

## 5. Involving the Public

### Introduction

- 5.1 In Chapter 2 we examined our existing rights of way and in Chapter 3 the needs of different users. The crucial question is how far the network currently meets users' needs. In assessing this we have been guided by the many reports and policy statements that have already been published and which we draw from in Chapter 4. This Chapter looks at the question from the point of view of the public.
- 5.2 Our involvement of the public focused on the following:
- Questionnaire survey;
  - Focused consultation with JLAF in the four local assessment areas;
  - 'Whole area' events for access providers and interest groups.

### Questionnaire surveys

- 5.3 These surveys were carried out in each of the three council areas between April and August 2006 and the key findings are summarised below. We received a total of 2862 responses, enough to give us a reliable picture of public opinion.
- 5.4 People were asked what types of rights of way they had used in the past year. Most frequent use was of paths through a park or open space (77 to 83% of respondents) followed by 'alleys' or paths between or behind properties (65 to 82%). Roughly half had used paths along canals and riversides, through woodland



or at country parks/ historic properties. Farmland paths had been used by about 50% of residents in Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire but rather less by people living in Bristol. Least used were named and promoted routes, coastal paths and nature trails.

- 5.5 When asked how they used rights of way and how frequently, the survey showed that walking, jogging and cycling were the most popular. Over half walked paths every day or every week. This decreased to 9% for cyclists and 10% for people who use rights of way for jogging.
- 5.6 In answer to questions about why people used rights of way, three out of four respondents said that it was to enjoy the environment. The other main reasons were for the health benefits (59%) or for convenience and gaining access to places and services (52 and 49%). Reasons for not using rights of way focused on concerns about personal safety (43%) or livestock (33%). About a quarter also suggested that lack of maintenance was a deterrent.
- 5.7 In relation to potential improvements, keeping paths clear of litter and dogs mess and regular maintenance came out top with about seven in ten people saying they were important or very important. Better lighting or improving surfacing were also considered priorities (56% and 54%). About half the respondents wanted more signage and information. This proportion went down to a quarter for the creation of new paths and a third when it came to the removal of stiles and obstacles.
- 5.8 People were asked what type of information they would like to see on rights of way signs. About two thirds thought it very important that signs show the type of transport allowed and the route destination. About half said that route names and maps would be of value as well as distances.
- 5.9 The questionnaire concluded by asking people whether different aspects of the rights of way network had got better, worse or stayed the same over the last three years. About seven out of ten

people thought that there had been little change in the ease of use, the number of routes or the amount of information available. For the others, more people felt things had got better rather than worse.

5.10 On the strength of the survey results we identified six themes focusing on:

1. Improving Maintenance and Safety
2. Signing Routes
3. Providing Information
4. Enabling Local Travel
5. Promoting Health and Recreation
6. Improving the Network.

## Local assessment and 'whole' area consultation events

5.11 Consultants were commissioned in November 2006 to organise a series of public consultation events to explore in detail the six potential ROWIP themes identified as a result of the questionnaire survey. These events were held in January 2007 and targeted at the four local assessment areas followed by 'whole area' events for access providers and interest groups.

5.12 As outlined in 1.6, the four local assessment areas were selected as representative of the different kinds of communities in our area. Table 4 sets out a profile of the areas. The PROW network

serving the small village of Oldbury-on-Severn is more extensive than that for the market town of Sodbury. On the other hand Sodbury is fringed by large commons that provide access land opportunities. There is some access land close to the large village of Timsbury and the density of the PROW network is similar to Oldbury. Brislington, as might be expected of an urban fringe community, has a more limited PROW network.

5.13 The key findings of the events are as follows:

- Different users, each with own requirements (see Chapter 3);
- Continuity of routes is important, including use of roads where necessary;
- Maintenance of the network is essential;
- Safety and personal security are concerns on some routes;
- Deficiency of routes for cyclists and horse riders;
- Easier access needed to some routes;
- Information not easily available/ lack of knowledge of availability;
- Signage not always adequate;
- Changes in network need to be better publicised;

**Table 4: Local Assessment Area Profiles**

	Brislington	Oldbury	Sodbury	Timsbury
Public Footpaths (km)	10.4	61.7	37.8	18.7
Public Bridleways (km)	0	15.5	2.4	0
Restricted Byways (km)	0	0	0	0
BOATs (km)	0	0	0	0.6
<b>TOTAL (km)</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>77.2</b>	<b>40.7</b>	<b>19.3</b>
Population (2001)	22146	708	5167	2580
Area (ha.)	738	1891	1549	470
Average density of rights of way (m/ ha)	14	41	26	41
Area of Access Land (ha)	0	0	1068	55

# Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan



- Health benefits should be promoted;
- Some concerns about landowners' actions/ need for diversions;
- Concern that some routes will suffer from visitor pressure;
- Full use not always made of volunteers.

5.14 Added to the results of the questionnaire survey the in-depth local area and 'whole area' consultations enabled us to explore the original six themes in more detail. It became clear that the theme relating to 'Promoting Health and Recreation' overlapped with the theme 'Providing Information' and so we have combined them. We also found that there was some confusion about the original Theme 6 'Improving the Network'. Comments were mainly, but not exclusively, to do with sustainable communities and providing useful links to green spaces and other local facilities. It seemed sensible to cover these issues in the theme 'Enabling Local Travel'.

5.15 With this extra information we refined the themes to form the basis of our Statement of Action (Chapter 7) focusing on:

## Theme 1: improving maintenance and safety

- Personal safety
- Keeping paths open and useable
- Dogs and livestock.

## Theme 2: signing routes

- Easy to follow routes
- Clear and legible routes
- Detailed informative routes.

## Theme 3: providing information

- Promotion and increasing use for leisure, tourism and health benefits
- Website development
- Responsible use.

## Theme 4: enabling local travel

- Social exclusion
- Schools
- Useful links/ accessing and supporting local services/ links to green spaces
- Sustainable communities.

*What do you think of our assessment?*

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