progress since 2007

- 7.1 The 2007-2011 ROWIP included a Statement of Action which the councils committed to progressing within the resources available. Table 5 below identifies those Actions which have been progressed, along with a summary of the progress made.

Table 5 Progress on Statement of Action

Recommended Action		Progress
1.2	Undertake full infrastructure and network condition survey	Full survey carried out in summer 2009
1.4	Develop joint diversion policy	PPO policies adopted by councils in 2009.
2.2	Ensure that 90% of path junctions with metalled roads are signed outside urban areas.	Over 90% of paths surveyed have been signed.
2.3	Ensure that signposts carry additional information for users where appropriate	Pictorial signs designed and used on Restricted byways, signs reviewed for bridleways.
3.1	Creation of a common website to promote PROW and give a single point of contact	OutdoorsWest website available
3.2	Develop online mapping as an interactive tool available on the joint website	Mapping included in OutdoorsWest website
3.3	Develop Targeted promotional material	Review and revamp of Round South Gloucestershire Rides undertaken; links to other targeted information eg BHS reviewed on website
3.4	Provide information, guidance and support for landowners	Assistance given to landowners through interactions with officers and a review of information available on websites including FAQs and ploughing and cropping leaflets.
3.7	Promote improvement works and provide feedback on completed maintenance through press and newsletters	Increased press & improved information to town/parish councils
3.8	Promote PROW that can be accessed by public transport	Cotswold Way and Circular routes off the Cotswold Way promoted material contain links to public transport information
4.1	Identify improvements to enable travel for all by foot/on bike to employment, health services, education, leisure and transport.	Missing cycle link identified along Whitchurch Railway Path, the route of the

		Mangotsfield to Yate cycle/multiuser spur has been identified.
4.6	Identify gaps in the wider recreational network that will improve accessibility and connectivity.	Missing bridleway links identified at Withies Lane and Frampton Cotterell bridleways.
4.9	Carry out improvements to fill in the gaps identified in 4.1, 4.6 and 4.8, subject to funding.	Creation orders and dedication agreements made for routes identified.

Our Statement

- 7.2 Our Statement of Action is set out in Table 6 listed under the four themes. In drawing up this statement we have been conscious of the need to match our actions with the resources that are likely to be available. Progress on many of the actions is dependent on securing the additional resources required either internally or externally. Pressures on budgets mean that we have to give priority to some improvements over others. In looking at improvements to the PROW network we have put emphasis on routes that will benefit the greatest number of people. However, we recognise that there are gaps in the wider recreational network that also need attention.

Table 6 Statement of Action

Theme 1 – Improving Maintenance and Safety									
Recommended Action		Link to Themes	Link To JLTP	Resources <small> 👤 x1= minor 👤 x2= medium 👤 x3= major </small>	Estimated Costs <small> £ = <£5k ££ = £5-20k £££ = >£20k </small>	Timescale (Years)			Key Partners Stakeholders/ Funders
						1-2	3-4	5+	
1.1	Develop consistent Rights of Way Management Standards (ROWMS) for maintenance (see 7.3)	2,3,4	Network Management – Chapter 5 Asset Management – Chapter 9	👤 👤	£ £	√	√		3 councils, JLAF, AFP, Cotswold Way Team, AONB services
1.2	Classify all routes in line with the ROWMS (see 7.4)	2,3,4	Network Management – Chapter 5 Asset Management – Chapter 9	👤 👤	£		√	√	3 councils, JLAF, Liaison Groups, town and parish councils,
1.3	Develop an improved strategy for managing the Definitive Maps and Statements and legal order work	4	Network Management – Chapter 5	👤 👤 👤	£ £ £	√	√	√	3 councils, Liaison Groups

Recommended Action		Link to Themes	Link To JLTP	Resources  x1= minor x2= medium x3= major	Estimated Costs £ = <£5k ££ = £5-20k £££ = >£20k	Timescale (Years)			Key Partners and Stakeholders/ Funders
						1-2	3-4	5+	
1.4	Classify all routes in line with the ROWMS (see 7.4)	2,3,4	Network Management – Chapter 5 Asset Management – Chapter 9	 	£		√	√	3 councils, JLAF, Liaison Groups, town and parish councils,
1.5	Develop an improved strategy for managing the Definitive Maps and Statements and legal order work	4	Network Management – Chapter 5	  	£ £ £	√	√	√	3 councils, Liaison Groups

