

Surrey Rights of Way Improvement Plan

2025 – 2035



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Liz Clark page 19, Gail Brownrigg page 21, LARA page 22, Trail Riders Fellowship pages 23 and 57, Epsom and Ewell Health Walks page 25, Steff Royston page 44, Avril Handley page 45

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce Surrey's third Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Surrey's public rights of way are an incredible asset that the Council looks after on your behalf. This plan sets out how Surrey County Council will protect, maintain and enhance them over the next ten years.

First, I would like to recognise the effort so many residents and stakeholders made to give us their views. We had an incredible response to our consultation, one of the highest ever received by the Council. This shows just how much you value your public rights of way. You told us how important they are for your quality of life, your health and wellbeing and for you to enjoy Surrey's outstanding natural environment.



Marisa Heath
Cabinet Member
for Environment

Public rights of way are a vital asset in delivering the Council's 'Surrey Way' and ensuring no one is left behind. We know we can do more to support everyone in our communities by making public rights of way as accessible as possible. You were clear this is an area you want us to focus on. You want us to maintain public rights of way, to cut back overgrowth, repair surfaces and provide better signage. You also told us that highway traffic and inconsiderate behaviour are concerns. These are all important areas we will work as 'one Council' to address.

We expect changes in development law to affect Surrey during the period of this plan. Where developments could impact existing public rights of way or provide the opportunity to create new ones, we will make sure we engage fully in the planning process, working with Local Planning Authorities to maximise opportunities to enhance them.

Public rights of way provide well-established links between our communities; often ancient in their origin. For over 35% of you they are important for commuting and using more sustainable methods to cars and roads. We want to support you in making this transition, especially for local short trips. When we source funding to improve and extend public rights of way, and link to other Highway networks, we will provide resource to deliver this.

We recognise we are working within a natural environment under threat from climate change and biodiversity loss. We have already made changes by using more sustainable and recycled materials. We will continue to adapt and consider how changes in our weather patterns, such as increased rainfall or hotter summers, will affect the condition of public rights of way.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the crucial input from our public rights of way volunteers. Every year the time given to rebuild bridges, reconstruct steps and help resolve issues on public rights of way is equivalent to nearly two full time officers. Working in all weathers, their essential contribution enables us to do so much more. Over the period of this plan, it means much, much more.

I look forward to working with all residents and stakeholders to put this plan into practice.

Surrey's Rights of Way Improvement Plan

What is the Rights of Way Improvement Plan?

Every local highway authority must, by law, produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). It sets out the Council's strategic goals and priorities for public rights of way. Rights of Way Improvement Plans must be reviewed every ten years and this is Surrey's third Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Law and government guidance set out that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan must go further than meeting basic legal duties for maintaining public rights of way.

This Rights of Way Improvement Plan is an aspirational document. It is based on extensive engagement with stakeholders and the public, coupled with a thorough review of evidence.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is set out in four themes:

- Theme 1: Public Rights of Way are for Everyone
- Theme 2: Maintaining and Protecting the Network
- Theme 3: Future Surrey
- Theme 4: Communications and Partnerships

Objectives and actions are set out for each of these themes.

What are Public Rights of Way?

A public right of way is a public highway. In law a public right of way is part of, and connects with, the wider highway network. Although they are mainly in the countryside, there are public rights of way in towns and villages too. Together, we call this the public rights of way network. There are four types of public right of way:



Public footpaths – a public right of way only for pedestrians (including dog walkers, users of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and people with buggies)



Public bridleways – same users as public footpaths, and in addition can be used by horse riders and cyclists



Restricted byways – same users as public footpaths and bridleways, and in addition can be used by horse-drawn carriage drivers



Byways Open to All Traffic – a public right of way for all users, including motor vehicles

Assessment of Needs

To produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan an assessment of the needs of the public in using public rights of way must be carried out. This must consider use now and in the future.

The assessment must fully consider the needs of the wider public and not just those who already use public rights of way. It must also assess how public rights of way can encourage exercise and recreation and support use by those who are blind or partially sighted or have mobility problems. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan must also set out a statement of action.

In reviewing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan we carried out a new assessment of evidence. We sought the views of the public and a wide range of stakeholders between December 2023 and September 2024.

- We carried out a public online survey, receiving 4273 responses.
- We contacted all 87 parish and town councils and 70% of them completed our survey.
- We contacted 158 stakeholder groups and organisations asking for their views.
- We contacted 26 councils within and neighbouring Surrey.
- We contacted 55 Residents' Associations.
- We held a briefing for Surrey County Council elected Councillors.
- We contacted the Country Land and Business Association and the National Farmers Union, circulated a survey to landowners and met with Surrey County Council tenant farmers.
- We held workshops with the Ramblers' Association (2 workshops), equestrians (3 workshops), off-road cyclists (1 workshop) and motorised vehicle users (1 workshop).
- We attended meetings with fora for Disabled People.
- We attended a workshop at Camberley Mosque.
- We sought the views of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum through meetings and a written representation.
- We reviewed an extensive evidence base.

Our engagement work has shown us how much people value public rights of way. The response to the public survey was amongst the highest of any carried out by Surrey County Council. Our engagement work has given us unprecedented understanding of what our customers, partners and stakeholders think.

The findings from the stakeholder and public engagement and the assessment of needs are contained in two evidence reports:

- **Evidence Report 1 – Surveys and Stakeholders:** This sets out the findings from our surveys and engagement work.
- **Evidence Report 2 – Network and Needs:** This sets out our assessment of the public rights of way network, provision for users and a review of the wider context of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan including other plans and wider objectives for Surrey.

Our findings and what we will do

Below are the areas which the Rights of Way Improvement plan aims to address. These are based on what you told us was important to you and our own research.

Public rights of way are important for health and wellbeing, but not everyone has the same opportunity to use and benefit from them.

We found out that there are differences in who benefits from our public rights of way. Disabled People, those in poorer health, younger people and those who identify their ethnicity as 'non-White' use public rights of way less. There is also a difference in the level of public rights of way across the county so not everyone has the same opportunities. Generally there are more people, fewer rights of way, more traffic and poorer health outcomes in the north compared to the south. Going forward we need to consider how we respond.

Our objectives and actions which will deliver this:

Objective 1

To improve our understanding of the needs of all our users, including those presently under-represented, to make sure that the rights of way network continues to evolve to meet their current and future needs.

Objective 2

That the network is as accessible as possible to as many people as possible, regardless of their physical mobility, disability, ethnicity, age, income or other factors, through working with partners, improving the quality of the network and providing information.

Objective 10

To raise awareness of the public rights of way network and to support existing and new users with opportunities to find out about public rights of way, to explore them, to make the network a more welcoming place and to help people to find their way around.



Maintaining paths is your highest priority.

You told us that maintaining the existing public rights of way was your highest priority. Especially important to you is clearing vegetation. Other areas which you want us to address are lack of signing, poor surfaces and structures such as stiles being in poor condition.

Our objectives and actions which will deliver this:

Objective 3

To maintain the network in the best possible condition, prioritising safety and targeting maintenance to where there is the greatest need.

Objective 4

To improve the condition of the public rights of way network through supporting others with a responsibility towards public rights of way, including landowners.

The safety of our users is our highest priority and is a concern for you as well. In particular high levels of road traffic have a negative impact on all of our users.

Surrey has one of the busiest road networks in the country, carrying over 60% more than the national average amount of traffic.

Traffic has a negative impact on all our users. Most of our users are classed as vulnerable road users and are at a higher risk of injury or death in a collision. High traffic on many major roads, especially dual carriageways, can make crossing impossible and unsafe to use them to connect public rights of way.

Improving crossings and traffic-free connections between public rights of way can help to improve the safety of our users. We can also help to encourage people to walk, cycle or wheel (using wheelchairs or mobility vehicles) for everyday journeys rather than use cars.

Our objective and actions which will deliver this:

Objective 7

To improve the safety of our users in respect to the impacts of traffic, through seeking improved connections and crossings where there is the greatest need, working with partners on information and initiatives to improve safety and to support active travel, liveable neighbourhoods and recreation.

You want us to protect paths from development, and to maximise improvements when development takes place.

Public rights of way are crucial in delivering sustainable growth – as a green infrastructure asset, in delivering sustainable travel and in supporting health and wellbeing and overall quality of life. In the future the amount of development in Surrey will increase. You were clear that you want us to protect public rights of way from development and the impact, for example from increased traffic, to secure improvements to public rights of way and improve connections and crossings.

Our objective and actions which will deliver this:

Objective 6

To ensure that development does not impact negatively on public rights of way or their users; that improvements are maximised, that they are fully protected and any impacts on them are appropriately mitigated. This should be both within the development and in the wider catchment. Rights of Way requirements associated with Strategic sites should be included in Local Plans.

We need to adapt to a changing Surrey and to play our part in making sure the county's special qualities, and public rights of way, are protected, for all to enjoy.

There are issues which are shaping Surrey now and in the future. Central to this is sustainability, protecting our outstanding natural assets for future generations and in responding to climate change. We also need to make sure that our public rights of way are protected for the future.

Our objectives and actions which will deliver this:

Objective 8

To ensure that public rights of way contribute to conserving and protecting the outstanding biodiversity, landscape and heritage of Surrey, whilst also providing opportunities to appreciate and understand them.

Objective 9

To protect the network from and adapt to the impacts of climate change through improving our maintenance techniques, applying best practice, seeking to innovate, using new materials and improving our understanding of changing weather patterns and other impacts on the public rights of way network.

Objective 5

To uphold the Council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement which is accessible to the public, and to execute other work streams in relation to legal work to record, protect and vary public rights of way, in order to underpin the objectives and actions in this Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

You want us to improve information provision around public rights of way and how we communicate with you. You were also concerned about irresponsible use of the countryside.

The need for responsible use of the countryside was a common theme raised by both our users and landowners. Everyone told us there has been an increase in users and issues such as aggressive dogs, people not staying on public rights of way, fly tipping and littering.

You told us that you want to be confident in knowing where to go in the countryside, and landowners told us that well waymarked paths are important to help people to stay on public rights of way. You want promoted routes to be well-marked and easy to follow.

Our objectives and actions which will deliver this:

Objective 10

To raise awareness of the public rights of way network and to support existing and new users with opportunities to find out about public rights of way, to explore them, to make the network a more welcoming place and to help people to find their way around.

Objective 11

To encourage responsible use of the countryside, to increase understanding and consideration between users and to lessen impacts on landowners, their businesses and livestock.



Our Shared Objectives

The [Surrey Way](#) explains how Surrey County Council delivers services. The Council is tackling inequality in all aspects of its work, expressed as 'No One Left Behind'. This is delivered through placing equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of the Council's work and by being a high-performing council which delivers quality, sustainable services for all.

The [Organisation Strategy](#) reinforces the commitment to 'No One Left Behind'. How the Rights of Way Improvement Plan delivers against the four priority areas is shown below.

Growing a Sustainable Economy so Everyone Can Benefit	Tackling Health Inequality	Enabling a Greener Future	Empowered and Thriving Communities
<p>Supporting high quality of life and helping Surrey to be an exemplar place to live, work and do business.</p> <p>Ensuring that new development is sustainable and that it fully contributes to healthy lives, quality of life and the environment, and does not create negative impacts.</p> <p>Supporting rural businesses and the visitor economy.</p> <p>There is economic benefit from the spend of our users in equipping and supporting their activity.</p>	<p>Supporting more people in using public rights of way for their health and mental wellbeing.</p> <p>Working with our partners in health and physical activity with measures to support those in the areas of highest health inequality.</p> <p>Bringing understanding of the communities in greatest need and applying this to our decisions in delivering this Rights of Way Improvement Plan.</p>	<p>Ensuring that public rights of way play their part in supporting active travel, reducing pollution and carbon emissions.</p> <p>Ensuring that public rights of way are recognised as essential green infrastructure assets, which have the potential to support nature and connectivity.</p> <p>Through helping to spread recreational pressures from sensitive nature conservation areas.</p> <p>Addressing carbon emissions in our own work and supply chains.</p>	<p>Public rights of way are free at the point of use, breaking down financial barriers, enabling all to benefit from them.</p> <p>Working with parish councils and other residents' organisations to listen to their concerns and together improve public rights of way.</p> <p>Listening to communities and understanding their needs when making decisions on improvements.</p> <p>Providing and expanding volunteering opportunities on public rights of way.</p>

Delivering this Rights of Way Improvement Plan

This Rights of Way Improvement Plan sets out objectives and actions over a ten year period. Some of the actions in this Rights of Way Improvement Plan can be delivered within existing resources. However, whilst some progress may be achieved, several of the actions will need additional resources in order to be delivered. Delivery of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will be through an Operation and Delivery Plan which will set out the projects and actions which will be taken forward in a shorter timeframe than this ten year plan.

We will prioritise our work based on the greatest need. Need will be assessed with reference to user safety, the number of users affected or who will benefit and the overall benefit to communities and the public rights of way network. We will be transparent in how we assess this need and publish how we will assess projects and priorities on our webpages.

