



<b>Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>MOTION 828: MAKING GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S COUNTRYSIDE SAFE &amp; ACCESSIBLE</b>  To receive a report on the Motion presented to Council in November 2018
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	22 May 2019
<b>Chairman:</b>	Councillor Rob Bird
<b>Presenting Officer:</b>	Simon Excell
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To outline the current position within Public Rights of Way and identify what measures might be required to achieve the aims of Motion 828
<b>Planned Dates</b>	
<b>Background documents:</b>	n/a
<b>Appendices</b>	n/a
<b>Recommendations</b>	To note the report

## 1. Background

1.1 At County Council in November 2018, the following motion was recorded.

### **Motion 828 – Making Gloucestershire’s countryside safe and accessible**

*Proposed by Cllr Colin Hay*

*Seconded by Cllr Loraine Patrick*

This Council notes the exceptional countryside in Gloucestershire and the significant economic and cultural benefits that this already gives to businesses and residents within the county.

However, this Council recognises that the county’s countryside could be made safer and more accessible for people, including walkers, those with limited physical movement and equine users. This Council also recognises that relatively small infrastructure changes could further cement the county’s position as a tourist destination of choice for country pursuits. Such improvements could include, but are not limited to:

1. Safe connections between walking routes and bridlepaths.
2. Gates on walking paths and bridleways that are more accessible for all users and easier to open on a horse.
3. Well-drained surfaces in gateways.
4. Parking facilities on popular routes.

This Council resolves to send this matter to the Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee, for consideration on how the Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership can work with the tourist industry to turn Gloucestershire into a centre of excellence for walkers and equine users, helping businesses develop new and innovative practices.

## 2. Current Position

2.1 The overarching policy governing Rights of Way is contained in the Rights of Way and Countryside Access Improvement Plan (ROWIP) approved by full council in March 2011 and forming part of the Local Transport Plan 3.

2.2 There are approximately 3500 miles (5633km) of public rights of way within the county comprising:

Public Footpaths	2840 miles (4570 km)
Bridle Ways	533 miles (857 km)
Restricted Byways	132 miles (212 km)
Byways Open to All Traffic	4 miles (6.4 km)

The Rights of Way asset database records over 9000 stiles and almost 11,000 gates, both of varying designs and condition, across the network.

- 2.3** There is a legacy of poor surfaces on many bridle ways, predominantly caused by lack of maintenance of adjacent ditches, legitimate use of the routes by farmers/landowners as well as restricted funds to address the resultant damage. Repairs to such routes can be expensive necessitating re-creating ditches, excavation of surface and reinstatement using ground membrane and significant quantities of stone/recycled materials.
- 2.4** Seven officers currently undertake predominantly reactive works to maintain the network utilising sub-contractors and volunteers as appropriate. These same officers manage the myriad of issues in their geographical areas including enforcement actions, working on planning applications and maintenance or improvement of the network. With restricted budget the rights of way (ROW) officers are already constantly seeking additional funding by working with local equine groups, offering 25% grants to landowners to replace stiles with gates and seeking contributions from councillors Highways Local funds.

Items 1 – 3 of the Motion are part and parcel of the everyday work of the ROW Team although it should be noted that stiles and gates are the responsibility of the relevant landowners. GCC has no authority to ‘force’ a landowner to install a gate in place of a stile.

### **3. Inspections**

- 3.1** Following the principles of the ROWIP, the ROW Team seek to inspect 10% of the path network each year.

### **4. Funding & Contributions**

- 4.1** Funding for rights of way is predominantly focused on reactive maintenance of the network, although there is a small but valuable proportion of maintenance work carried out by volunteer groups and the team have a focus on providing training and support to such groups to develop this capability further.
- 4.2** Some Councillors have also made contributions from their Highways Local funds towards works on rights of way when approached by the local ROW officer.
- 4.3** Another potential source of funding is the Growing Our Communities fund where each Councillor has £30k (over 3 years) which they can use to prioritise on projects within their area which assist in promoting local community cohesion and activity. Improvements to and maintenance of rights of way would be an excellent use of these funds as local communities highly value the rights of way in their area as local walking and leisure linkages and routes.

### **5. Summary and Recommendation**

- 5.1** The current revenue budget is sufficient only to manage the reactive maintenance requirements of the network. Similarly the ROW staffing levels are already stretched in covering the statutory responsibilities to manage and enforce the activities on the current network.

- 5.2** A broad ranging investigation into improving the ROW network along the lines of this motion will require investment into staff resources to explore and develop wider funding opportunities with the LEP, the health service, the tourist industry and beyond. A relatively small investment by each councillor from their Growing our Communities fund, say £3-5k, would provide an excellent way to provide some pump priming and could fund an officer for 12 months to investigate and develop funding opportunities, along with a prioritisation of projects where most benefit could be created.
- 5.3** It is recommended that the committee encourage each Councillor to consider devoting some of their Growing our Communities funds to this and that links are established between the LEP and the ROW team to explore funding options.