

Committee: ACCESS

Date: 19 April 2007

Report: CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO THE NORTH YORKSHIRE RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise members of the work that North Yorkshire County Council have carried out, with its partners including the Authority, to prepare a draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the county of North Yorkshire and to seek members' endorsement of the draft ROWIP for North Yorkshire.

Strategic Planning Framework

2. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
 - ***National Park Management Plan objectives***
AR4. Develop 'Rights of Way Improvement Plans' for Cumbria and North Yorkshire by 2007, and involve local communities and their representatives, the Yorkshire Dales Local Access Forum, landowners/managers and users in their development and implementation.
 - ***Best Value Performance Plan objectives***
Contribute to the production and implementation of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the Dales by 2007.
 - ***An Integrated Access Strategy***
AS1 In partnership with the County Councils (who have statutory responsibility) develop a ROWIP action plan for the Yorkshire Dales which identifies improvements to the network, related to need and adequacy of the existing network.

Background

3. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a duty for all local highway authorities to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). ROWIPs will, amongst other things:

- provide an assessment of the adequacy and opportunities provided by local rights of way for access to services, recreation and renewal, based on current needs and demands of the full range of users;
 - provide an assessment of the accessibility of local rights of way to all members of the community, including those with visual impairment or mobility problems,
 - Identify any improvements that are required to ensure the rights of way network meets the needs of today's society.
4. The Government's time scale is that each Highway Authority should have published its ROWIPs by the end of 2007. Both Cumbria and North Yorkshire County Councils are producing ROWIPs for their areas, and although each Authority is approaching this differently, and are at different stages of plan preparation, both authorities are following the government guidance and aim to finish the process within the timescales required. A report on the process both County Councils were undertaking was given to this committee on 13th January 2005, and further progress has been reported regularly through the Head of Park Management report to the Access Committee and the secretary's report to the Yorkshire Dales Access Forum.
 5. Cumbria County Council has already consulted on a Draft ROWIP which was considered by this committee in August 2006 and the final version is soon to be published. Whilst North Yorkshire County Council first published a pre-consultation draft, before publishing their consultation draft ROWIP which is the subject of this report.
 6. At the end of the process there will be two ROWIPs, for each of the county areas within the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

The Process in North Yorkshire

7. Officers of this Authority have worked closely with county council officers during the plan preparation. Throughout the process both county councils have involved the Yorkshire Dales Access Forum, as statutory consultee and advisor, as well as the parish councils, users groups and the public at large. In addition, production of the North Yorkshire ROWIP has been overseen by a steering group made up of local authorities and LAF members.
8. North Yorkshire County Council was aware, following publication of their pre-consultation draft, that their approach and overall content of the ROWIP was good. However, improvements were needed in terms of the ROWIPs length and structure if the content were to become more accessible, and allow people to understand the 'improvements' and 'priorities' for action being put forward. Re-structuring and clarification of the key policies followed, together with the publishing of a simple 20 page summary document for the public consultation. The consultation draft ROWIP, is now well designed, and accessible to anyone who may choose to read it.

North Yorkshire ROWIP - Consultation Draft

9. North Yorkshire County Council are now consulting partners, other interested parties and the general public, on the draft ROWIP. The full version of the ROWIP is available

on their website at www.northyorks.gov.uk and Members have already been sent a copy of the 20 page summary 'people, paths & places' and CD Rom of the full document. The summary consists of:

- The context and scope of the plan
- How Plan priorities were determined
- The assessment procedure and conclusions
- The nine strategic objectives
- Implementation procedures

The full plan goes in to more details, with chapters on:

- Origin, context and scope of the plan
- The North Yorkshire Plan Area
- How Plan Priorities were determined
- Assessments Results
- Objectives Actions and Targets
- Statement of Action
- Implementation

10. Of particular interest will be the *The ROWIP Statement of Action*. The statement of actions is a product of extensive consultation with Parish Councils, Rights of Way staff and members of the public who have contributed suggestions for particular improvements. These suggestions have been prioritised, in accordance with the statutory guidance, and summarised for each of the local services centres in North Yorkshire and the different landscape character areas and ranger areas in the two National Parks. In addition the suggestions put forward have been digitised, and there is a ROWIP improvement GIS layer to ensure this information is used as part of management of the rights of way network, and will ensure improvements are implemented as opportunities arise, eg through consideration of rights of way matters for Farm Environment Plans.

Plan Implementation

11. The draft ROWIP makes it clear that there is not a statutory duty to implement the ROWIP. The statements of action are aspirational five-year plans, to be delivered in partnership, with funding sought from a variety of sources, the draft plan outlines the scope and breath of the partners who could be involved in implementing the plan.

12. North Yorkshire Council has indicated its wishes to work with each National Park Authority to implement the statement of actions within the National Parks, and to work with other partners to implement the ROWIP. However North Yorkshire County Council officers' attention has been drawn to the steer Access Committee gave to officers when it considered the Cumbria ROWIP. Minute 39/06 states that the Committee:

'urges that any delegation of the implementation of Rights of Way Improvement Plans from Cumbria or North Yorkshire County Councils should be accompanied by resources to undertake the work'.

13. Whilst 'implementation' of the ROWIP and review of the 'delegation' scheme' are separate issues, they are related matters. The review of the delegation scheme is currently under discussion with both County Councils, and includes the issue of resources.

Conclusion

14. It is clear North Yorkshire County Councils along with its partners have carried out extensive research and consultation during the development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plans and have developed objectives and a series of actions which both meet the policy context for the plan and the requirements of local people and visitors to North Yorkshire- now and in the future.

15. As there is not a statutory duty to implement the ROWIP it must be seen as an aspirational document at the present time.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- (a) the Authority, confirms its support for, and congratulates North Yorkshire Council on the production of, the draft North Yorkshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan; and
- (b) any delegation of the implementation of Rights of Way Improvement Plans from North Yorkshire County Council should be accompanied by resources to undertake the work.

Andy Ryland
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Background documents:

Consultation Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the County of North Yorkshire –
March 2007 (People, Paths & Places)