Theme 2 – Signing routes

Recommended Action		Link to Themes	Link To JLTP	Resources  x1= minor x2= medium x3= major	Estimated Costs £ = <£5k ££ = £5-20k £££ = >£20k	Timescale (Years)			Key Partners and Stakeholders/ Funders
						1-2	3-4	5+	
2.1	Complete a full review of signage in the area and produce signage guidelines	3,4	Smarter Choices – Chapter 5 Accessibility – Chapter 6		£	√			3 councils, JLAF, user groups, town and parish councils, AFP, AONB rangers
2.3	Ensure that signposts carry additional information for users where appropriate	3,4	Smarter Choices – Chapter 5 Accessibility – Chapter 6	 	£ £ £			√	3 councils

Theme 3 – Providing Information

Recommended Action		Link to Themes	Link To JLTP	Resources <small> 👤 x1= minor 👤 x2= medium 👤 x3= major </small>	Estimated Costs <small> £ = <£5k ££ = £5-20k £££ = >£20k </small>	Timescale (Years)			Key Partners and Stakeholders/ Funders
3.1	Develop targeted promotional material (including equestrian, disabled and motorised users)	4	Smarter Choices – Chapter 5	👤 👤	£ £ £	√	√	√	3 councils, JLAF, user groups, tourist industry, town/parish councils, AONB, AFP, Cotswold Way
3.2	Provide information in a range of formats and/or languages	2,4	Accessibility - Chapter 6	👤	£ £	√	√	√	3 councils, user groups
3.3	Explore opportunities for increasing participation of minority groups in countryside access	2,4	Accessibility - Chapter 6	👤	£ £	√			3 councils, representative groups
3.4	Promote improvement works and provide feedback on completed maintenance through press and newsletters	1,4	Smarter Choices – Chapter 5	👤	£ £	√	√	√	3 councils, JLAF
3.5	Promote PROWs that can be accessed by public transport	4	Congestion – Chapter 5 Accessibility – Chapter 6	👤	£ £	√			Public transport operators including user groups, 3 councils, AONB, AFP, Cotswold Way

Theme 4 – Improving access for local travel

Recommended Action	Link to Themes	Link To JLTP	Resources 👤 x1= minor 👤 x2= medium 👤 x3= major	Estimated Costs £ x1= <£5k x2= £5-20k x3= >£20k	Timescale (Years)			Key Partners and Stakeholders/ Funders	
					1-2	3-4	5+		
4.1	Identify improvements to enable travel for all by foot / on bike to employment, health services, education, leisure & transport nodes	3	Congestion – Chapter 5 Accessibility – Chapter 6	👤 👤	£ £	✓			3 councils, user groups, landowners, employers, health services, education, leisure, transport operators, town/parish councils
4.2	Provide safer and shorter routes identified in 4.1 to enable easy access to and from public transport links and schools	3	Congestion – Chapter 5 Accessibility – Chapter 6	👤 👤 👤	£ £ £	✓	✓	✓	Public transport operators including community transport, user groups, 3 councils, town/parish councils, AONB
4.3	Identify and carry out improvements for people with mobility difficulties and visual impairments.	2,3	Accessibility – Chapter 6	👤 👤 👤	£ £ £		✓	✓	3 councils, user groups, AONB services
4.4	Identify road safety improvements that enable increased use of routes	1	Road Safety – Chapter 8	👤	£	✓	✓	✓	3 councils, user groups, emergency services, Road Safety Partnership

Recommended Action		Link to Themes	Link To JLTP	Resources  x1= minor x2= medium x3= major	Estimated Costs £ x1= <£5k x2= £5-20k x3= >£20k	Timescale (Years)			Key Partners and Stakeholders/ Funders
						1-2	3-4	5+	
4.5	Work with employers and educational establishments through travel planning to promote use of local rights of way	3	Congestion – Chapter 5 Smarter Choices – Chapter 5		£	√	√	√	3 councils, user groups, employers, developers, education establishments, town and parish councils
4.6	Identify gaps in the wider recreational network that will improve accessibility and connectivity	3,4	Accessibility – Chapter 6	  	£ £ £		√	√	3 councils, user groups, JLAF, town and parish councils, AFP, AONB services
4.7	Produce joint guidance to secure appropriate improvements to the PROW network through planning processes.	3	Smarter Choices – Chapter 5	 	£ £ £	√			3 councils, developers
4.8	Identify improvements needed to the PROW network associated with regeneration & housing/employment growth	3	Smarter Choices – Chapter 5	  	£ £ £	√	√	√	3 councils, developers
4.9	Carry out improvements to fill the gaps identified in 4.1, 4.7 and 4.9, subject to funding	3,4	Accessibility – Chapter 6	  	£ £ £		√	√	3 councils, user groups, JLAF, town and parish councils, AFP, AONB services

- 7.3 Below we describe two of the Actions that we aim to pursue in more detail.

