

2. User Needs

Introduction

2.1 DEFRA advise that authorities should consider the ‘needs and circumstances of people with a range of expectations, interests and levels of ability’. In assessing need we have benefited not only from the views of the JLAF but also from the comments of the public and users during public consultation- see Chapter 5. We have also taken on board the input of the public and stakeholders into the JLTP and into the many policy documents that we have scrutinised in preparing this ROWIP as well as best practice elsewhere - see Chapter 4. We recognise that there is a wide variety of need, ranging from casual use, people getting fresh air and exercise, getting to work or school, to organised walking, cycling or horse riding trips.

2.2 With AONBs, the World Heritage city of Bath and a range of other attractions we are conscious that we need to take into account not only the needs of our urban and rural residents but those of visitors and tourists. Below we outline the needs of different users. In Chapter 6 we assess how far their needs are met by the PROW and wider access network based on our local area assessments and questionnaire survey. This leads to the priorities for action we propose in Chapter 7.

Walkers

2.3 The JLTP highlights the importance of walking as part of an integrated transport system, particularly for short journeys and at the beginning and end of longer journeys. The significance of walking for recreation, health and other social reasons is also recognised in the range of plans and strategies we touched on in Chapter 1 and the documents we have studied in Chapter 4. National surveys suggest that about half of households have at least one member who walks in the countryside. There are different motivations for walking but it is useful to distinguish two broad groups: people undertaking what might be called ‘everyday’ trips and those enjoying recreational trips.

2.4 For everyday walkers our consultation and experience from elsewhere suggests that their needs focus on:

- ♦ Effective links with local facilities such as shops and key destinations, including shorter routes to schools;
- ♦ Well drained and clean surfaces with regularly cut vegetation;
- ♦ Safe routes that avoid road hazards and provide personal security;
- ♦ Lack of obstructions;
- ♦ Ability to use pushchairs and mobility scooters;
- ♦ Clear and visible signs.

2.5 People who walk their dogs have particular needs for:

- ♦ Dog latches on stiles or provision of kissing gates;
- ♦ Dog bins;
- ♦ Opportunities for their dogs to run off the lead, although there is no legal entitlement for this on public rights of way.

2.6 Recreational walkers vary from those wanting a stroll or short walk (e.g. families with young children) to those looking for a day walk or long distance opportunities. We have identified the following principal needs:

- ♦ Natural surface and environment;
- ♦ Variety of scenic, circular and linear routes;
- ♦ Drainage that avoids excessive mud;
- ♦ Adequate signage and waymarks;
- ♦ Safe routes that avoid road hazards;
- ♦ Lack of obstructions, including vegetation, ploughing;
- ♦ Information about routes;
- ♦ Routes close to home for short walks;
- ♦ Availability of public transport or car parking;
- ♦ Accessible routes

Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan

2.7 Joggers need:

- Safe road crossings;
- Variety of surfaces;
- Continuity of routes;
- Personal security;
- Access year round.

Cyclists

2.8 Cyclists vary in their needs ranging from people who use their bicycle to travel to work or school to those wanting to cycle purely for pleasure or exercise. National surveys suggest that about a quarter of households have at least one member who cycles in the countryside. As with walkers we have distinguished between 'everyday' trips and 'recreational' trips but we recognise that there is interplay between them. There are also differences in the needs of mountain bikers looking for challenging rides to family groups wanting a more relaxed safe experience. In relation to the off-road rights of way network we assess cyclists' principal needs as:

Everyday trips

- Effective links with local facilities and key destinations;
- Well drained surfaces free of potholes and with regularly cut vegetation;
- Safe routes that avoid road hazards and provide personal security;
- Lack of obstructions
- Ability to use child cycles/ trailers;

Recreational trips

- Variety of scenic and circular routes of differing length;
- Well drained surfaces free of potholes (but challenging routes for mountain bikers);
- Routes wide enough to share with walkers and horse riders;
- Well designed signage and waymarks;
- Safe routes with adequate crossing

points where they meet the road network and convenient links where necessary on-road or along road verges;

- Lack of obstructions, including vegetation;
- Information about routes;
- Availability of car parking.
- Appropriate surfacing.

Equestrians

2.9 There are at least 30 commercial horse riding stables in our area - with concentrations on the urban fringe of Bristol and at Winterbourne/ Frampton Cotterell - as well as a variety of individual stables. We assess riders' major needs as being:

- Variety of scenic, off-road routes of adequate length;
- Level surfaces, free of potholes;
- Routes wide enough to share with walkers and horse riders;
- Adequate signage and waymarks;
- Safe routes with adequate crossing points where they meet the road network and convenient links where necessary on-road or along road verges;
- Lack of obstructions, including vegetation;
- Information about routes;

2.10 DEFRA also draws attention to the needs of carriage drivers. In addition to the general needs of riders, carriage drivers look for adequate parking for manoeuvring carriages and horses, areas for tacking up and routes with sufficiently wide gates.