Delivering many of the actions in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will need partnership working with a range of stakeholders, both existing and new.

We will produce an Annual Report which will set out what has been achieved to deliver the Rights of Way Improvement Plan in the past year and what we plan to achieve in the coming year. This will be published on the Countryside Access Team's web pages. It will also show examples of our work and the projects that the Team have been working on through the year.



Access in Surrey

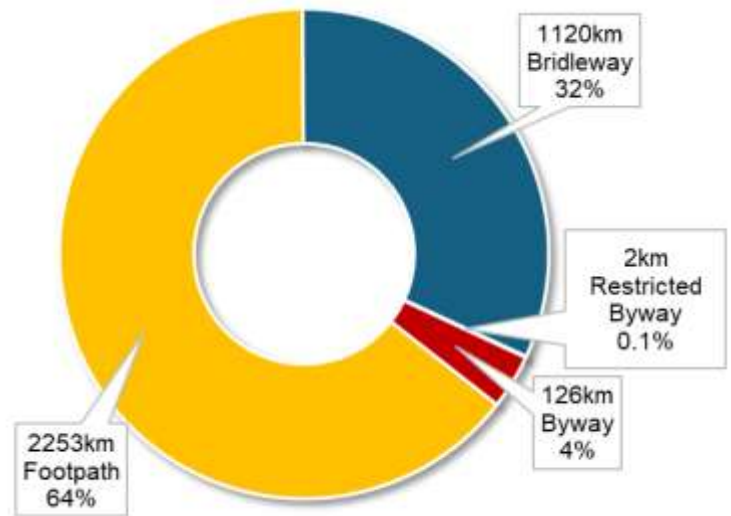
Public Rights of Way

There are 2175 miles (3,501km) of public rights of way in Surrey. Together, we call this the public rights of way network.

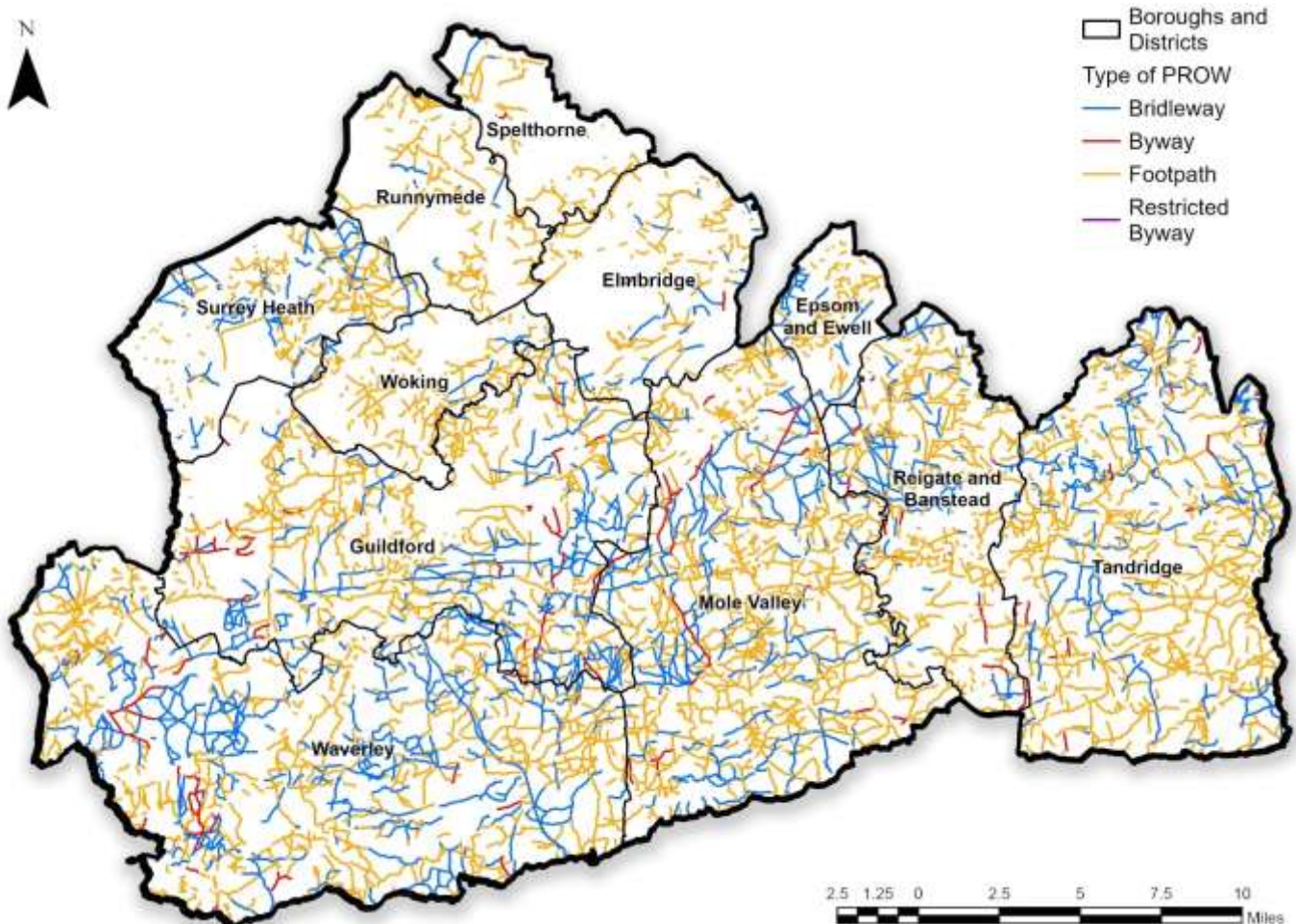
- 64% are footpaths
- 32% are bridleways
- Less than 1% are restricted byways
- 4% are byways open to all traffic

On average, there are 2.1 km of public rights of way per square kilometre and 2.85 metres of public rights of way per person in the county.

Public Rights of Way by Type



Public Rights of Way Network



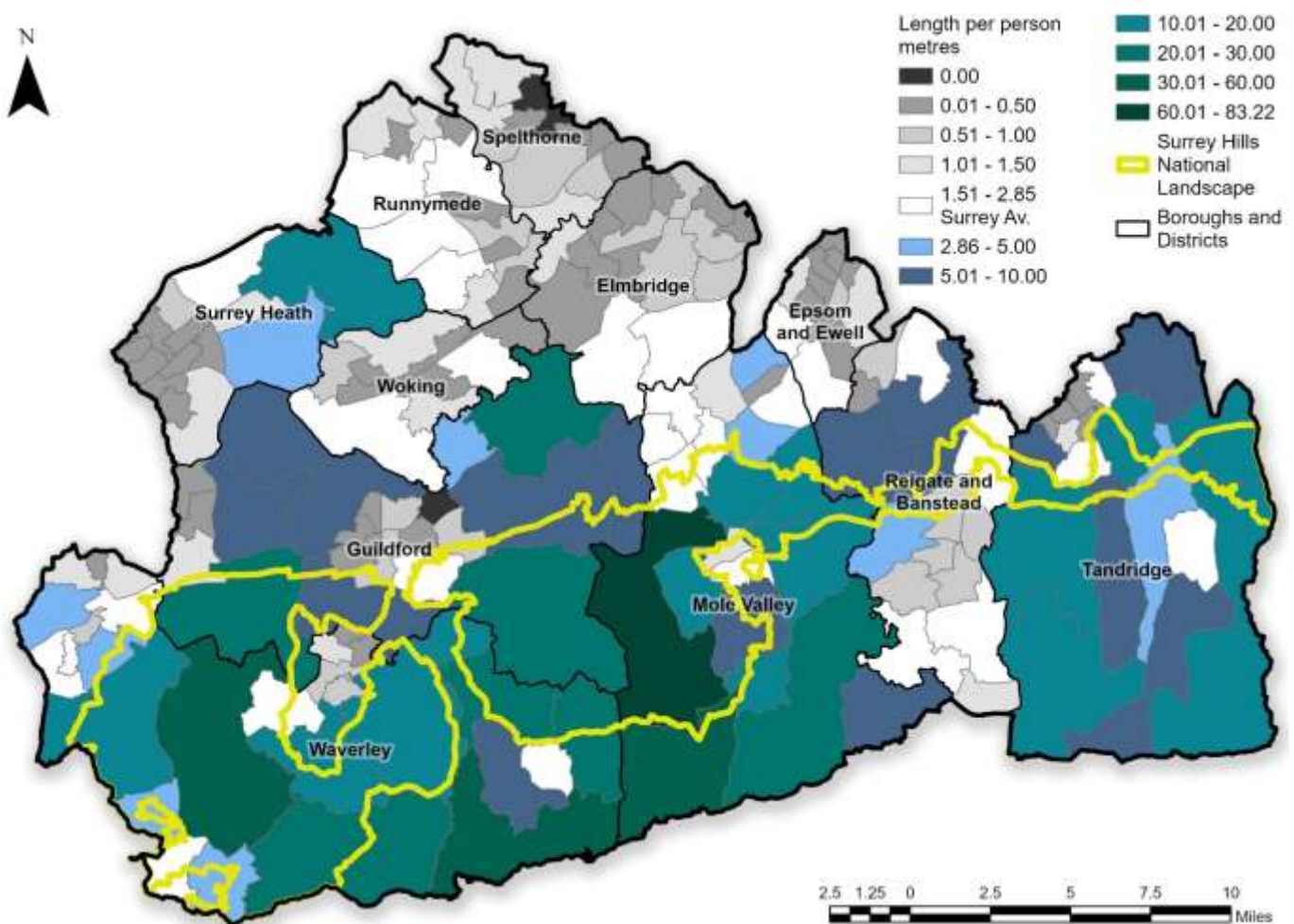
Whilst there is a higher density of public rights of way by area than in neighbouring counties, there is a lower length of public rights of way per person living in Surrey. This, combined with visitors from outside Surrey using public rights of way in the county, means that there are high levels of use of the public rights of way network.

Provision of public rights of way varies a lot across the county. There is a denser network in the south of Surrey compared to the north. This is historic, dating from when public rights of way were first recorded in the 1950s.

There are also more people living in north Surrey which means that there is a much lower provision per person in the north compared with the south. There are also areas with fewer public rights of way in Reigate and Banstead district.

Within the Surrey Hills National Landscape there are currently 727 miles (1,170km) of public rights of way. At 2.8km per square kilometre, this is higher than the Surrey average.

Length of Public Rights of Way per Person, Wards



Greenspaces

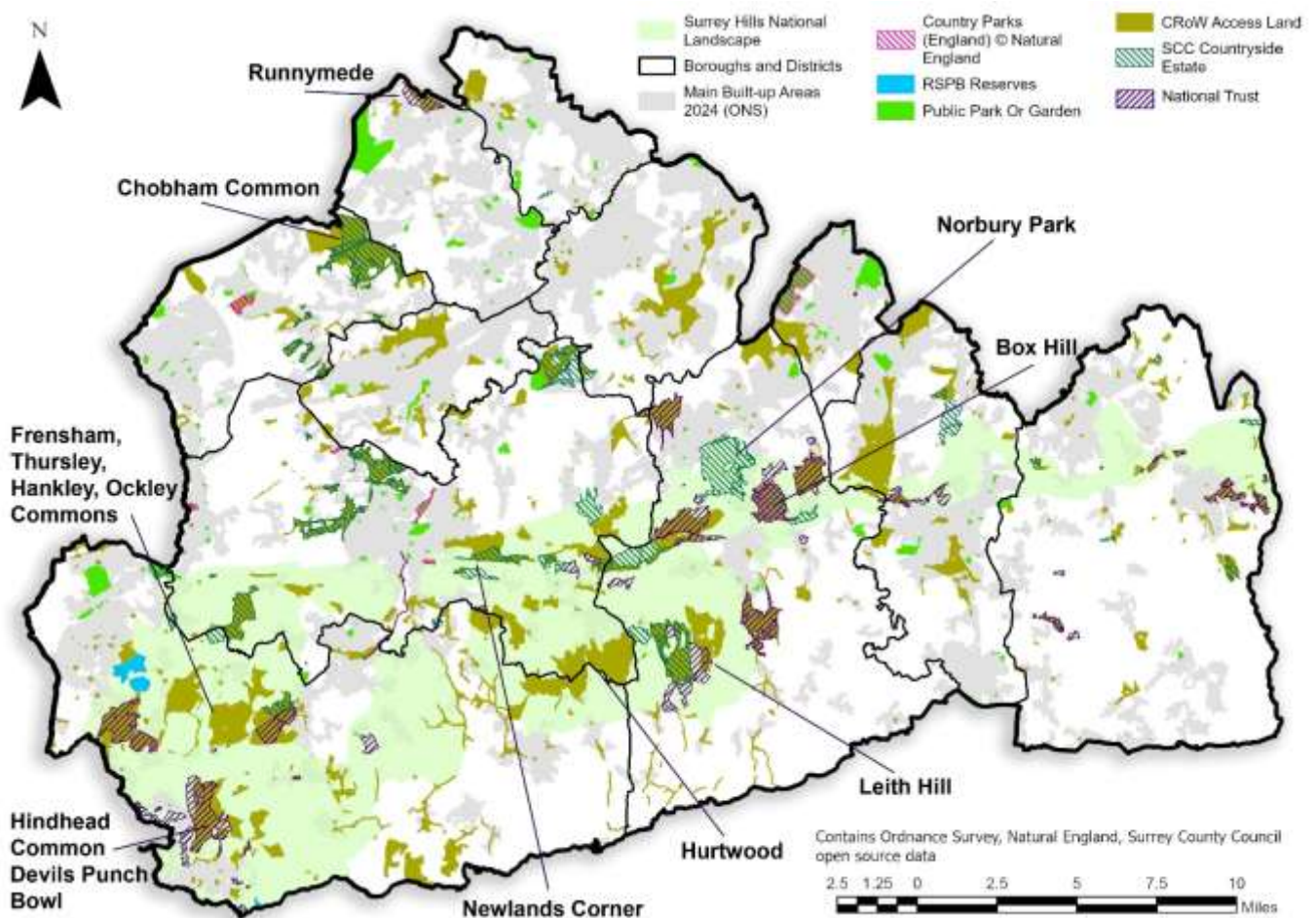
There are also many other greenspaces which people can access. Surrey has several very popular destination sites which attract visitors from across Surrey and beyond. Some of these 'honey pot' sites receive very high visitor numbers.

