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| SUBJECT: | RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN |
| MEETING: | Strong Communities Select |
| DATE: | 8 December 2016 |
| DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: | ALL |

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek the Committee's views on the scope of and progress on the Review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee note and provide comments on:
- i. The scope of and progress on the review;
 - ii. The proposed timescales for further reporting to the Committee on the outcome of the initial assessments

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) is a statutory plan required by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 to cover the management, development, integration and promotion of local rights of way networks. Welsh Government published Guidance on the Review of RoWIPs in July 2016.
- 3.2 The Monmouthshire RoWIP was approved in 2007 (and can be viewed at <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2013/09/ROWIP-final-doc.pdf>). We are now required to carry out a new assessment; review the existing plan and decide whether or not to amend it; and if required to publish a new plan within 12 months of that decision (see appended diagram extracted from guidance).
- 3.3 The review requirements and the proposed timetable are set out in the appended paper. The formal review has to take place within 10 years of the plan's original approval (i.e. before Oct 2017) and our proposal is to complete that stage by July 2017 and to publish a final plan by March 2018.
- 3.4 The existing RoWIP took a "benefits driven" approach to countryside access management based on the following vision:
- *To recognise the economic, social and heritage value of our public rights of way network as an important investment in the future for the residents and visitors of Monmouthshire.*

- *To maintain and improve local rights of way in order to promote and encourage their use and enjoyment for the physical and mental well-being of all of Monmouthshire's residents and visitors.*
- *To sustain the quality and diversity of Monmouthshire's countryside and to promote responsible countryside access for all.*

Our assessment is that the existing RoWIP has been very successful in guiding this approach to countryside access management and has helped secure external investment over the last decade. So the proposed approach is to review and refine and set the RoWIP into the new wellbeing / natural resource management policy context but aim not lose the essence of the original plan.

3.5 As required by statute the Local Access Forum has been consulted on the proposed scope and timetable and the intention is that the new Local Access Forum will be consulted throughout; the RoWIP being its main focus of work over the coming months. The guidance suggests the involvement of the LAF should cover:

- Assisting with dialogue through contacts with national, regional and local organisations;
- Informing the data gathering exercise including the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- Advising on how the network could be improved for the public and where there are particular land management concerns;
- Advising on the related issue of access to open countryside especially where new linear routes may be desirable;
- Providing advice on prioritising implementation;
- Commenting on published draft plans; and
- Assisting in the resolution of conflicts between different representations when plans are issued for consultation.

3.6 In addition formal MCC scrutiny and approval is built into the timetable at appropriate stages. Specifically the following is proposed regarding scrutiny:

- Reporting the outcome of the statutory assessments to this committee in Summer 2017 prior to a decision as to whether to amend/prepare a new RoWIP
- Reporting on the outcome of consultations on an amended/new RoWIP in early 2018 prior to a decision to approve / publish a final plan
- After the approval of the new RoWIP the opportunity to consider the annual reports which are a new requirement over the new plan period

3.7 Following the guidance the scope of the new RoWIP assessments will cover all of Monmouthshire including that part within the Brecon Beacons National Park. This will require either a joint sub group with the Brecon Beacons LAF or for both Forums to meet together at the appropriate stages of the review. Brecon Beacons National Park Authority has recently informally indicated that they intend to prepare their own RoWIP (which they may do provided that it reflects the RoWIPs each highway authority is preparing) and so the precise approach to joint working will be settled in the coming months and considered by the new LAF.

4. REASONS:

- 4.1 A review of the RoWIP is required by s60 (3) of the CROW Act 2000. Statutory Guidance for RoWIP Reviews has been published by Welsh Government.
- 4.2 Appropriately managed and promoted public rights of way, countryside and coastal access support the tourism economy and locally accessible services by developing the county's walking product. The countryside access network provides opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy active and healthy lifestyles and provides direct and indirect volunteering and community involvement opportunities to contribute to healthy and fulfilled lives.

5. AUTHORS:

Ruth Rourke
Principal Countryside Access Officer

Matthew Lewis,
Green Infrastructure and Countryside Manager
Tourism Leisure & Culture

6. CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 01633 644860
E-mail: ruthrourke@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01633 644855
E-mail: matthewlewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk

7. APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Process diagram from Welsh Government Guidance July 2016
<http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/160711rights-of-way-improvement-plans-en.pdf>

Appendix 2: MCC Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Timetable Review 2016
(August 2016)

Appendix 1:



Diagram 1: Summary of the ROWIP process and timetable