Appendix 1

Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2017 – 2022, Discussion Paper.

Introduction

- We are obliged to review and produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for the Borough of Bedford. This is statutory requirement for the Highway Authority which arises from the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

- Production of the next ROWIP will be done in a difficult context, one of managing austerity, long term cuts programme and corporate change.

- Therefore the scope of the plan must at the very least include an assessment of present and future user needs and an action plan to direct improvement works over the next 5 years.

- We need to get the scope of the plan right in order to make it realistic and achievable but also to ensure we don't overly raise expectations in these difficult times.

Recommended headline themes for our next ROWIP

- **Managing the PRoW network asset**

- **Protecting the PRoW network asset**

- **Using the PRoW network asset**

Managing the PRoW network asset

- Improving PRoW maintenance and land management.

- Farming and landowners – new pressures include security, fly tipping, illegal access for raves etc. Brexit & post CAP any opportunities for payments for access, what will happen to cross compliance, will permissive access payments be introduced?

- Internal changes to ROW team – restructuring, digital opportunities, links with Highways.

- Involvement – volunteerism, practical works, surveys, training, and management – big projects such as involvement in Bedford excluded area.

- Maintenance of PRoW network – New Team in Highways, Budgets tightened, working with Farmers and Landowners, Parish Councils, Priorities, meeting duties in difficult times – significant costs on Bridge repair and replacement, management of Byways Open to all Traffic – more detailed surveys – Asset management programme, links to capital programmes.
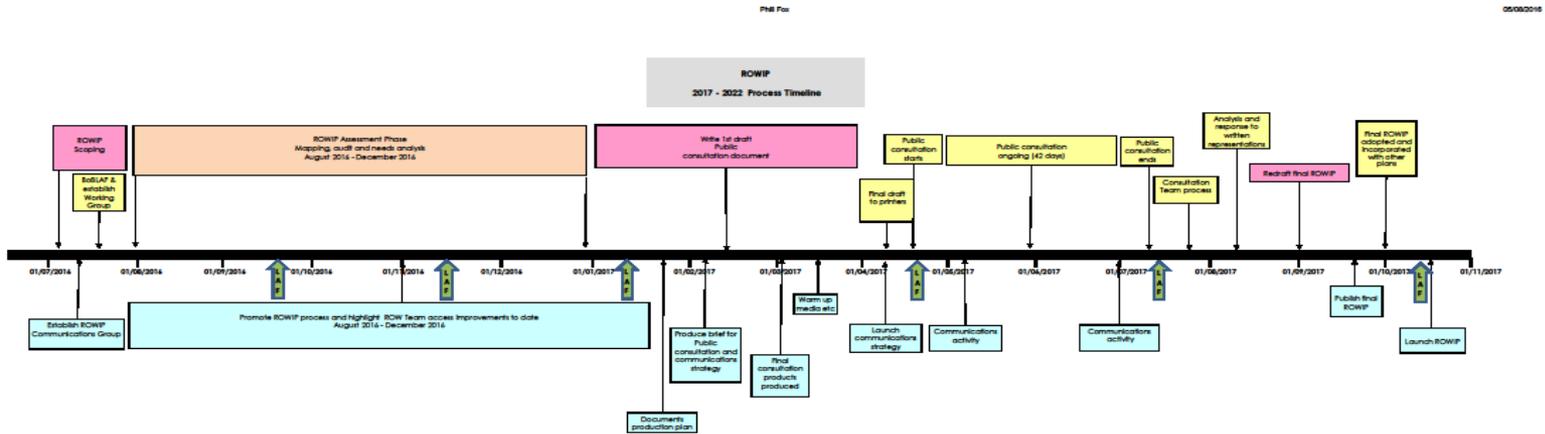
Protecting the PRoW network asset

- Development and Local Plans – Protection of ROWs in Plans, explore any opportunities for new links and loops. Opportunities for funds arising from CIL, strategic projects EW Railway, Bedford/MK Waterway, Bedford River Valley Project (BRVP) etc, Options plans being explored for new small towns, Gt Barford, Thurleigh, Sharnbrook etc there will be various impacts on PRoW.

- Definitive map and statement plus legal events – Significant projects which must take place over the next 5 years include Bedford excluded area, the "drive to 2026£ – possible changes due to Deregulation Act 2015.

- The ROW network – asset plan – survey – costed programmes of works, dealing with fragmentation, links to other networks – ROW as a Green Infrastructure asset – capturing the network in other plans – impact of development and new communities.

- Linking to other relevant plans and strategies. This also includes making the best of the Highways asset management plans.

Using the PRoW network asset

- New uses and changing trends in countryside recreation – active sports continued rise of running and cycling, Pokémon Go, Geocaching, augmented reality and GPS technologies etc.

- Health and wellbeing – Mental health, fitness agenda, walks for health, aging population, inter-generational shared activities.

- Cultural asset – Inclusion, free to use, Non users, meeting user needs, community cohesion.

- Information – Promoting value of PRoWs, what channels ??, web and other digital media, signage, waymarking, leaflets, walking & riding events events (walks festival and leisure rides).

- Safe and easy use of PRoWs – surfaces, structures, DDA compliance, Multi user routes.

- Economic benefits of PRoWs – better argued case, consider health, rural economy, overall leisure spend, value of cultural and biodiversity asset.

The ROWIP production timeline and consultation 2016/2017

Review previous plans and assess present and future user needs

- What did we learn from the previous plans ?

- How to assess user needs. Are there really any significant changes ?

- Survey Monkey, Citizens Panel, Parish and Town Councils, stakeholders (analysis), Farmers & Landowners, BoBLAF. user groups, events ? we have limited finances to gather and process data.

- Communications – Promotion (what media), comms strategy for the ROWIP process and beyond.

Risks and Equality

- The Borough Council will be required to produce an equality impact assessment and carry out risk analysis on the impacts of our proposed ROWIP. The BoBLAF will have a role in advising the Council on any possible impacts.

Recommendations

- *We propose a focussed scope for the ROWIP with the emphasis on rights of way improvements for the next 5 years only. We would aim to incorporate our ROWIP aims and actions into other complementary plans rather than trying to produce a one size fits all documents on every aspect of outdoor recreation and countryside management in the Borough.*

- *We propose having 3 key themes which capture the headline issues impacting on rights of way and use these as the framework for the ROWIP Action Plan.*

- *We propose targeted pre Plan consultation and needs analysis. We will build on and review previous data. We believe that basic user needs will have changed little over the last 5 years but we need to be conscious of the mixture subtle changes and incorporate this into our work.*

Recommendations

- *We would ask that the BoBLAF ROWIP working group is reactivated. This was an important group in the production of our previous plans and we welcome their advice, stress testing and reality checks on our next plan.*

- *The ROWIP is a statutory strategic plan so there is a requirement for this Council to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment and risk analysis of the impacts of any prosed plan. We would ask that the BoBLAF is involved in the review of risks and equality impact assessment in respect of the ROWIP.*

- *We request that the BoBLAF acts as a champion for our next plan and is actively involved in the promotion of the ROWIP at all stages in the process.*

- *That the BoBLAF considers the prosed ROWIP production process timeline to be realistic and achievable.*