Surrey County Council owns or manages 2,630 hectares of countryside where people can walk and, on some sites, cycle and ride horses. Popular sites include Newlands Corner, Chobham Common and Norbury Park.

The National Trust also owns many popular sites, mostly in the Surrey Hills National Landscape. Sites include Box Hill, Leith Hill and the Devil's Punchbowl. The borough and district councils of Surrey also own public open spaces, some of which have public rights of way.

People on foot can also use 'Open Access Land'. This is land which the public have the right to access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. There are 11,600 hectares of Open Access Land in Surrey, all over the county. Much of this is common land.

Surrey's Greenspaces



Theme 1: Public Rights of Way are for Everyone



In this theme we set out the needs of our users and how they can be better supported in using public rights of way. We also consider what we know about who uses public rights of way and who doesn't, and how we can support more people in using them. We set out how public rights of way are a resource for everyone, including Disabled People, those who are less mobile or in poor health and those who currently use public rights of way less or not at all.

Needs of Users

Walkers

Walking is the most popular outdoor recreational activity on public rights of way. In our survey 95% of people said they walked either with or without a dog. Walking is also a regular activity - 75% of those dog walking did this frequently (once a week or more) and 61% of walkers without a dog. Sport England's Active Lives Survey recorded that 85% of people in Surrey had walked for leisure at least twice between November 2022 and November 2023. The Active Lives Survey shows that walking for leisure has increased by around 10% overall in the past 10 years, with a high point during the pandemic (2020 – 2021).

Walking is perhaps the nearest activity to perfect exercise for health, being free and the easiest and the most accessible way for most people to increase their physical activity. Walking can be particularly important in increasing exercise in inactive people. There are also economic benefits to walking. Walking routes, especially where they incorporate local shops and hospitality, are an important aspect of the visitor economy.



Participation rates recorded by the Active Lives Survey and our survey vary across the county, with the highest levels in Waverley and Mole Valley districts and lowest in Spelthorne district. Where there is low participation is often where there is poorer health. Spelthorne district also has the lowest length of public rights of way per person, at 0.46m per person, compared to the highest in Mole Valley (7.57m per person) and Waverley (4.37m per person).

Walkers have many areas where they can walk. As well as being able to use all types of public rights of way unlike other users they can also use many other greenspaces, country parks, publicly accessible greenspace and Open Access Land. People also walk for everyday journeys and increasing walking for this reason is being taken forward in Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.

Through our research and engagement the following issues and priorities apply to walkers:

- Roads and traffic are a safety concern in places where there is a need to walk along busy roads or rural roads with poor visibility to connect a route.
- Walkers wanted more information on where to go.
- Inconsiderate use of public rights of way by others was an issue – including poor control of dogs and cyclists travelling at speed.
- Maintenance of the network was important, including vegetation clearance, poor surface condition, maintenance of structures and waymarking.
- Improvements in accessibility were important, especially removing stiles.
- We have identified there is lack of provision for walkers in the north of the county, including in areas where there is poorer health



“ Walking is by far the most cost effective way of keeping physically (and mentally) well.

Survey respondent

”

Cyclists

Cycling is only permitted on part of the public rights of way network – on bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. There is also a network of cycle routes, mainly in urban areas, which are provided mainly for active travel for everyday journeys and several National Cycle Network routes. In reality cycling for leisure and for everyday journeys overlap and many people do both. Expansion of routes for active travel are being taken forward in Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.

In our public survey, 40% of people said that they cycled off-road. This was the second highest activity after walking. More males than females took part in cycling off-road - 60% compared to 45% overall for all activities on public rights of way. Sport England's Active Lives survey shows highest participation in cycling in Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell and Waverley, and lowest participation is lowest in Spelthorne and Reigate and Banstead.

There has been an increase in cycling in recent years in Surrey, partly due to the popularity of cycle races in Surrey including the 2012 Olympics when the road racing route included Box Hill. Cycling also increased during the pandemic. Surrey is a destination area for all forms of cycling. In particular, there are several very popular off-road mountain biking routes in the Surrey Hills National Landscape. Popular areas include Leith Hill, Hurtwood Estate and around Hindhead. Cyclists also come from Surrey from outside the county for the routes on offer.

“ Surrey has a brilliant network of bridlepaths and growing reputation as a cycling destination. It should be an exemplar of how to integrate the network into the transport system while getting people out in the countryside and improving physical and mental health.”

Survey respondent



Cycling is ever-evolving. Gravel bikes which can be ridden over a range of terrain are becoming more popular. The increase in e-assisted bikes can enable people to ride further and for longer and to continue riding when poor health or age might otherwise restrict them. In our survey, 17% of off-road cyclists already used e-assisted bikes and a further 17% said they planned to in the future.

Through our research and engagement the following issues and priorities apply to cyclists:

- Perception that major infrastructure projects often overshadow the need for maintaining existing paths.
- Maintaining and improving surfaces.
- Better connection of the public rights of way network needed.
- High traffic on roads and dangerous crossings.
- Increased use of rights of way by different groups, including cyclists, walkers, and horse riders, has led to potential conflicts.
- The need for better communication, education, and signage to promote awareness and respect between user groups.

Equestrians

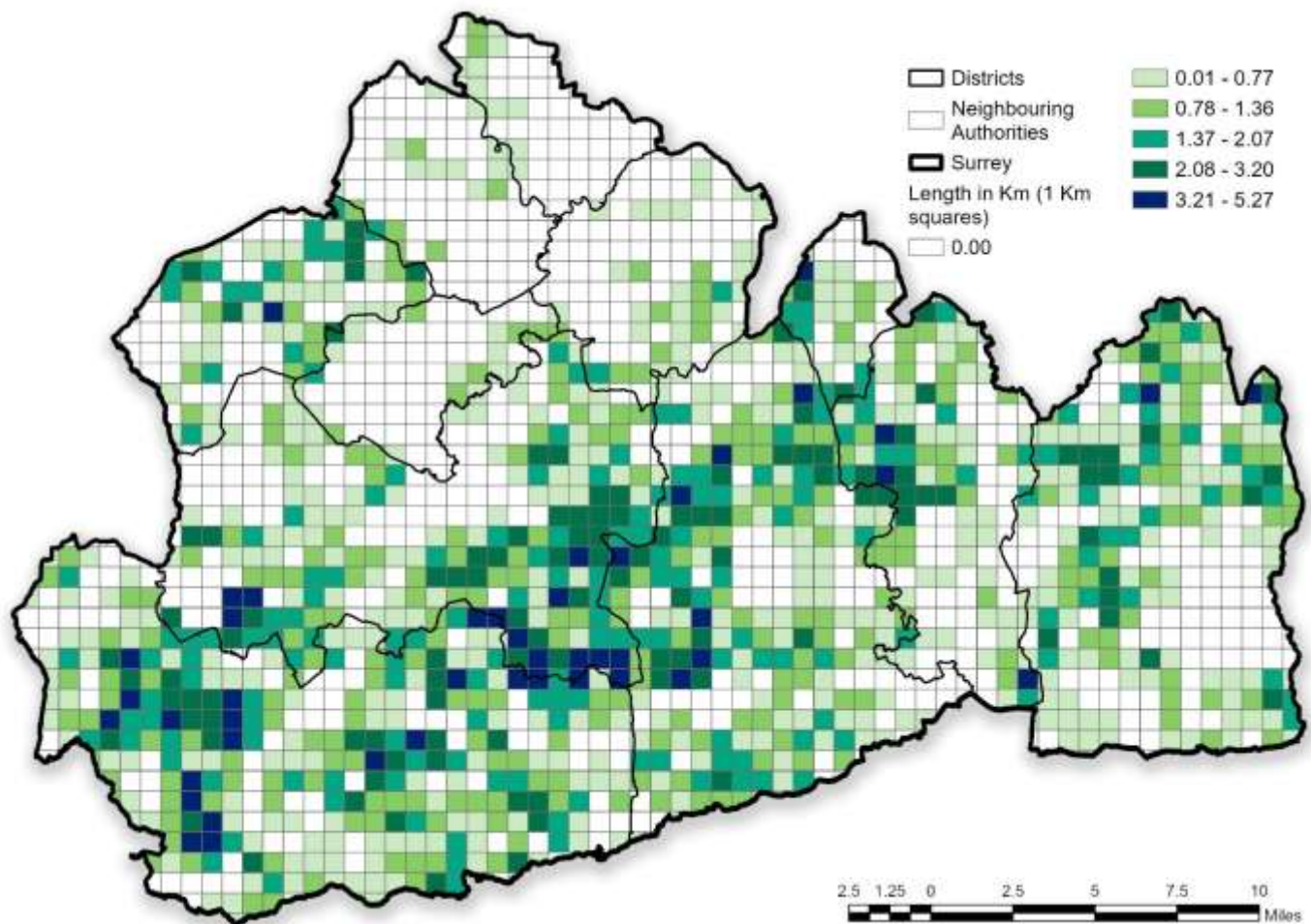
Recreational equestrianism on public rights of way includes horse riding (hacking) and carriage driving. Carriage drivers can use restricted byways and byways open to all traffic and horse riders can also use public bridleways. In our survey, 19% of people rode horses and 2% were carriage drivers. Horse riding was the activity which the most people did frequently – once a week or more – at 82%. In line with national figures, our survey showed that far more females take part (92% female). There are health and wellbeing, as well as physical activity benefits from equestrian activities. Disabled People can also often take part in equestrianism.



Data on horse passports (based on the owner's home) shows the highest number of horses in west Surrey, particularly around Woking, Guildford, Godalming and Farnham, as well as Dorking, Leatherhead, Epsom and Horley. Our survey also showed that people living in London ride horses in Surrey – 10% of horse riders lived in a London Borough.

Provision of public rights of way for equestrians varies across Surrey but overall there is higher provision than neighbouring counties. There are some areas with dense and well-connected networks but other areas where the network is disconnected and some area where there are very few of these public rights of way.

Density of Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to all Traffic (1km squares)



The road network and high levels of traffic present particular issues for equestrians as they cannot use all public rights of way and must use roads to connect routes. High traffic flows on many major roads make crossing impossible. Although traffic on other roads and rural lanes may be lower, crossing or traversing along these can also be hazardous. There were 286 incidents involving motor vehicles reported to the British Horse Society in Surrey between March 2021 - October 2024. However, it is estimated that only around 1 in 10 incidents are reported.

Through our research and engagement the following issues and priorities apply to equestrians:

- The need for maintenance, particularly overgrowth and poor surfaces.
- Accessible equestrian gates.
- Roads are increasingly busy and unsafe for equestrians. Options for addressing this include use of verges, signage and motorists adhering to the Highway Code, routes on adjacent land running parallel to the road and improved crossings.
- There was a desire for improved and extended bridleway networks, particularly in areas with limited off-road riding options, and requests that routes are upgraded for equestrian use.
- Lack of safe parking for horseboxes and trailers was identified as a barrier to accessing bridleways.
- Surfacing on new and upgraded routes needs to be horse friendly.
- Concerns were raised about inconsiderate behaviour from some cyclists and dog walkers, including dogs running loose and cyclists passing too fast or close.

“ I want to convey how much horse riding means to me as a person with a life changing injury which has resulted in limitations to my mobility. Horse riding is my lifeline and enables me to access the countryside safely and independently. I would not exercise if I couldn't horse ride. Access to safe off road riding on the public rights of way is essential to my health and mental wellbeing.

”

Email received



Motorised Vehicle Users

There are many types of mechanically propelled vehicles on public rights of way, including 4x4's and trail bikes. These users can only use byways open to all traffic. The network of these public rights of way is fragmented.

