

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, Customer & Communities
Amanda Honey, Corporate Director, Customer & Communities

To: Communities Cabinet Committee

Date: 17 January 2013

Subject: Revision of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary : The revised Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) is a statutory plan which will have to be taken to public consultation. This report provides details about why the review was required, how it was undertaken and the contents of the Draft Plan.

1. **Background**

1.1 The CAIP is the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Kent. It is a statutory requirement to produce the plan and review it within 10 years of publication.

1.2 While there is a statutory requirement to produce the CAIP, it is also the document which directs and supports the work carried out by the Countryside Access Service that makes a real difference to the quality of life of Kent residents. The Countryside Access Service Annual Report 2011 (see Appendix 1) provides examples of the ongoing delivery of community-led projects that the Plan supports.

1.3 Significant investment, improvements and savings to the capital liability for the Public Rights of Way network have been delivered through the objectives set out in the initial CAIP. It is imperative the Plan is kept up to date and is:

- aligned to current County Council priorities
- reflects the input provided by our customers
- adapts to the current economic climate
- seizes any new opportunities.

For these reasons a review of CAIP has been undertaken and a Draft Plan produced for consultation - see Appendix 2.

2. **The Countryside Access Improvement Plan**

2.1 Why review the Plan?

- a) There is a need to ensure that the work of PROW and Access Service is contributing to the delivery of Bold Steps and is aligned to the visions of a "One Council" approach.
- b) The challenge posed by the need to reduce the national fiscal deficit

has resulted in a significant reduction in resources available to local authorities. The plan establishes priorities that reflect the needs of customers and how these will be delivered efficiently in line with the resources available.

- c) The Service must be geared up to seizing newly available funding opportunities to reduce the impact of the global budget reductions. Outputs must re-aligned to focus on those areas where external and internal funding may be available. This will assist in delivering the wider objectives of sustainable transport, UK tourism and healthy independent living. For instance in December 2012 the Transport Minister announced £20million in funding for Cycling Infrastructure.
- d) Increasingly, valuable customer insight is available and this can be used to ensure the Service is aligned to the needs of its customers.
- e) The significant change to the organisational structure of the Service must be reflected in its medium term strategy.
- f) The Service, having moved to a new Division, must reflect within its policy and strategy a clear focus on the Customer and the highly valued service it provides to local Communities.

2.2 Content of the Draft Plan

As a statutory document there is certain information that must be contained within the Plan and these requirements are set out in legislation within the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. The revised plan will, therefore, contain many of the same elements as the original 2007 version. To enable greater synergy with other departments and policy a greater and clearer emphasis has been provided on how the Service contributes to Bold New Steps and the Customer Service Strategy. Main elements of the plan are:

- a) Existing and potential use and demand assessment for the statutory prescribed groups: the public, blind and partially sighted persons and those with mobility problems.
- b) Detailed customer profiling using Mosaic, Countryside Access Management System, Volunteer and Explore Kent database.
- c) National and local policy context. Particular attention has been given to aligning the Plan with Bold New Steps, Local Transport Plan 3 and the Customer Service Strategy.
- d) Operational management, asset management and budgetary information.
- e) The effect of static or reducing resources on delivery.
- f) How to make the best of new national and local funding opportunities.
- g) A delivery plan that includes timescales, policy links and SMART targets.

2.3 How the Draft Plan has been informed

Information has been gathered through extensive research, surveys and direct customer feedback. This has included previously completed consultations, research of business and asset management plans, review of KCC and national research and policy, obtaining information from focus groups, Parish Councils, District/Borough Councils and County Members.

2.4 Pre-consultation

Statutory pre-consultation is required with district/borough, parish and neighbouring councils. Natural England as the regulating body must also be informed of the proposed update. This work was completed earlier in 2012.

3. **Next Steps**

January / February 2013

The Draft Plan will be sent to the Communications Team for design in preparation for a full public consultation which is outlined in the legislation contained within the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000.

February / March 2013

A full public consultation will be carried out.

April 2013

There will be a response to the public consultation and the draft plan will be amended where appropriate.

May 2013

The new, revised plan will be adopted and implemented.

4. **Recommendation**

The Committee is asked to :

- Comment on the draft Plan as part of the consultation process.
- Note the process for consultation and formal adoption of the CAIP.

Appendix 1 Countryside Access Improvement Plan, Annual Report (2011)

Appendix 2 The Draft Countryside Access Improvement Plan

Background documents

N/A

Contact Officer: Colin Finch

Senior Projects Officer

Countryside Access Service, Customer Services

Tel: 01622 2215568

E-mail : colin.finch@kent.gov.uk