Rights of Way Management Standards

- 7.4 We intend drawing up a Rights of Way Management Standards (ROWMS) document which will set out service and quality standards. At this stage we have identified the following seven areas for attention but others will be added as the ROWMS is developed:

- standard inspection programme;
- provision of infrastructure;
- surfacing and drainage;
- signage and waymarking;
- path lighting;
- scheduled maintenance e.g. cleansing, vegetation control;
- refuse and dog waste bins.

Classification of Paths

- 7.5 It is clear that the PROW network serves different functions, travel (or 'everyday') and recreation, for different people and at different times. Depending upon their location and character, routes may have a predominantly travel function or recreational function or they may serve both purposes. In order to deliver the improvements that you have told us you want we need to develop a set of minimum standards for the way that we look after all paths. We also need to identify particular routes that would benefit from enhanced maintenance and other improvements. In essence, this will involve the classification of paths to determine the management regime that will be applied to it under the ROWMS. The classification of paths will be subject to periodic review to enable future changes in the patterns of use to be taken into account.

Implementation, Funding and Partnership Working

- 7.6 Most of the actions will fall to the three councils to implement in our roles as local highway authorities but in the last column of Table 6 we identify key partners and stakeholders who would also need to be involved. The JLAF will have a key role, as will the Cotswold and Mendip Hills AONB Services. Through these stakeholders we plan to draw upon the resources of user and other voluntary groups. For some specific actions delivery will need to have input from the tourism industry and outdoor access providers. Others will depend on partnership working with public transport operators and community transport organisations, the emergency services, the Road Safety Partnership and, crucially, private landowners. South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset Council's have worked with the Avon Ramblers group to set up three weekly volunteer work parties across their areas to carry out path improvements with assistance and guidance from the Council's ranger/path warden.

- 7.7 The Statement of Action puts forward estimates of the scale of staff resources needed and capital and revenue costs. Also shown is the timescale for each action, subject to funding. Some will be relatively costly and take at least 5 years to complete but shaded in green are a number that we see as short term projects or 'quick wins' if the necessary resources are available.
- 7.8 We recognise that we will have to press our case for funding and find new and innovative ways to implement our Statement of Action. Our ROWIP and annual Business Plans will help strengthen our bids. Funding will come from a variety of sources as discussed in paragraph 5.2 above.

Business Plan

- 7.9 The financial implications and delivery of the Statement of Action will be set out in a Joint Business Plan which will be incorporated into the JLTP Delivery Plan. The Joint Business Plan will build up over the four year life of the ROWIP with progress being recorded annually. A simple green, amber, red colour code will be used to highlight whether Actions are on target or not.

Monitoring

- 7.10 We aim to chart progress on implementing our Statement of Action as part of work on JLTP. In particular, we will be looking to demonstrate best practice projects and we will continue to carry out the counts we describe in paragraph 2.7 above and report on changes in our Joint Business Plan.

8 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 We believe our ROWIP will help us to build upon the work which has already been undertaken to develop a network of safe, accessible and attractive routes that meet the present and future needs of all members of the community. It is the result of extensive work undertaken by the three councils of Bristol City, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire and the Joint Local Access Forum.
- 8.2 Our assessment of user needs and the current network revealed the scale of the task required to produce a ROWIP. We also had to consider how the ROWIP fitted in with other documents, policies and partners from Parish Plans to the AONB management plans.
- 8.3 Extensive public consultation through questionnaires, area and user group events helped us to identify priorities and from these the four key themes of:
- Improving maintenance and safety;
 - Signing routes;
 - Providing information;
 - Improving access for local travel.
- 8.4 The Statement of Action takes these four themes and sets out what we propose to do, in addition to the work which was carried out under the previous ROWIP. Action ranges from reviewing signage, improving access by public transport and for people with mobility difficulties to providing guidance and support to landowners and developing consistent management standards.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AONB – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

AFP – Avon Frome Partnership

BOAT – Byway Open to All Traffic

CNE – Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005

CROW – Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

CRT – Canal and River Trust

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport

DEFRA – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DfT – Department for Transport

DoH – Department of Health

EA – Environment Agency

FC – Forestry Commission

JLAF – Joint Local Access Forum

JLTP – Joint Local Transport Plan

LP – Local Plan

NE – Natural England

PROW – Public Rights of Way

ROWIP – Rights of Way Improvement Plan

ROWMS – Rights of Way Management Standards