Motorised Users

2.11 Very little of our PROW network is legally open for use by motorised two wheel and four wheel vehicles. The demand for what the DEFRA guidance calls 'recreational motoring' is largely met by off-road facilities on private land.

People with mobility problems

2.12 About 8% of our residents have some form of physical or learning disability. Mobility can be restricted not only by disability but also by having to push a child's buggy, stiffened joints or short term health conditions. Particular issues that need to be borne in mind include the following:

- Specific information;
- Surfaces firm, level and non-slip;
- Space for manoeuvring wheelchairs/ mobility scooters/ buggies and passing;
- Views unimpeded for wheelchair users;
- Handrails at appropriate height;
- Even steps;
- Minimising number of structures;
- Easy to use catches and gates;
- Design of signs;
- Accessible seats/perching places
- Spaces for riders to mount and dismount;
- Special 'blue badge type' car parking needs;
- Needs of people with visual impairment: clear edges to paths, clear marking of steps and structures, warning of hazards at head height.

Minimising user conflicts

2.13 The advice from DEFRA is that proposals for improving rights of way should not unduly benefit one class of user at the expense of another. Shared use of bridleways is a particular case in point where conflicts can occur between walkers, cyclists and horse riders. On byways the interests of these users can in turn conflict with motorised users. We see the importance of learning from best practice in the management of these potential conflicts and working closely

with our AONB, Community Forest and other partners.

Other interests

2.14 Rights of way improvements are aimed at benefiting the public but we must not lose sight of the fact that landowners have a special interest. Public rights of way usually go across private land and can cause problems for farmers, golf course owners and others. Positive working with farmers and land managers is essential. In our area these interests range from individual farmers to large estates including the Duchy of Cornwall and the National Trust. The AONB management plans highlight this co-operative working. The FC, Woodland Trust and private woodland owners are other interested parties and their needs are emphasised in the FoA Plan.

2.15 Apart from private land, people also look to local authority parks and open spaces to provide recreational access as well as land held by other public bodies. We need to make sure that relevant estate managers are fully involved with the ROWIP.

2.16 Whilst concentrating on rights of way we also have to be mindful of heritage and nature conservation interests. These are spelled out in the policy documents we list in Chapter 4. The presence of ancient monuments and other archaeological features and diversity of wildlife and habitats add to the attraction of our rights of way but we have to ensure that usage of the network does not conflict unduly with wider objectives.

What do you think of our assessment?

Let us know by filling in the questionnaire at the end!

3. Rights of Way in Our Area

3.1 As highway authorities we are responsible for the 'definitive map and statement' which are the legal record of public rights of way. In line with the DEFRA guidance we have used the maps and statements, together with other information, to make a preliminary assessment of:

- The extent to which routes and networks are available to meet the user needs identified in Chapter 2;
- Areas which are deficient in PROW for some or all user groups;
- Inconsistencies or anomalies in Individual PROW;
- Other opportunities to improve the network.

Definitive maps and statements

3.2 The definitive maps and statements record various classes of routes depending on the type of use available to the public:

Public Footpaths - can be used by pedestrians;

Public Bridleways - can be used by pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists (though cyclists must give way to other users);

Restricted Byways - for pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians and non-motorised vehicles (e.g. horse drawn vehicles);




Byways Open to All Traffic ("BOATS") - can be used by all traffic, but are predominantly used by pedestrians and equestrians.

3.3 There are 2239km (1399 miles) of public rights of way recorded on the definitive maps and statements, split as shown in Table 1. In all we have an average of just over 22m of right of way per hectare.

3.4 Almost 90% of the public rights of way are footpaths. The majority of public bridleways and restricted byways are in South Gloucestershire. Bath & North East Somerset has a relatively limited bridleway network but 50km of BOATS. Bristol like other large urban areas has a relatively small network recorded on the definitive map and statement but this is supplemented by a diversity of other paths and routes.

3.5 Public rights of way recorded on the definitive map are not evenly distributed and there are areas where there is limited density and a lack of convenient links: see Figure 4. Historically, in many areas routes have been upgraded to roads and increased use of these routes by motorised vehicles has created an increasingly fragmented network of vehicle free or quiet routes. Bridleway provision across the area is lower than the national average and is fragmented (Figure 5).

Table 1: Extent of Public Rights of Way (Km)

	Entitled Users	Bath & North East Somerset	Bristol City	South Gloucestershire	ROWIP area
Public Footpaths		730	155	1112	1997
Public Bridleways		40	5	120	165
Restricted Byways		1	0	25	26
BOATS	All	50	0	<1	50
TOTAL		821	160	1258	2239
Population (2001)		169,000	380,600	245,600	795,300
Area (ha.)		35,000	11,200	53,500	99,750
Average density of rights of way (m/ ha)		23.4	14.3	23.5	22.4