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Our ref: PO 110470

*2nd* December 2008

**From Huw Irranca-Davies MP**  
Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs

*Rd 8 Dec 08*

*Dear Mr Newbigin,*

Thank you for your letter of 7 November to Geoff Hoon about funding the implementation of Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs). I am replying, as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I appreciate your enthusiasm to fund RoWIPs, which offer such a good opportunity to improve our rights of way network.

Local authorities receive most of their funding from central Government through the Revenue Support Grant, and local authorities are expected to fund improvements through existing resources, and where this is not possible to look at external sources of funding. Additional funding is available through the integration of Local Transport Plans and RoWIPs, where rights of way improvements will help to deliver Local Transport Plan priorities. Not all rights of way improvements will fall into this category and these will therefore need to be funded from elsewhere (this is why we still intend to have two separate but integrated plans). The Department for Transport will announce funding decisions for Local Transport Plans for local authorities in the annual local transport settlement.

Research by Natural England has identified a wide variety of potential funding sources in addition to local authority and Local Transport Plan revenues. These include:

- Section 106 agreements (planning obligations),
- Aggregate Levy and landfill tax;
- AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) Sustainability Funds;
- Environmental Sensitive Area and Higher Level Stewardship scheme funding;
- Funding from Primary Care Trusts, Rural Development Agencies, European Union funds, Sport England, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Tourism & Tourist Levy, and;
- A range of locally sourced funds.

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I am keen to ensure that the valuable work done in preparing RoWIPs leads to real improvements on the ground. I recognise that putting together funding proposals and chasing potential sources of income can be time-consuming for local authorities, but there are many positive spin-offs in joining up with other sectors to improve the network. Many authorities have already risen to this challenge and have become skilled in accessing funds from a variety of sources. Whilst, it is for local authorities to take the initiative, Defra and Natural England have sought to facilitate this by:

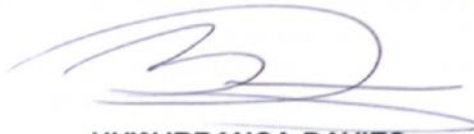
- Helping to share knowledge and experience between authorities;
- Developing a 'decision support tool' to help local authorities justify and prioritise expenditure on rights of way in tandem with social and economic goals; and
- Extending the statutory remit of Local Access Forums and issuing revised Guidance.

Defra expects Natural England to continue to support local highway authorities in implementing their RoWIPs. Natural England is considering how to do this most effectively.

Local Access Forums have a pivotal role to play in driving forward implementation of RoWIPs. With members drawn from a wide range of interests, I hope that Forums will be able to provide useful advice to local authorities on implementation and monitoring of RoWIPs. Not all sources of funding will be suitable or appropriate in every area, but with their experience and knowledge we would expect Forums to be well placed to assist authorities in focusing on the potential funding sources and partnerships which are most relevant.

Individual Forum members can also help to promote RoWIPs amongst the stake-holder groups which they represent, to raise awareness and even to encourage organisations to support ROWIP objectives in appropriate ways for example by bidding for funding which is not available to a local authority.

*Yours Sincerely*



**HUW IRRANCA-DAVIES**