

COMMUNITIES, ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE**Item under consideration: Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

Date considered: 12 February 2025

The Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee received a report on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) presented by the Cabinet Member for Environment. This provided an opportunity for the Community, Environment and Highways Select Committee to review the draft ROWIP and provide feedback ahead of submission and approval by Cabinet.

Surrey County Council has a duty to maintain public rights of way (PROW) in Surrey. These include footpaths, bridleways and byways open to all traffic. In Surrey there are 2,175 miles of PROW used for recreation, enjoyment and commuting. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) Act 2000 Surrey County Council has a duty to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and to review it at least every 10 years. The ROWIP contains the Council's proposed actions to both maintain and improve rights of way in Surrey between 2025 and 2035 and to meet the public's current and future needs. A public consultation on the draft ROWIP has taken place and the final plan will be presented to Cabinet for sign off and adoption in April 2025.

In the course of discussion on the Plan the Select Committee noted *inter alia*:

- The benefits of the new plan and its notable successes, including the ongoing work to ensure that Surrey residents and visitors to the county can continue to enjoy green spaces and the environment.
- That the plan received one of the highest response levels for any public consultation highlighting the importance of *rights of way* to residents including walkers, cyclists and horse riders; and that maintaining *rights of way* was the highest priority expressed by users in the consultation response.

- The challenges and risks to delivery both financial and in terms of unitarisation and the importance of ensuring the valuable work done to date and existing budgets are preserved.
- The opportunities for improving connectivity between villages and communities and for enhancing *rights of way* in support of the sustainable travel agenda and through improved links with planning authority developments.
- The role that members can play using local knowledge to flag problems with *rights of way* where residents and users experience problems or where improvements are necessary. Plus the opportunity to pool councillor resources or use the Your Fund Surrey small fund to finance *rights of way* initiatives.
- The interconnectivity of *rights of way* improvement with other key council priorities such as Vision Zero, Safer routes to Schools and LTP4, and how this feeds into prioritisation and investment for improvement projects.

The Committee questioned how progress on delivery against the actions in the ROWIP was monitored and reported to the Council and the public, prompting agreement that it would be helpful for a summary impact report to be shared with members to highlight progress made including where *rights of way* have enabled or underpinned other agendas such as Safe Routes to School and public health. It was agreed that there should be regular communications to councillors and the public each quarter highlighting *rights of ways* cleared and other good news stories with photos.

After detailed discussion and noting the responses to its key lines of enquiry, the Select Committee agreed the following recommendations for Cabinet to consider.

Resolved:

That the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee

- I. Recognises the high level of consultation that was achieved. The Committee thanks the team for their work. The Committee supports the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the 11 priority objectives described.
- II. Requests that Cabinet prioritises the actions necessary to maintain our public rights of way and reports back briefly to the Committee on progress against actions 8-11 within six months.
- III. Notes that the Council cannot deliver the plan without extensive collaborative working with partners. The Committee therefore requests that Cabinet ensures that Council officers, stakeholders and volunteers are properly supported.
- IV. Requests that this work is joined up across all Council services, including Leisure services, Public Health, Local Transport Planning and Vision Zero initiatives that the Council is undertaking.
- V. Requests that Cabinet reviews the process for informing local Members on progress against the ROWIP.

Cllr Keith Witham – Chairman, The Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee

Background papers

Report on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s100981/5.1.%20Report%20Rights%20of%20Way%20Improvement%20Plan%2030012025.pdf>

Minutes of Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee of 12 February 2025

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/g9215/Printed%20minutes%20Wednesday%2012-Feb-2025%2010.00%20Communities%20Environment%20and%20Highways%20Select%20Committee.pdf?T=1>

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