Some users are part of one of several groups which support these users, including the [Green Lane Association \(GLASS\)](#), [LARA \(Land Access and Recreation Association\)](#), the [All Wheel Drive Club](#), the [Association of Land Rover Clubs \(ALRC\)](#) and the [Trail Riders Fellowship \(TRF\)](#). Some of these organisations have local groups in Surrey.



GLASS and LARA both report the health and wellbeing and economic benefits of recreational motorised vehicle use. [GLASS also reports](#) that motor vehicle use is important for people with disabilities as a way to access and enjoy the countryside for their physical and mental health and wellbeing. These organisations, along with the Trail Riders Fellowship, also publish codes of conduct for their users to reduce conflict between users on byways and so that members use the byways responsibly.

“ Using our 4x4, following the GLASS code of conduct, allows my Disabled wife to visit and see the county she loved when she was still able bodied.

Survey respondent ”

In our public survey, 6% said they used public rights of way with a 4x4 vehicle and 5% with a trail bike. There were more males than females - 89% of those using 4x4 vehicles and 64% of trail bike users.

Although all users can to a degree damage the surface of a public right of way, damage by mechanically propelled vehicles is often greater. Damage can also occur from agricultural or forestry vehicles, as well as from leisure use. Maintenance of byway surfaces incurs a high cost to the Council. Sometimes this means that byways need to be closed by a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). The policy for addressing safety, damage and other issues is contained within [Surrey County Council's policy on Traffic Regulation Orders](#), which follows national guidance on the management of byways. A list of byways currently subject to a TRO is published on the [Surrey County Council website](#). These closures further reduce the length of network available to these users.



Through our research and engagement the following issues and priorities apply to motorised vehicle users:

- Users want byways to be kept open and fewer closures through Traffic Regulation Orders.
- More signposts and better education for users. This would help to avoid misunderstandings about which users are allowed on which routes.
- More information and downloadable maps. This would help users to plan their routes and avoid private land.
- Better understanding between different users - walkers, cyclists, and motorcyclists should be more considerate of each other and understand that byways are shared spaces.

Who is Missing from our Public Rights of Way Users?

Our survey was filled in by people who use public rights of way and has given us a clearer understanding of who uses them:

- People tend to be older - 82% were over 45, compared to 46% of Surrey's population.
- There was a lower proportion of people who identified their ethnicity as 'non-White' than the overall Surrey population.
- 8% said they had a long-standing illness or disability affecting their day-to-day life, compared with 14% of people in the Census 2021 whose day-to-day life was limited 'a little' or 'a lot'.
- Fewer people responded from the more deprived areas of Surrey.

Whilst this profile reflects national patterns and so is not unique to Surrey, it does mean that people across the county may not be using public rights of way to an equal extent. Those who did not respond, and therefore who may be using public rights of way less often, are younger people, people from ethnic minorities, those in more deprived areas and those with disabilities or who have poorer health.

From our engagement work we understand that a range of factors stop people from using public rights of way, including lack of information, lack of confidence and safety concerns; but that there is interest and demand. We want to work with stakeholder organisations and our partners to help them to support people from minority ethnic groups, younger people, Disabled People and those who live in more deprived areas to access public rights of way for their benefit.



Supporting Health and Wellbeing

Being physically active, particularly in nature, improves health and wellbeing and is particularly beneficial for mental health. Public rights of way offer hundreds of miles of routes where people can increase their activity, all free of charge. We want more people to be able to access this resource to improve their health and quality of life.

Rights of way are important for improving health and wellbeing through:

- Supporting leisure and recreation in nature, for better physical health and mental wellbeing.
- Providing access in areas of high health inequality - being free at the point of use also removes financial barriers.
- Providing safe walking, cycling and wheeling routes for day-to-day travel, supporting people being active in their everyday lives.
- Supporting social and community activities, such as healthy walking groups.

Our survey showed us how important public rights of way are to people for their health and wellbeing. 90% said they used public rights of way to improve their physical health, 85% to improve their mental wellbeing and 91% to access nature and enjoy the landscape.

Surrey's health and wellbeing is generally good compared with national averages. However, there are some areas of health inequalities. Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022 highlights 21 priority areas in parts of Spelthorne, Runnymede and urban Guildford and Woking. Sport England's Active Lives survey also show that the areas in Surrey with the highest levels of inactivity are Spelthorne and Woking districts.

Most of these areas with poor health are in urban areas. There is lower provision of public rights of way in central urban areas but there are urban edge routes linking to the countryside and town paths. The routes within urban areas can also be improved to support people in using them for everyday activity.



It is increasingly evident when looking at obesity levels and the mental issues that many are experiencing, that we need to do what we can to support, prevent or minimise such challenges in society. Nature and exercise are incredibly beneficial. Put the two together and you have the perfect medicine. When the NHS and social care provision is struggling, encouraging people to look after their physical and mental health better is surely a win-win for a comparatively much smaller overall cost.

Survey respondent



We have compared our public rights of way network with indicators of health and deprivation. Deprivation measures a range of indicators, including health and well-being, education and skills, income, crime and other factors.

- We know that more people in northern Surrey have poor health and are more likely to be inactive. There are more areas of deprivation in the north of the county and higher levels of pollution and traffic. People living in these areas also have less access to public rights of way and therefore those routes may be more intensively used.
- We know that in southern Tandridge and Reigate and Banstead districts, where there is poorer health and higher levels of deprivation, public rights of way make a larger contribution to where people can access greenspace than in the rest of the county. In these areas public rights of way are a particularly important for people to be physically active in the outdoors.

We will work with our partners in Active Surrey, Public Health and teams progressing active travel to explore further how public rights of way can help to address health inequalities.

Disabled People

Many Disabled People or people with reduced mobility or other health issues may be prevented from accessing public rights of way as much as they would like. This is due to a range of factors which, if addressed, would enable them to access public rights of way more.

The [People and Nature Survey](#) reveals that Disabled People visit greenspaces less often than who are not Disabled, with the reasons most often related to conditions not being suitable to support their needs. The population in Surrey is also ageing, which means more people will be Disabled or in poor health in the future.

They are a range of factors which Disabled People face when accessing public rights of way. The [Sensory Trust](#)'s 'access chain' shows what is needed from the first decision to visit a site, through the journey, arrival and visit. It is important that attention is paid to each of these links to improve access for Disabled People.

“ We all deserve to enjoy the great outdoors. Please, take into consideration access issues we face as wheelchair and mobility scooter users. ”
Survey respondent

Barriers Disabled People when visiting the countryside

- Physical barriers, such as steps, steep gradients, stiles and gates
- Lack of information on access conditions and facilities and lack of accessible information.
- Lack of confidence, low expectations, not feeling welcome, fear over safety or of getting lost
- Lack of convenient and accessible public transport
- Lack of seating and opportunities to rest or take shelter, toilets and other facilities and support for carers
- Cost of transport, parking fees and refreshments
- Poor maintenance

Many structures, such as stiles, are in place to support land management and are the responsibility of the landowner. The nature of the countryside means that not all paths can be fully accessible to all people. However, we adopt the 'least restrictive access' principle, which means that when either the Countryside Access Team or landowner needs to replace structures we aim for the most accessible option. Since the last Rights of Way Improvement Plan we have worked with landowners to remove over 400 stiles from the network.

“ My son has autism and these rights of way are a great help to him and us in regulating his emotions and mental health.
Survey respondent ”

Least Restrictive Access

The law requires that public rights of way provision for Disabled People has to be considered equally with that of other visitors. The spirit of this policy is based on the 'Least Restrictive Access' principle. This means that the 'least restrictive' structure should be chosen where possible. Removing a structure altogether is the most accessible option, then a gate or kissing gate and with a stile the most restrictive. All structures on public rights of way should meet the highest possible construction standards. Least restrictive access aims are that improvements will benefit all users not only those with restricted mobility.

We will also expect that routes affected by development are made as accessible as possible, both through the development site and in the surrounding area. We will also expect new or diverted public rights of way to meet the highest accessibility standard, meeting the British Standard where possible.

Greater information also supports more people in using public rights of way and helps Disabled People to make their own decisions before they visit. Our online public rights of way map could, in the future, help us to provide some of this information so that people can confidently plan their own routes. [Surrey County Council](#) also has a range of 'Easier Walks' and we will provide support for these to be as physically accessible as possible. We will also encourage other site managers to improve information for Disabled People.

To best serve Disabled People we may target improvements to make areas more accessible and ensure that they are better connected. We will work with partners to understand how and where we should do this, for example improving access around areas where there is good parking and facilities. We will also continue to work with our partners and Disabled People to improve our understanding of their needs and how we can improve access.

“ I became suddenly unable to walk more than 20 metres a few years ago having been a dog walker most of my life. The countryside round here is like my back garden - I have walked it for over 40 years and I didn't want to stop now. I wish, really wish, that other Disabled or elderly folk had access to off road mobility scooters and the chance to experience being out in the fresh air, under their own steam and independently. The mental health benefits are priceless - it lifts your spirits to sit under the trees listening to the birds. It gives me a social life and I wish other lonely and vulnerable folk had the chance.
Survey respondent ”

Objectives

Objective 1

To improve our understanding of the needs of all our users, including those presently under-represented, to make sure that the rights of way network continues to evolve to meet their current and future needs.




We will continue to talk to our users to improve our understanding of their needs. We will work alongside other partners to help to support our users and to reach those who are currently under-represented. We will seek to address the areas which are priorities for them through delivering this Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The actions in this plan, taken in their entirety, support both our current and future users.

Objective 2





That the network is as accessible as possible to as many people as possible, regardless of their physical mobility, disability, ethnicity, age, income or other factors, through working with partners, improving the quality of the network and providing information.

We can do this through working alongside our partners, including in health, Active Surrey, the Surrey Coalition for Disabled People, the voluntary sector and others, to prioritise improvements to where these will provide the greatest benefit. We will ensure that the principles of least restrictive access are applied on any new or diverted routes and across the public rights of way network when surface repairs, bridge replacement or infrastructure is installed or replaced, applying British Standard BS5709:2018 wherever possible. We will aim to raise awareness of the contribution public rights of way can make to wider health, wellbeing, mental health, inclusivity and socio-economic goals.

Key to Action Table

Short term: Aiming for delivery in years 1 – 3		Medium term: Aiming for delivery in years 3 – 7		Long term: Aiming for delivery or progress in years 7 – 10	
£	Likely to be deliverable within current financial resources but delivery will be reduced if less resource is available.	££	Partially deliverable within current financial resources but additional resources needed to fully deliver this action.	£££	Some, limited, progress may be achieved within current financial resources but significant additional resources will be needed to fully deliver.
	Likely to be deliverable within current staff resources, but delivery will be reduced if less resource is available.		Partially deliverable within current staff resources, but additional resource needed to fully deliver this action.		Some, limited, progress may be achieved within current staff resources but significant additional resources will be needed to fully deliver.

Actions

Action	Details	Delivery	Resources	Timeframe
Action 1	Establish, and over time evolve, an enhanced mapping interface with improved usability, showing routes and their accessibility, infrastructure, closures and restrictions, public transport and other information to support all users to make route choices.	Countryside Access Team	£££ 	Medium to long term
Action 2	Identify priority areas for improving accessibility on the public rights of way network and deliver improvements to create continuous networks of more accessible routes.	Countryside Access Team, SCC Health and Social Care, Active Surrey, Surrey Coalition for Disabled People, VCS organisations	£££ 	Throughout the plan
Action 3	Work in partnership with landowners to continue to remove stiles from the network.	Countryside Access Team, landowners, parish councils, Ramblers' Association	££ 	Throughout the plan
Action 4	Alongside our partners, including in public health, Active Surrey, the voluntary sector and others to raise awareness of the contribution and use of public rights of way to health, wellbeing, mental health, inclusivity and socio-economic goals. Embed these into policy and seek to secure additional funding for delivery of projects and improvements.	Countryside Access Team and a range of local authority and VCS partners including the Surrey Coalition for Disabled People	£ 	Throughout the plan

- Actions relating to maintenance of public rights of way are covered in [Theme 2: Maintaining and Protecting the Network](#).
- Actions relating to connectivity and traffic are covered in [Theme 3: Future Surrey](#).
- Signage and waymarking is important for new and less confident users. Actions relating to this are covered in [Theme 4: Communication and Partnerships](#).

Theme 2: Maintaining and Protecting the Network



The condition of the public rights of way network has a direct impact on the enjoyment of its many users. This makes the Countryside Access Team an important frontline service and the work of maintaining and protecting public rights of way is therefore at the core of its work. In this theme we set out how we maintain and protect public rights of way. This includes making sure the legal record of public rights of way is up to date and carrying out the essential work which underpins this Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Assets and Responsibilities

Surrey's public rights of way network is highly used. Some areas are very busy with high visitor numbers around the urban and villages fringes and there are several very popular 'honey pot' sites, some of which have public rights of way.

