

BEAUDESERT AND HENLEY IN ARDEN

JOINT PARISH COUNCIL

REPORT TO JPC 4TH MARCH 2024

PUBLIC FOOTPATHS AND RIGHTS OF WAY
WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL(WCC) IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024

1.INTRODUCTION

CONSULTATION OBJECTIVES AND BRIEF

Work is beginning on a review of Warwickshire County Council's (WCC) Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). WCC is seeking the views of your council prior to drafting the new ROWIP so that the document reflects local priorities. The County is responsible for around 1700 miles of public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic across the whole of its area. The ROWIP is an important strategic policy document, which the council is required by law to have in place. It sets out how the County Council can make sure the public rights of way network meets the needs of the public, now and in the future. The process of reviewing the ROWIP, and the engagement being carried out before the new ROWIP is drafted, will help the council to better understand the needs of residents.

JPC APPROACH AND POLICY BACKGROUND

The JPC considers that this is an important issue and welcomes the initiative of the County Council to review the plan (ROWIP) and to consult the public and local councils. The issue of maximising the quality and accessibility is recognized in both the District Council Core Strategy and in the Henley/Beaudesert Neighbourhood Plans (see annex 1). There is a formal questionnaire for Parish and Town councils which must be returned by 7th March and a public one which is open until April 7th. We strongly encourage residents to send their personal views to WCC. The link is 'ask.warwickshire.gov.uk'.

In the last few years the JPC has made a valuable low cost improvement to a small number of Rights of Way but this has been piecemeal. In the early days of the last improvement plan WCC improved a number of accesses to a high standard which are often still working well today.

RECOMMENDATIONS - WAY FORWARD

The JPC intends to respond to the WCC questionnaire with the following recommendations of issues to be included in the reviewed improvement plan.

- HIGHER PRIORITY AND PROFILE FOOTPATH/RIGHTS OF WAY POLICY
- INTERAGENCY APPROACH/INVOLVEMENT OF PUBLIC BODIES AND STAKEHOLDER INCLUDING LANDOWNERS AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES
- CLEARLY IDENTIFIED LEAD MEMBERS AND OFFICERS AT ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVELS INCLUDING PARISH/TOWN COUNCILS

- CLEARER TARGETS INCLUDING MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS TO SIGNAGE AND LOW BUDGET IMPROVEMENTS
- ENCOURAGING STRONGER LOCAL GROUPS AND LOCAL AUDITS OF CONDITION
- 5-10 YEAR PLAN WITH CLEAR TARGETS AND RESOURCE INDICATIONS
- PROTECTION OF ROW IN ALL FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

KEY CONSULTATION POINTS

IMPORTANCE TO HENLEY/BEAUDESERT

Rights of Way have very significant benefits for our area. They help provide and maintain a sustainable environment. They provide a key amenity to assist physical and mental wellbeing of all ages and circumstances. They are a free amenity open to all. They are an asset to the economy of the town attracting visitors to come and spend time and money here. In summary this means that maintaining, enhancing and publicising them is essential to the current and future health of the area.

MAJOR IMPEDIMENTS

A summary list of the problems faced by users of Rights of Way is in Annex 2

QUALITY OF ROUTES

There are several routes which are accessible attractive and in good condition. These provide an easy and highly beneficial service to the community. It is regrettable that quite a number of routes are in poor condition, poorly maintained and even in some cases deliberately blocked. Even on some of the more accessible routes there are difficult passages which make continuous walking/riding difficult. They can also make access to disabled and elderly residents impossible.

LACK OF CONNECTIVITY

The most effective and easiest to use ROW are those which give continuous and interlinked routes (for example linear parks). Our town is particularly poor in this respect there is even a route which involves a significant section of Birmingham Road to continue on it! Whilst we are by no means unique in this respect it highlights the distance to we have to go. In some parts of town especially Riverlands a good example has been established as to what can be achieved.

SIGNPOSTING

Facilities are only ever going to be used well when they are well publicised and marked. There are guides, maps and public signs which help to promote rights of way in the town. However, the actual routes themselves are usually poorly marked or not marked at all. In a few cases signs have been removed and/or replaced with misleading alternatives.

ATTITUDES TO WALKING/WALKERS

Many residents and visitors walk and ride regularly on the local routes and they currently obtain great value from the environment of the town. However there are issues which relate to the roles of the various groups and stakeholders.

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES – INSUFFICIENT PRIORITY AND FUNDING

Government at all levels gives insufficient priority to walking and rights of way. As a result there is insufficient public discussion of the issues and a lack of resources especially away from high profile parks and facilities.

LANDOWNERS/FARMERS

There is little evidence of landowner maintenance of rights of way and a reluctance to invest in the general condition. There are also isolated examples of landowners and farmers deliberately blocking ROW. There appears to be no mechanism to involve landowners to engage in the plans although there have been previous efforts by a few landowners to take initiatives to achieve improvements in their area (see for example 2014 Forward Trust Report).

PUBLIC/RESIDENTS RESPONSIBILITY

The quality of rights of way in the area are to the benefit of everyone and it follows that all residents and members of the public should act responsibly towards them. Many residents and some local groups spend time actively developing the amenities. Not everyone wishes to invest in this way. However there is a shared responsibility to value and protect the area. Although the current situation is by no means very bad there are examples of neglect and occasional vandalism.

Annex 1 Policy References

1.Stratford District Council Core strategy 2011-31

Policy CS7

B. Provision of Green Infrastructure

The availability of open spaces, waterways and other green infrastructure features will be maintained and improved as a contribution towards:

1. quality of life and attractive communities;
2. biodiversity and the provision of habitats;
3. landscape character and quality;
4. non-vehicular modes of movement
5. sustainable drainage, flood management, carbon sinks and other climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

Access to Green Infrastructure features within settlements and the countryside will be provided through, for example, local nature reserves, green corridors, waterway ('blue') corridors, allotments and woodland, together with connections between built up areas and the countryside.

2.Henley/Beaudesert Neighbourhood Plan 2011-31

Policy C2 Local Green Spaces

Local Green Space which is of particular importance to local communities, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife will be designated for special protection. Designations as a Local Green Space rules out development in perpetuity. None of the designed Local Green Spaces represent large tracts of land and are all well related to the local community.

ANNEX 2

SUMMARY OF BLOCKAGES TO USE OF RIGHTS OF WAY

- OVERGROWN PATHS
- PLOUGHED AND SOWN paths
- BLOCKAGES FROM TREES GROWTH FENCING AND DEBRIS
- DAMAGED AND BLOCKED BRIDGES
- POOLING
- WCC MAP CLARITY
- RESOURCE AND POLICY LIMITATIONS
- LIMITED FORUMS FOR JOINT DISCUSSION WITH VOLUNTARY GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS