

## **1. Introduction.**

The three ROW teams in Bath & North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Bristol have worked very hard over the last few months researching and writing the ROWIP which will be incorporated in the Local Transport Plan. The JLAF has been consulted at all stages in the process and special meetings were held with the JLAF to discuss the choice of, and the detail in, the four chosen research areas. The JLAF Officers and some JLAF members visited the four research areas and also attended the public meetings in those areas.

Whilst we ?????????? the proposals in the ROWIP report, there are some matters which are of particular importance to members of the JLAF. The matters have wider ranging implications and take a longer term view of the overall use of ROWs

## **2. Money and political will.**

A great deal of work has gone into the ROWIP and some of the research findings are being implemented by the ROW teams where the cost is small. Inevitably, many of the recommendations will cost money and we expect the three Local Authorities to find the political will to fully finance the ROWIP.

We find the vague reference to how the ROWIP improvements will be financed, disconcerting. In our view, a full-time Rights of Way Improvement Officer should be appointed and be financed by all three Councils. The job specification for this post would, primarily, include finding internal and external capital and revenue funds to implement the changes in the ROWIP and to offer practical help to the three ROW departments to implement the improvements. In addition, each local authority should appoint a ROWIP Officer to be responsible for the improvements.

## **3. Demand and supply for Rights of Way.**

Much of the emphasis in the past has been on the maintenance of the network whereas we believe that the real need in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is to stimulate demand.

The government has launched a series of initiatives regarding exercise and health, for those with disabilities and for reaching out to communities that have not historically used the countryside. We feel that the public should be encouraged to make use of ROW in our area to meet these concerns. Much better publicity is needed.

Most of the people in the JLAF area live in urban areas so we suggest that more emphasis is placed on stimulating demand for ROW in the urban areas.

#### **4. Tourism.**

The JLAF area is comparatively under developed for tourism and we suggest that the area could benefit financially if tourism was exploited. In particular, visitors from further afield should be made aware of the ROW system in the local area through the various tourist publications and websites produced for overseas visitors.

Walkers spend over £6 billion a year in the English countryside and about 200,000 full-time rural jobs are supported by walking. (See “The Economic and Social Value of Walking” by Christie & Mathews in 2003. and see “Leisure Day Visits: a report of the 1998 Day Visits Survey” by the Countryside Agency in 1998)

#### **5. Land managers.**

This heading includes landowners, farmers, the Government, Local Authorities, land agents and also managers of Common Land.

In our view, the ROW teams are very good at cultivating good relations with land managers but we believe that, at present, they can not devote enough time to this vital task.

Land managers are, generally, resistant to change if only because of their partial understanding of the way ROW teams may be able to secure changes.

We believe that many land managers play a very important part in securing better access to the countryside. The ROW teams should be able to spend more time with them and the carrot and stick should be used judiciously.

#### **6. Access to the countryside.**

There is a fine balance between too many car parks and too few car parks - which gives rise to inappropriate parking. While some ROW have some facilities for car parking nearby, these should be listed in pamphlets to encourage greater use. This is particularly important for disabled drivers.

#### **7. Voluntary reorganisation of the ROW network.**

It seems to us that a whole industry has grown up based on the premise that ROW in the countryside should be decided by legal means and this approach often leads to conflict. Looking at the network of ROW, in B&NES and South Gloucestershire in particular, one realises that great benefits could be gained by all users, all landowners and all tax payers if the ROW could be assessed and changed by voluntary agreement.

We suggest that ROW teams choose small areas and make a determined effort to reach voluntary agreements. The chosen areas should be where they believe that the participants will take a pragmatic view, will approach each issue with an open mind and will treat each issue on its merits.

**8. 30% of the population do not own a car.**

Estimates of the families without a car vary, but 30% is probably about right. This is likely to be the section of the population most in need of using the ROW. The ROWIP must not, unintentionally, disenfranchise this very large group of potential customers.

**9. Public land.**

Many routes used by the public, particularly in urban areas, are across public land and many of these routes have not formally been designated as ROW. When these routes are not designated as ROW they are open for property developers, rubbish dumpers, squatters and the like to annex the land for their own selfish purposes.

We suggest that all routes across public land available for use by the public should be formalised as ROW within an agreed timetable.

This will mean that Councils will have to do the research themselves on their own land. This is a very important point because the research done by the ROWIP team shows that the majority use of paths is in urban areas so urban Councils have a major task on their hands.

**10. Ongoing audit of all access facilities and initiatives**

Because the responsibilities for access are spread across several Council departments in the three Local Authorities we would like to have an audit of **ALL** the facilities available. This desk research is vital and would include parks, commons, permissive access, the Forest of Avon, Rights of Way, cycle paths, equestrian toll rides, long distance footpaths, access to water etc. etc.

There are many excellent publications but they need to be brought together in a website which would give easy access to information for anyone wanting to get out of doors for whatever purpose.

**11. Conclusion.**

The views expressed in this short paper are an attempt to enhance and broaden the responsibilities of the three ROW teams in the three Local Authority areas. All Departments with any responsibility for access to the outdoors must actively co-operate to increase the provision of access for all residents and visitors to the JLAF area.

As a statutory adviser, the JLAF will seek to ensure that systems to monitor and audit the ROWIP are in place.

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