Public rights of way are public highways and, with a few exceptions, are publicly maintainable. It is important that the network is open and available to everyone who wants to use it. Legally we have a duty to maintain public rights of way to a standard that meets the needs of ordinary usage. However, we are not responsible for all aspects of maintaining public rights of way and landowners are responsible for some areas. Therefore we look to work in partnership with landowners to make sure that public rights of way are in a good condition for the public.

There are thousands of structures on public rights of way. We have calculated that the value of all public rights of way these assets, including bridges, is around 98 million pounds. We have made positive changes since the last Rights of Way Improvement Plan which help people to use public rights of way and which make them more accessible. There are over 500 more roadside fingerposts showing the start of public rights of way. There are 412 fewer stiles and over 500 more accessible gates and gaps.

Surrey County Council

Keep the surface fit for public use.

Clearing surface vegetation.

Make sure obstructions are removed.

Maintain steps and some bridges.

Contribute to landowner costs for stiles in some cases.

Signs where a public right of way leaves the road and waymarking along the route where needed.

Landowners

Reinstating and clearing paths crossing arable land.

Cutting back trees or hedges overhanging the path.

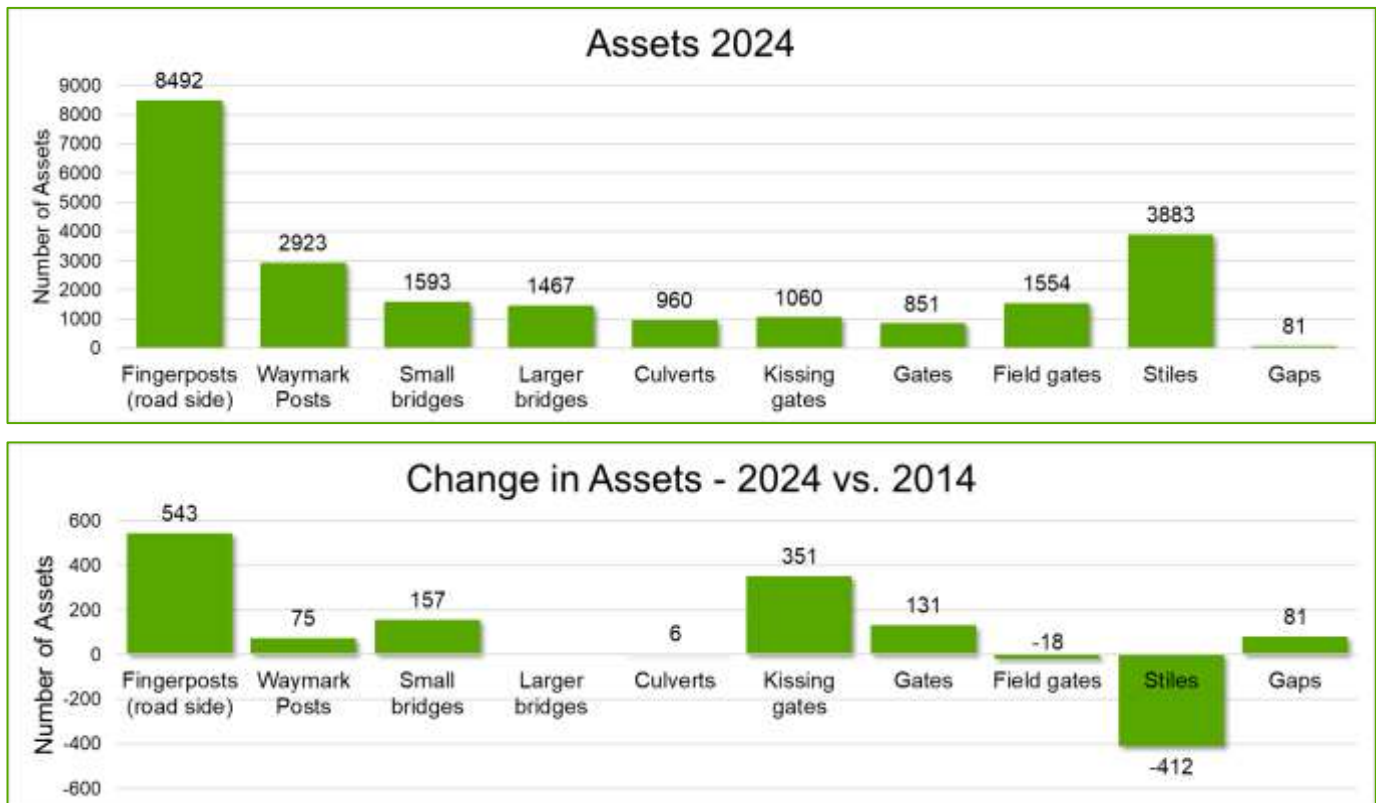
Keeping the route clear of obstructions.

Not ploughing or cropping field edge paths.

Installing and maintaining gates and stiles for controlling livestock.

Provide bridges if the need arises from the action of a landowner

Main Assets on Public Rights of Way (top), Change in Assets (bottom)



We prioritise our work in line with our [maintenance priority statement](#). This enables work to be categorised by safety and prioritised accordingly. Safety will continue to be our highest priority for implementing works. When making decisions on works and improvements we will also use our local knowledge of use and community interest, alongside how well the works align with the objectives and deliver the actions of this Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Examples of this could include (but are not confined to) a circular walk from an accessible point, improved connectivity, routes to school, public transport connections or another point of interest or opportunities to dedicate bridleways or to improve accessibility.

Views of Our Users

In our surveys we asked people about the condition of public rights of way and how it affected them. The issue which most concerned them was overgrown paths. Nearly three quarters told us it had a negative impact on them. Second was poor surfaces, at 68% and third, at 51%, were blocked paths. Parish Councils held similar views. 68% told us they were dissatisfied with vegetation and 76% that they were dissatisfied with surfaces.

We asked whether people thought the condition of public rights of way had improved or declined over the ten years since the last Rights of Way Improvement Plan. 39% thought they had improved or stayed the same,

Top issues which affect the public



whilst 48% thought they had declined. Overgrown paths, poor surfaces and lack of overall maintenance were again the top reasons for why they perceived a decline. More fingerposts, improved surfaces and stiles being replaced by gates were given as positive improvements in the past ten years.

Some of the reasons given for a decline in condition are not in our control, including the perception of more dogs, increased wear and tear due to more people since the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of climate change and more traffic. However, we have taken these into account when setting the priorities of this plan as they are issues which are important to our users.

Areas of Maintenance

Vegetation

Users told us that keeping paths clear is important to them. Vegetation clearance is a challenge we face every growing season. Surface vegetation is the responsibility of the Council whilst vegetation overhanging the path or growing from the sides, and crops, are the responsibility of the landowner.

Our annual vegetation clearance schedule includes routes which we know have high use, including routes to school or other facilities. We also respond to reports of overgrown vegetation by clearing the path ourselves or requiring others who are responsible to do so. We will continue to review our annual clearance schedule to include as many high priority routes as possible, given our resources. We will explore cost-effective ways of managing vegetation to help resources stretch further, including working with landowners and parish councils. In the spring we will publish the annual vegetation schedule on our webpages to make it easier for people to find this information.

Users told us that vegetation growing from the sides narrows paths which causes particular problems on busy routes. It can also mean that surfaces become degraded more quickly. Keeping this vegetation under control is the landowner's responsibility. We will explore ways to improve this message and also consider requests for a heavier winter cut to improve access along rights of way that are becoming too narrow.



Signs and Waymarking

We are responsible for providing signage where the public right of way leaves a hard surfaced road. To help people to follow the route where there may be some confusion we may also install waymarkers, signs or fingerposts along the path.

Waymarking and signage can help those users who are less confident. Landowners also told us that waymarking routes helps stop people straying. This includes the Ministry of Defence who told us about the clear dangers to people when they stray from the public rights of way.

There are several self-guided routes promoted by different organisations, including the National Trails. This has led to a range of waymarking being put in place which can be confusing for the user. We will work with partners to standardise the approach to waymarking, remove outdated signs and to make sure waymarking is maintained.



Bridges

There are many types of bridges on public rights of way. The Council maintains most bridges which are there for the purpose of only carrying the public right of way. We inspect all our bridges on a rolling programme for safety reasons and repair them as needed. There are also many bridges on public rights of way that are privately owned and maintained.

When we replace bridges, wherever possible, we will improve accessibility, for example increasing widths, installing ramps and providing handrails. We will continue to innovate using new materials and designs to increase durability.

Stiles, Gates and Gaps

Barriers such as stiles or gates are allowed when landowners need to control livestock so that users can go across fences. Landowners are responsible for maintaining stiles and gates.

Some people find it difficult to climb over stiles. We have significantly reduced the number of stiles on the public rights of way network since the last Rights of Way Improvement Plan and we will continue to make this a priority. We will always aim for the least restrictive option; however as landowners are responsible for stiles, we can only do this with their agreement and look to work in partnership with them.



Gates on bridleways can create difficulties and hazards for both horse and rider and can be restrictive to others who have reduced mobility. Where funding allows, we will work with landowners to help ensure that gates are easy to use and make sure any new equestrian gates conform to the current British Standard.

Path Surfaces

Surrey County Council is responsible for the surface of a public rights of way, to a standard suitable for its classification and the lawful use by the public. A large part of our rights of way network is rural and so most have a natural surface. This is usually suitable for users and surfacing is not needed or appropriate in the countryside. Some landowners may choose to surface a public right of way, but under law we are not obliged to maintain this to the same standard.

If the route is surfaced, care needs to be taken to ensure the surface is suitable for all users. Hard surfacing can be needed for routes for commuting to work or school. The choice of surface on multi-user routes is important, as different users have different needs. Some asphalts, for example, are not a good choice for horses. Surrey County Council has recognised that where there are surfaced public rights of way, usually in urban areas, that they may need a higher level of maintenance. These paths have been designated as 'Town Paths' and Surrey Highways inspect and maintain the surface of these, along with bridges, drains and street lighting.

In some areas there are high levels of use which damage surfaces and remove surface vegetation, leading to a less robust surface. Some soils and geology are less able to withstand this. On the very steep slopes of the Surrey Hills water erosion can lead to gullying and exposed, slippery chalk. This will increase due to heavier rainfall episodes becoming more frequent through climate change. In western Surrey there are very sandy soils. The vegetation here can become denuded leaving pure sand and exposed tree roots or bedrock. In the south of the county the soils have more clay which can lead to waterlogging and poaching in the winter which sets unevenly in the drier months.

Surface condition can also be adversely affected by users. This is particularly the case for byways open to all traffic, which can be used by motor vehicles. Maintaining the surface of these routes can be very costly. In some cases we need to close the byway, usually during the winter, to prevent unacceptable damage to the surface. A list of permanently or seasonally closed byways is listed on our [website](#).



Ploughing and Cropping

If a path crossing an arable field is ploughed, the landowner must make sure the path is levelled and clearly marked within two weeks. The path must be kept clear through the crop. Public rights of way following the edge of a field (headland) must not be ploughed under any circumstances. We work in co-operation with landowners to make sure they are aware of their responsibilities.

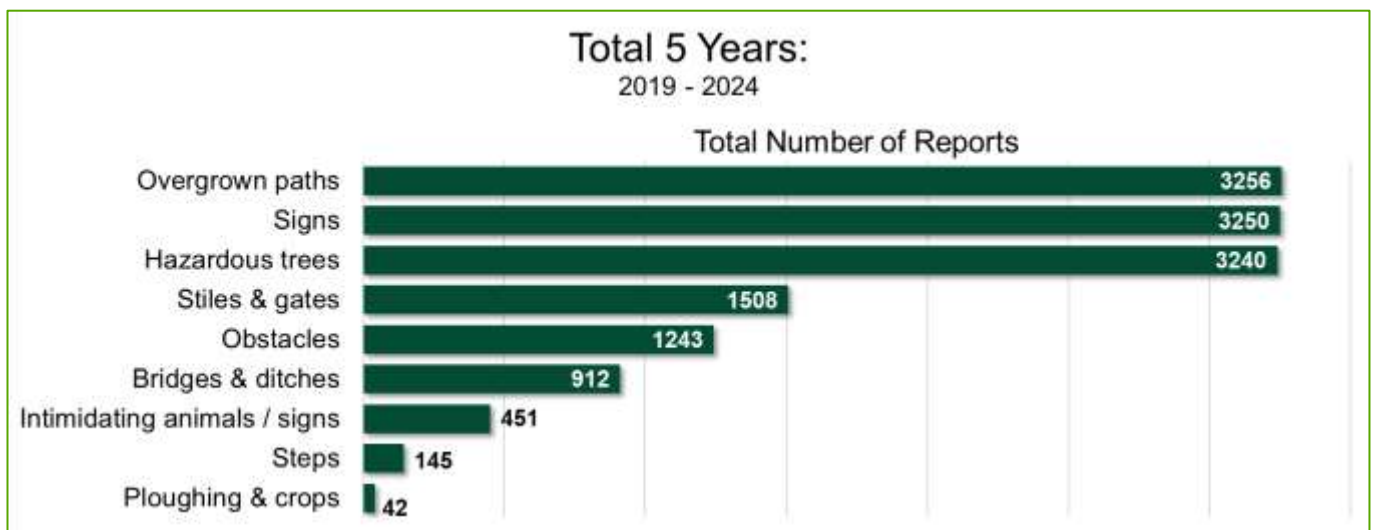
Issues on Public Rights of Way

We receive reports of around 300 issues each month. Over the past five years this is an average of 3,617 each year. There has not been a significant change in the number of reports received during the last five years, although there was an increase in 2021 reflecting the higher number of users during the pandemic.

Over the past five years we have received almost equal numbers of reports for overgrown paths (average 651 reports annually), signs (average of 650 reports annually) and hazardous trees (average of 648 reports annually).

In our public survey, some users told us that the online mapping system for reporting issues was not easy to use. Users also told us they wanted more feedback on the status of the problem and its resolution. We will investigate ways this can be improved and how we can make reporting problems more accessible.

Reported issues 2019 - 2024



Enforcement

It is illegal to obstruct or encroach onto a public right of way, for example through fencing, locking a gate across it, installing unauthorised structures, reducing its width, dumping rubbish or interfering with its surface. Crops, vegetation and trees can also obstruct a public right of way.

Although we prefer to negotiate to resolve issues, sometimes we need to take enforcement action to protect the rights of the public. In our survey 51% of people had encountered 'fallen trees or other obstructions on the route' and 21% 'paths deliberately blocked'. We know that keeping routes clear is important to our users and we will use our enforcement powers to tackle this with the landowner where appropriate.

The Definitive Map and Legal Records

The [definitive map and statement](#) form the legal record of public rights of way and are the basis for all of our work. The map shows the location and the statement shows the details of all recorded public rights of way. These records must be made available to the public. They can be viewed at our offices by appointment.

The legal work to record, protect and vary public rights of way is an essential part of managing the network. Many of the ambitions of this Rights of Way Improvement Plan to create better connections, provide multi-user routes, support landowners and help ensure public safety all rely on this area of work.

We have a duty to keep these records up to date and under continuous review. In certain circumstances the law allows us to make either permanent or temporary changes to public rights of way. There are two main ways to permanently amend the legal record.

A Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) is made when evidence shows that the record should be modified, for example by adding routes which have acquired public access rights following long public use, or unrecorded historical routes. Other changes may amend the recorded status of a right of way (e.g. from footpath to bridleway), change the details in the statement or remove a wrongly recorded public right of way.

Public Path Orders (PPOs) divert, extinguish or create public rights of way. Such orders are a power, not a duty, and can be made by the Council or following an application from a landowner or the public. When considering such an application we would always look for public benefit, such as reducing the number of structures or improving surfaces. Any alternative route must be safe and of sufficient width. For new or diverted paths we seek the highest standard of accessibility possible and look to attain the British Standard BS 5709:18 for any structures.

To ensure the safety of the public on the network we may also close or restrict use of a right of way on a temporary basis, for example to allow works on utilities or to enable development. We always prioritise public safety while trying to minimise any negative effects on public access. Alternative routes will be suggested wherever possible.

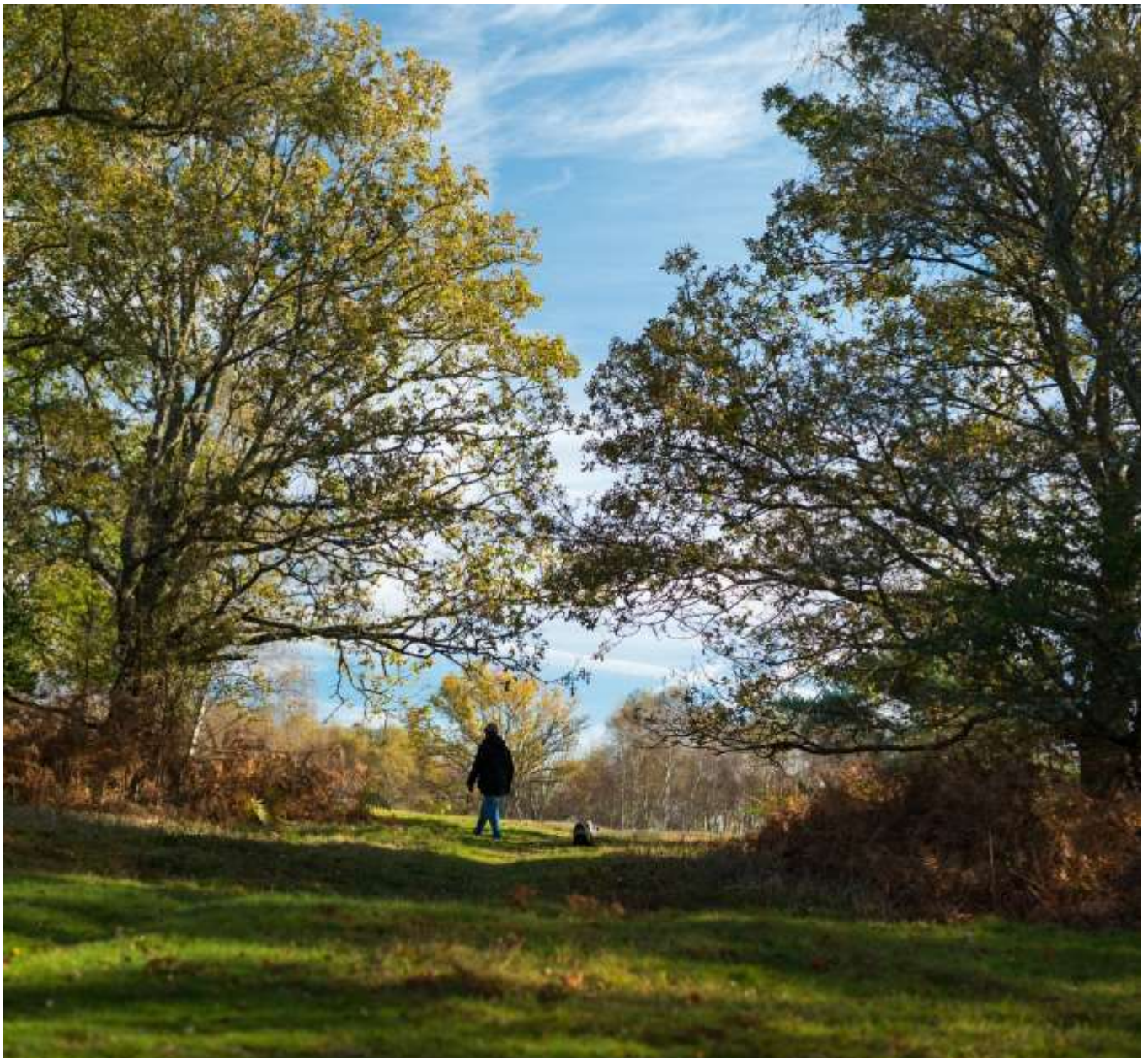
We have powers to restrict the rights of select user groups on a longer term basis. This is normally to close byways open to all traffic to motorised traffic, most typically 4x4s for reasons of safety or damage to a surface. We must balance decisions to restrict rights temporarily or permanently with protecting the legitimate rights of our users. We reviewed our [Traffic Regulation Orders Policy](#) for vehicles in 2022 and undertake to do this on a 10-year basis or if legislation or guidance changes. We always seek to find other solutions to address the issues before we restrict any right, which is a last resort.

Landowners can protect their land from additional rights being claimed by the public as a result of long use. The deposit of a highways or landowner statement and declaration with us, shows the intent of the landowner regarding rights of way. It cannot remove any rights that may already exist but may stop new rights coming into being. This information may be viewed on our website.

We want to help all landowners of village greens, common land and access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act to understand their responsibilities for public access.

Future Changes

The Deregulation Act 2015 proposes several changes to how we process rights of way work and applications. If fully enacted, it will have an effect on service delivery. It may for example lead to more applications from landowners to make changes to public rights of way, with new response timescales required. It may also apply shorter decision timescales for DMMOs.



Objectives

Objective 3

To maintain the network in the best possible condition, prioritising safety and targeting maintenance to where there is the greatest need.

We can do this by improving our understanding of the condition of the network so that we can identify where maintenance and improvements are needed. We will also improve our understanding of our users, including those who are under-represented, and understand the barriers they experience. We will ensure that resources are used effectively through developing partnerships, securing alternative funding sources, working with volunteers, landowners and parish councils. We will produce an enforcement policy so it is clear, both to the public and landowners, when action is likely to be taken.

Objective 4

To improve the condition of the public rights of way network through supporting others with a responsibility towards public rights of way, including landowners.







We can do this through providing information, advice and liaison to help landowners and others who have responsibilities to understand their obligations and through practical support such as additional waymarking.

Objective 5







To uphold the Council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement which is accessible to the public, and to execute other work streams in relation to legal work to record, protect and vary public rights of way, in order to underpin the objectives and actions in this Rights of Way Improvement Plan.





We will make sure our online information is up to date and accessible and our legal duties in relation to public rights of way, which underpin many other areas of our work, are executed.

Key to Action Table

Short term: Aiming for delivery in years 1 – 3		Medium term: Aiming for delivery in years 3 – 7		Long term: Aiming for delivery or progress in years 7 – 10	
	Likely to be deliverable within current financial resources but delivery will be reduced if less resource is available.		Partially deliverable within current financial resources but additional resource needed to fully deliver this action.		Some, limited, progress may be achieved within current financial resources but significant additional resources will be needed to fully deliver.
	Likely to be deliverable within current staff resources, but delivery will be reduced if less resource is available.		Partially deliverable within current staff resources, but additional resource needed to fully deliver this action.		Some, limited, progress may be achieved within current staff resources but significant additional resources will be needed to fully deliver.

Actions

Action	Details	Delivery	Resources	Timeframe
Action 5	Condition survey of the network to update location, condition and accessibility of structures and surfaces, and to be better informed to adapt to climate change impacts.	Countryside Access Team	££ 	Medium to long term
Action 6	Draw up an enforcement policy and publish on webpages.	Countryside Access Team	£ 	Short term and throughout the plan
Action 7	Develop an approach to prioritising surfacing works and to score these against the greatest need and impact. We will publish an explanation of the themes on our webpages.	Countryside Access Team	£ 	Short term and throughout the plan
Action 8	Improve usability of our reporting system for customers and consider ways to improve feedback on the status of the problem.	Countryside Access Team, SCC Highways	££ 	Short to medium term
Action 9	Continue to review the vegetation maintenance schedule to address areas of greatest need and impact. Publish on webpages. Identify routes where vegetation from the sides is having the greatest impact on users and address this through winter cuts or enforcement.	Countryside Access Team, landowners	££ 	Short term and throughout the plan
Action 10	Develop our working in partnership with parish and town councils and the major landowners who provide public access to achieve the best possible outcomes for the network and harnessing all available resources.	Countryside Access Team, parish / town councils, landowners including National Trust, MoD, Hurtwood Estate, Forestry England and others.	£ 	Throughout the plan

Action	Details	Delivery	Resources	Timeframe
Action 11	Maintain and update the definitive map and statement of public rights of way as well as the Register of Commons and Town and Village Greens.	Countryside Access Team	£ 	Throughout the plan
Action 12	Redraw the definitive map and statement and republish in a digital format.	Countryside Access Team	££ 	Medium
Action 13	Reduce the backlog of DMMO work with the aim of meeting the proposed new 12 month determination timeframe under the Deregulation Act.	Countryside Access Team	££ 	Medium to long term
Action 14	To introduce new working practices and requirements set out in the proposed Deregulation Act and consolidate the definitive map and statement by 2030	Countryside Access Team	££ 	Medium term

- Actions relating to maintenance of public rights of way are covered in [Theme 2: Maintaining and Protecting the Network](#).
- Actions relating to communication and partnerships with landowners and parish and town councils are covered in [Theme 4: Communication and Partnerships](#).

Theme 3: Future Surrey



In this theme we address the issues which are shaping Surrey now and in the future. Central to this is sustainability – in development, in protecting our outstanding natural assets for future generations and in responding to climate change.

Transport, Active Travel and Liveable Places

Roads and Traffic in Surrey

Surrey has one of the busiest road networks in the country. There is high congestion across the county and Surrey's roads carry over 60% more than the national average amount of traffic.

Traffic has a negative impact on all our users. The traffic flows on many major roads, especially dual carriageways, make crossing impossible and they create significant barriers to accessing public rights of way. Although traffic flows on other roads and rural lanes may be lower, crossing or traversing along them is also difficult in many cases due to traffic. The impact of traffic has been clearly stated to us from all our types of user; in our public survey and through discussions with stakeholders. The impact of traffic on our users undermines other objectives which we are striving to achieve. The levels of traffic and the risk posed also undermines health and wellbeing objectives and quality of life, as users may avoid using public rights of way or feel unsafe doing so. It also affects climate change as people then drive to 'safe' locations and 'honeypot' sites.

Most of our users are classed as vulnerable road users. These users are at a higher risk of injury or death in a collision and the Highway Code was updated in 2022 to prioritise their safety. The code includes a hierarchy of users. Those most at risk are pedestrians, followed by cyclists and people riding horses. Disabled people, older people and children are also equally vulnerable.



Surrey's Local Transport Plan, along with strategies and projects to increase active travel, all aim to reduce congestion and increase travel by sustainable modes. This aims to reduce traffic in the future; but the problem is current and pressing.

The impact of traffic and safety is recognised in Surrey County Council's [Vision Zero](#) Road Safety Strategy. The strategy aims to eliminate all traffic fatalities and serious injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. The strategy seeks to provide a multi-agency response. We will work with the Road Safety Sustainable Travel Team to raise awareness of the needs and concerns our users and ensure that these are reflected in the implementation of the Vision Zero strategy.



Our users and stakeholders have advocated that new public rights of way to connect the network or which provide paths adjacent to roads can help to address this issue. Although this may resolve individual issues this is not an approach which can be delivered across the county at a scale and within a timeframe which will resolve the problem. Each new route often requires considerable resource input; in land compensation, legal costs, staff resource and capital works. We will seek to create new routes to relieve issues but this will be progressed on a priority basis, based on evidence of need, resources and opportunity. Improvement for safety will be the highest priority. We will assess potential routes on a range of evidence, including records of incidents, deliverability and the scale of impact of the project. We may also consider permissive access agreements with landowners where there is a clear public need and where this results in a quicker positive outcome.

Connectivity

Public rights of way are historic routes linking places where people needed to go. In the modern world we find that this network does not connect as well as it could to serve the needs of current users. Disconnected paths can adversely affect all users especially where roads need to be used. Lack of connection is, however, a particular issue for equestrians and cyclists who have a reduced number of public rights of way available and therefore need to use roads more to connect routes. When taking forward connectivity projects, improving safety will be our priority, but we will also consider improvements to support amenity and recreation. We will also consider where improvements are needed to accommodate additional users, for example due to development. We will record requests around where connectivity could be improved and where paths could be upgraded with the input of parish councils, stakeholders, developers and the Countryside Access Team. The work to develop the previous Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the Surrey Countryside Access Forum included scoping of potential connections which will be retained.

Improved crossings may also be beneficial in some places. These are progressed by Surrey County Council Highways on a priority basis across the entire road network. The cost of these is very high and they must conform to road safety standards. Crossings are often not possible on rural national speed limit roads due to inadequate sight lines. We will advocate for crossings, bridges or other solutions where issues are the most severe. There are other solutions which we will explore, including improving sight lines at entrances, signage or staggered barriers for horse riders.

Any increased traffic arising from development and the impact it has on our users must be properly taken into account and recognised by Local Planning Authorities and developers. New housing will also lead to an increased use of nearby public rights of way by new residents. The safety and impact of increased traffic on users, both existing and new, needs to be properly assessed and measures included to address these impacts. This could mean new crossings, realignment of paths or additional paths.

We will also explore additional, supporting measures with partners. Road safety awareness campaigns, in partnership with other organisations such as Surrey Police and the British Horse Society could help to raise awareness of motorists. We will also explore seek additional roadside signing with Surrey County Council Highways.

Active Travel and Liveable Places

Active travel - walking, cycling and wheeling for everyday journeys – brings a range of benefits, including reducing congestion and air pollution. A well-designed, accessible environment can encourage people to walk, cycle and wheel, supporting more active lifestyles.

The public rights of way network is particularly important for creating walkable neighbourhoods and supporting active travel. The origin of public rights of way was as functional routes for people to access places like church, schools, areas of commerce or places of work and they often still link these places.



Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) are ten year plans for investing in walking and cycling. LCWIPs are being developed nationally and Surrey is producing an [LCWIP for every district and borough](#). Each LCWIP identifies priorities and options to expand walking and cycling networks. The LCWIPs aim to increase the number of people who walk, cycle and wheel in their everyday journeys and to make it safe, enjoyable and easy for everyone. They aim to improve access to destinations such as schools, shops, hospitals, workplaces and rail and bus stations. Public rights of way are considered in the LCWIPs as part of the existing network for cycling and walking and some are highlighted as potentially upgraded routes. Whilst the LCWIP may provide some investment to upgrade public rights of way it does not include additional funding for the increased level of maintenance required. Public rights of way may also not be suitable for upgrading to the standard which is required by national guidance. We will work as one Surrey to support initiatives which improve public rights of way for active travel, whilst supporting the needs of our users. We will work with and advise our colleagues in Surrey County Council Highways and the Surrey Hills National Landscape on how best to consider and accommodate as many of our users as possible into these schemes.

There is more that can be done to capitalise on public rights of way in creating liveable places. These routes are part of the fabric of towns and villages and yet are often overlooked as an existing resource which could be used more. They are an essential element of walkable neighbourhoods but sometimes investment is needed in the routes and in signage. We will work with our Surrey County Council colleagues to ensure that public rights of way play their part more fully in creating liveable places to support health, wellbeing and quality of life.

Development

The 11 boroughs and district Local Planning Authorities are currently responsible for producing Local Plans. These set out where housing and other development will take place. The [Surrey Infrastructure Study \(2017\)](#) stated that between 2016 and 2031 Surrey authorities will deliver 65,356 new homes, increasing the population by 106,123 (9%). However, it is likely that these housing figures will significantly increase following the 2024 review of the National Planning Policy Framework and the methodology for calculating housing figures (not available at the time of this plan).

There are constraints to development in Surrey as much of the county is within London's Metropolitan Green Belt or a National Landscape. Most housing development in Local Plans is allocated outside of these areas. A potential revision of planning law to allow building on more land within the 'Grey Belt' could bring development to new areas of the county.

The nine key sub-areas of [Surrey's Place Ambition \(2023\)](#) reflect the current areas allocated for development. In these, the aim is to achieve growth which is proportionate, sustainable, supports health and wellbeing, has the necessary infrastructure investment – including green infrastructure – has quality building and public realm design, is resilient to climate change impacts and is planned and delivered at a local level.

Public rights of way are crucial in delivering sustainable growth – as a green infrastructure asset, in delivering sustainable travel and in supporting health and wellbeing and overall quality of life. There is great potential to enhance access and enjoyment in well-designed development.

We have identified that we need to have earlier, meaningful input in the Local Plan-making process and into the ongoing work in the key sub-areas. There is a need for a strategic approach to assessing use of and impacts on public rights of way as part of the wider green infrastructure network as well as within development sites. Our research has shown us that too often public rights of way are not fully and properly considered in plan-making.

We already work with Local Planning Authorities to ensure that public rights of way through developments are protected and enhanced, along with improvements in the surrounding public rights of way network. We will continue to propose individual projects which can be funded through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds or 'Section 106' agreements. We have already delivered several improvement projects through these methods, although public rights of way improvements are in competition with other community improvements and funding is not guaranteed.

We know that more can and must be achieved to protect and improve public rights of ways in relation to development. The impacts on public rights of way are not confined to within the development 'red line'. We will work proactively to secure the best outcomes for new and existing residents and to support developers in high quality development which supports health, wellbeing and sustainability. This could include connecting routes to shops, schools, roads, travel hubs, leisure destinations, green spaces and into the public rights of way network.

For any new development there will be increased use of the surrounding network by new residents. We know that 94% of people access public rights of way from their homes and therefore new residents will use local public rights of way. We also know 79% of people will follow a route of 1 to 3 miles, and 85% of 3 to 8 miles.



Therefore for any new development we will, where necessary, actively seek a contribution to improvements to the local public rights of way network around the development based on our evidence of use. We will base the request on the scale and impact of the development. This may include, but not necessarily be confined to, the following:

- Incorporating a safe means by which new residents can link to and use the existing public rights of way network for both commuting and leisure purposes.
- Improvements to the condition of existing public rights of way, including signage to protect the interests of landowners from the inevitable increased use.
- Path upgrades to allow multi-user access on an existing footpath.
- The creation of new and connecting paths for all types of users where needed.

Sometimes there will be an increase in traffic arising from the development, adding to existing levels of traffic which we know affects the safety and enjoyment of our users. We know that this not only affects users of public rights of way through the development site, but also in the network around the development site. Where appropriate we will therefore seek investment in safety measures, such as crossings, diversions, signage or other measures appropriate for public rights of way within the development site and for those beyond the development site for which there will be an impact.

Within the development site we will seek the improvement of routes and the provision of multi-user routes. These should accommodate and be suitable for as many types of users as possible including, where possible, equestrians and Disabled People. However, we acknowledge that not all paths will be able to accommodate all users. Upgrades in legal status to accommodate new users will be sought. This may mean an increased path width is required. There should also be high levels of accessibility to accommodate those with mobility or other impairments. These upgrades should not create negative impacts on users. For example, if an existing bridleway is surfaced this may become unsuitable for horses. The developer will need to show how existing use is accommodated with no loss of amenity. This might mean additional access provision is needed.



Protecting Biodiversity, Heritage and Landscape

Biodiversity

Surrey has a diverse natural environment and many areas which are important for nature. It is important that these are protected for the future. Public rights of way are also linear biodiversity and green infrastructure corridors. If managed sensitively they can help to connect biodiversity across the landscape. 11% of the public rights of way network (396km) crosses Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves and Local Nature Reserves.

The presence of public rights of way across the most sensitive sites can add to recreational pressure. Works to public rights of way may also have an impact on biodiversity, requiring consent from Natural England or an assessment under the Habitats Regulations for the most highly protected species or habitats.

Thames Basin Heaths

The Thames Basin Heaths is a Special Protection Area (SPA) in west Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. The designation affords the sites the highest level of legal wildlife protection. The Thames Basin Heaths support ground nesting birds which are vulnerable to disturbance from recreation and predation, including from domestic pets. Local Planning Authorities by law must protect the SPA and every planned housing development within 5km must not have an adverse effect. This is achieved through the Local Planning authorities working together through the [Thames Basin Heaths Partnership](#). Part of the approach is to provide recreational places, called Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs), to absorb additional recreation visits arising from development. A principle of SANGs is that they should not rely on public rights of way to provide access. However, the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership has told us that public rights of way can have an important supporting role in spreading recreation pressure through:

- Opportunities for longer and circular walks could help to spread recreational pressure.
- Signage where SANGs and public rights of way meet, along with supporting information, can encourage people to explore walking in surrounding areas.



Landscape

Surrey has a rich and varied landscape. From the flat Thames Basin, through the hills of the North Downs and Wealden Greensand, there are large areas of open heathland, enclosed wooded, river valleys, small scale farmland and open meadows. The county is the most wooded in England. It is a highly valued landscape with over 25% of the county being designated as National Landscapes.

The Surrey Hills National Landscape covers a quarter of the county. It includes the chalk slopes of the North Downs and part of the wooded Greensand Hills. The landscape of beautiful countryside is rich in wildlife, woodland and attractive market towns and villages. The Surrey Hills was one of the first landscapes in the country to be designated, in 1958. The boundary of the Surrey Hills National Landscape is being reviewed at the time of this plan.

There is also a small section of the High Weald in the south-east corner of Surrey. It is a landscape of small farms and woodlands, historic parks, sunken lanes and ridge-top villages.

All forms of outdoor recreation are popular in the National Landscapes and they attract visitors from surrounding areas to enjoy their outstanding countryside. Whilst this can be valuable economically, it is important that recreational pressure is managed to protect the landscape and to lessen the impacts on those living in these areas, including landowners.

Since December 2023 a new duty applies to public bodies, including Surrey County Council, to 'seek to further the purposes' of the nationally designated landscapes. This purpose is conserving and enhancing natural beauty. The objectives and actions in this Rights of Way Improvement Plan will help people to access and enjoy these outstanding landscapes.



Heritage

Public rights of way can provide access to heritage assets and can be a way for people to view, understand and appreciate heritage. Some heritage sites need to be protected and can be damaged by high levels of recreational use. Heritage assets also need to be protected during works on public rights of way.

There are 35km of public rights of way within Registered Parks and Gardens, 10km within Scheduled Monuments and 101km in Conservation Areas.

Climate Change Impacts

[The Surrey Climate Change Strategy \(2020\)](#) identifies the need to improve resilience to climate change as, even if net zero targets are met, Surrey will need to adapt to emerging changes in climate. These are already having an impact on infrastructure, services, communities and ecosystems.

Flooding in particular could have an impact on public rights of way. This may damage surfaces and structures, including bridges. The increased likelihood of flooding from all sources will need to be considered in the design of paths, surfaces and public rights of way structures.

Flood zones 2 and 3 are areas which are likely to flood. Although the risk of flooding in these areas is calculated as 1 in every 100 years or more we already know that flooding is taking place more often. There are 283km of public right of way within flood zones 2 and 3; 8% of the network. The largest area within these zones is around the River Thames, with other areas alongside the River Wey, the River Mole and along the upper reaches of the River Eden in Tandridge district.

In recent years changes in weather patterns have led to an increase of cases where riverside public rights of way are being lost into rivers, or require revetment works to secure them. The now regular heavy rain bursts cause both flooding and surface erosion from runoff.



Objectives

Objective 6

To ensure that development does not impact negatively on public rights of way or their users; that improvements are maximised, that they are fully protected and any impacts on them are appropriately mitigated. This should be both within the development and in the wider catchment. Rights of Way requirements associated with Strategic sites should be included in Local Plans.

To do this we will build strong relationships with the Local Planning Authorities, developers and other Surrey County Council teams to secure better and more ambitious outcomes from development to reflect more fully the impact that development has on public rights of way both within and around the development site, on traffic levels and on landowners. We will input at an early stage into Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, green infrastructure strategies, development masterplans and other strategic planning. We will seek developer contributions for public rights of way improvements. In order to achieve this we will seek a Development Officer post to work in partnership, to actively seek developer contributions, to deliver positive outcomes and ensure that development is focussed on the best outcome for residents and contributes fully to sustainable development. The investment in an officer could generate 10 times their cost in new improvements including successful CIL bids.

Objective 7

To improve the safety of our users in respect to the impacts of traffic, through seeking improved connections and crossings where there is the greatest need, working with partners on information and initiatives to improve safety and to support active travel, liveable neighbourhoods and recreation.

To do this we will seek traffic-free connecting routes in areas of greatest need, in line with the priorities of this Rights of Way Improvement Plan. We will raise awareness of the impact that traffic has on the safety and enjoyment of public rights of way for our users

Objective 8

To ensure that public rights of way contribute to conserving and protecting the outstanding biodiversity, landscape and heritage of Surrey, whilst also providing opportunities to appreciate and understand them.




To do this we will work with our partners to seek ways to manage public rights of way to protect and enhance Surrey's biodiversity, landscape and heritage assets.

Objective 9



To protect the network from and adapt to the impacts of climate change through improving our maintenance techniques, applying best practice, seeking to innovate, using new materials and improving our understanding of changing weather patterns and other impacts on the public rights of way network.






We can do this through improving our understanding of what structures and areas of the network are at greatest risk from the impacts of climate change, and the financial implications of climate change impacts on the public rights of way network. We can review best practice as it evolves and seek to use new materials and techniques, for example in surfacing. We will work with others, for example Surrey County Council's Flood and Climate Resilience Team, better to understand impacts.

Key to Action Tables

Short term: Aiming for delivery in years 1 – 3		Medium term: Aiming for delivery in years 3 – 7		Long term: Aiming for delivery or progress in years 7 – 10	
£	Likely to be deliverable within current financial resources but delivery will be reduced if less resource is available.	££	Partially deliverable within current financial resources but additional resource needed to fully deliver this action.	£££	Some, limited, progress may be achieved within current financial resources but significant additional resources will be needed to fully deliver.
	Likely to be deliverable within current staff resources, but delivery will be reduced if less resource is available.		Partially deliverable within current staff resources, but additional resource needed to fully deliver this action.		Some, limited, progress may be achieved within current staff resources but significant additional resources will be needed to fully deliver.

Actions

Action	Details	Delivery	Resources	Timeframe
Action 15	Development Officer to ensure better outcomes from planning and development through CIL and s106 and to respond to changes in planning law.	Countryside Access Team, CIL and s106 responsible organisations	£££ 	Short term and throughout the plan
Action 16	Increase requests for developer contributions, including catchment-based considerations through greater involvement in the planning process.	Countryside Access Team, Countryside Access Team Development Officer, SCC Spatial Planning and Transport Development Team	£££ 	Short term and throughout the plan

Action	Details	Delivery	Resources	Timeframe
Action 17	Seek connecting paths and crossings where these will address the greatest need and provide greatest benefit, prioritising safety.	Countryside Access Team, SCC Highways, Local Planning Authorities, landowners, Surrey Hills National Landscape	£££ 	Throughout the plan
Action 18	Work with partners to seek improvements in road safety, including awareness raising and signage.	Countryside Access Team, SCC Road Safety, Highways, British Horse Society, others	££ 	Short term and throughout the plan
Action 19	Support active travel, walkable neighbourhoods and liveable spaces, through improvements to public rights of way, signage and other measures.	Countryside Access Team, SCC Highways, LCWIP teams, spatial planning and placemaking, Surrey Hills National Landscape (SHNL)	££ 	Throughout the plan
Action 20	Protect and enhance biodiversity, heritage and landscape character in public rights of way maintenance and improvement.	Countryside Access Team, SHNL, SCC, SCC Historic Environment Planning, Thames Basin Heaths and others	£ 	Throughout the plan
Action 21	Identify structures, surfaces and other aspects at risk from the impacts of climate change, working with SCC Flood and Climate Resilience Team to address impacts and seek new approaches and methods to address impacts.	Countryside Access Team, SCC Flood and Climate Resilience Team, Environment Agency and others	££ 	Short term and throughout the plan

Theme 4: Communication and Partnerships



In this theme we consider how we communicate with the public and our stakeholders about our work. We set out how we will work with our partners, including landowners, to get better outcomes and deliver the ambitions of this Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Rights with Responsibilities

The need for responsible use of the countryside was a common theme in our public survey and throughout our engagement. We spoke to landowners – both the farming community and larger public landowners. They all reported an increase in users and reported issues with aggressive dogs, people not staying on public rights of way, fly tipping and littering. There have also been issues with dog fouling and in some areas the spread of disease amongst livestock.

Other issues raised by the public and landowners included inconsiderate use, for example cyclists travelling too fast, and misuse, for example horse riders and cyclists using footpaths. There was a general feeling that users had become less considerate and tolerant of each other. This was reported between all users – walkers, cyclists, equestrians and motorised vehicle users. Users also thought there had been an increase in dogs in recent years, including commercial dog walkers with multiple dogs, and a perception that dogs are poorly trained.

Use of countryside sites and public rights of way increased greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst use has decreased from its high point there remains more people visiting the countryside. The national [Countryside Code](#) aims to guide responsible use of the countryside and was refreshed by the Government during the pandemic due to increases in countryside visitors.



There are several existing campaigns and projects to foster respect amongst users and to raise awareness of the Countryside Code. The organisations representing users all encourage responsible access amongst their members and some have their own codes of conduct, including the [Trail Riders Fellowship](#), [GLASS](#), [Cycling UK](#) and the [British Horse Society](#). However, there are many individuals who are not members of any organisations. Surrey County Council's Countryside Visitor Services also has a [Countryside Code Champions](#) scheme. There are other projects, especially in western Surrey around the Thames Basin Heaths, to encourage responsible dog ownership. The national campaign 'Be Nice Say Hi', run by [Cycling UK](#) and the [British Horse Society](#), has been promoted in the [Surrey Hills National Landscape](#). The approaches are, however, fragmented. All of the larger public landowners told us that better co-ordination of information, messages, codes and timing of publicity across the county would be beneficial.

Users also indicated that in some areas of high use, on site waymarking to indicate who can legitimately use the route could be useful.

Promoted Routes

Two National Trails pass through Surrey – The [Thames Path National Trail](#) and the [North Downs Way National Trail](#). [The Greensand Way](#) long distance route also passes through Surrey. Surrey County Council's Visitor Services Team promotes 27 self-guided trails for walkers, available on [Surrey County Council's website](#). There are also self-guided routes for the 19 Surrey County Council Countryside Sites. There are other promoted routes produced by organisations supported by Surrey County Council. The Surrey Countryside Partnerships list self-guided trails on their webpages and the Surrey Hills National Landscape also promotes walking, cycling and horse riding routes.



We want to encourage people to explore public rights of way, including new users. In our survey the main reason why people do not use public rights of way as much as they would like was worrying about getting lost; the third was not knowing where to find information. Promotional material and communication needs to be of a good quality, set out what the route is like clearly and what facilities there are to support users.

There are many promoted self-guided routes, some on commercial websites and apps, some produced by parish councils and some by our partners. These have not been produced by us and we cannot monitor these. However, we want users to have the information they need and good quality routes to support them. We will work in partnership with Surrey County Council Visitor Services and Countryside Estates, Surrey Hills National Landscape, Surrey Countryside Partnerships and parish councils to develop a suite of quality-assured routes. Those creating the route should ensure they are safe to use, for example in relation to road crossings and any part of the route which follows roads and seek our advice. We will also seek assurances from those creating the routes that they will be regularly checked on the ground. We will then include these routes on our maintenance database through which we can check whether an issue we receive is on a promoted route and prioritise it accordingly.



When several organisations brand and waymark their routes individually this can be confusing for the user and is visually intrusive in the countryside. We will draw up a design standard to guide waymarking of routes on public rights of way.

Improving our Partnerships

Working in Partnership

Through developing this Rights of Way Improvement Plan we have engaged with our existing partners and stakeholders and started to build relationships with new stakeholders. Delivering this plan will require us to continue to build on these relationships. This includes in health and wellbeing, in supporting people to be more active, in the boroughs and districts, the voluntary and charity sector, the Surrey Hills National Landscape and the Surrey Local Nature Partnership, other teams within Surrey County Council and others.

We have already begun to engage with some parish and town councils to foster collaborative approaches to maintaining and improving their public rights of way. We will not be able to work in depth with all parishes in the lifetime of this plan but will prioritise those who wish to work with us in a collaborative way.

We will also continue to work with volunteers to help us to maintain the network. Our existing volunteers have told us that there is more they can do to help, and we will investigate expanding their roles, including providing training to do this where needed. All of our users have told us they would like to help with maintaining public rights of way and we will seek to expand our support to enable this. Expanding volunteering could also help people to get more active and to gain skills.

We have found that whilst there is a high level of interest and use of public rights of way, there is lower awareness of the Countryside Access Team and the work of maintaining and improving the network, amongst both the public and sometimes our stakeholders. The work we do is complex but it is essential we communicate this more effectively. We will seek ways to raise awareness and to communicate more effectively about our work.



Working Alongside Landowners

Landowners are very important partners. Public rights of way not only cross their land, but they are responsible for some aspects of their maintenance.

In developing this Rights of Way Improvement Plan landowners have told us they would welcome more communication with them, information on public rights of way and collaborative working. We can also include their concerns in our communications with the public, for example around lambing time, or in relation to dog fouling causing harm to livestock.

All landowners we engaged with have unfortunately experienced negative impacts arising from public rights of way. We will seek to support them and improve communication around responsible behaviour and through waymarking.

Objectives

Objective 10

To raise awareness of the public rights of way network and to support existing and new users with opportunities to find out about public rights of way, to explore them, to make the network a more welcoming place and to help people to find their way around.







We will work with partners to ensure that the self-guided routes they provide are signed and waymarked to standard that is of benefit to all. We will encourage them to provide routes which are suitable for a range of users, including Disabled People, and that the input of groups representing Disabled People is sought. We will expect that there are mechanisms to ensure that promoted routes, especially those targeted at new or Disabled users, are maintained, including waymarking. We will also raise our profile through social media, informing customers of what is happening on the network.

Objective 11

To encourage responsible use of the countryside, to increase understanding and consideration between users and to lessen impacts on landowners, their businesses and livestock.








We will work in partnership to promote the Countryside Code and foster respectful and considerate behaviour between all users on the public rights of way network. We will support our partners in promoting responsible dog ownership, especially on farmland and urban and urban fringe rights of way where it can have a detrimental impact on users and livestock.

Key to Action Table

Short term: Aiming for delivery in years 1 – 3		Medium term: Aiming for delivery in years 3 – 7		Long term: Aiming for delivery or progress in years 7 – 10	
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SHNL = Surrey Hills National Landscape
BHS = British Horse Society

Actions

Action	Details	Delivery	Resources	Timeframe
Action 22	Produce a waymarking policy for use by all who are developing waymarked self-guided trails.	Countryside Access Team	£ 	Short term
Action 23	Agree with partners which of the routes they are promoting they will monitor. Put these on the maintenance system to streamline resolution of reported issues.	Countryside Access Team, SHNL, SCC Visitor Services Team and Countryside Partnerships, parish and town councils.	££ 	Short term and ongoing throughout the plan.
Action 24	Consider on site signage to indicate what users are permitted in the busiest areas or where clarification of rights would be helpful	Countryside Access Team	££ 	Medium to long term
Action 25	Carry out regular social media and promotional campaigns to encourage responsible countryside use. Co-ordinate messages and timing with other partners.	Countryside Access Team, Surrey County Council Visitor Services Team.	£ 	Throughout the plan
Action 26	Seek to expand and improve our work with volunteers, including new roles, new people and providing training.	Countryside Access Team, Ramblers', BHS, Trail Riders Fellowship, Parish Councils, GLASS and others.	££ 	Throughout the plan
Action 27	Work with CLA and NFU to improve regular communication and to disseminate information to landowners. Improve visibility and communication options for landowners.	Countryside Access Team, CLA, NFU, Landowners, Surrey County Council Visitor Services Team.	£ 	Throughout the plan
Action 28	Seek funding, build new partnerships and improve communication to implement this Plan.	Countryside Access Team	££ 	Medium term