



**Rights of Way
Improvement Plan**

4

2024-2034
Loving our local landscapes

Foreword

This is our fourth Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP4) entitled 'Loving our Local Landscapes', and it is great to see the innovative ways in which we are working with our partner organisations to make real positive changes across the County to encourage everyone to get out and love our local landscapes!

The Covid-19 pandemic illustrated that our residents, more than ever before, understand the value of using local Public Rights of Way, not only for the benefit of transport activity, but also for their mental and physical health.

Walking, wheeling, and riding in County Durham presents huge opportunities for people to be physically active; to enjoy our wonderful countryside, to walk the dog, travel to work or to school, and to offer something special to tourists. The County is breathtakingly beautiful, and our stunning environment can help support some of our local economic activity, as we have seen with the introduction of the Northern Saints Trails.

ROWIP4 is deliberately more long term than the first three ROWIPs and will remain in place for the next 10 years. The vision for improving the Public Right of Way network was developed in partnership with over 20 external organisations including our friends in the County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF). ROWIP4 was also subject to public scrutiny after an extensive 12-week public consultation.

The clear vision for continuous improvement will put the authority in a strong position to draw in external funding for a shorter 3-year programme of projects that sets out our ambitions on the ground for the first three years of the plan.

Public Rights of Way are a huge asset, and this Plan helps to ensure their protection for future generations, who will also be able to get out and love their local landscape.

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Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Rural Communities and Highways



1	Executive Summary	04
2	Introduction	07
	Review of previous ROWIPs	09
	Partnership working	09
	PROW and new development	09
	PROW infrastructure	09
3	Vision for ROWIP4	10
	ROWIP4's strategic objectives	11
4	Scope Of ROWIP4 From 2024 To 2034	13
	Internal and external stakeholders	14
5	Policies	16
	Policy 1: Managing and delivering a high-quality access network	17
	Case Study: The Stockton and Darlington Railway	18
	Policy 2: Awareness of public rights of way and other routes	19
	Policy 3: Making our network accessible - '10 in 10'	21
	Case Study: Phototrails	22
	Policy 4: Empowering Communities to 'own' their public right of way network	23
	Case Study: Wolsingham Wayfarers	25
	Case Study: Heritage 100	25
	Policy 5: Promoting the Economy and Cultural Identity of County Durham through our Public Rights of Way Network	26
	Case Study: Northern Saints Trails	27
	Case Study: Hamsterley Forest	27
	Policy 6: Ensuring the Countryside Code and access legislation is followed, and Landowners are respected	28
	Policy 7: Incorporating Public Rights of Way in New Development	
	Case Study: Mount Oswald, Durham City	29
	Policy 8: Monitoring the use of our Public Rights of Way	30
6	Conclusion	31
7	Appendices	33
	Appendix A: ROWIP4 and the Council's Key Corporate Plans and Objectives	34
	Appendix B: County Durham Plan Context	35
	Appendix C: ROWIP4 Delivery Plan	38
8	Glossery of terms	38

Executive Summary



1: Executive Summary

All local highway authorities have a statutory duty, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), to produce a ROWIP. Public Rights of Way (PROW) include footpaths, bridleways, and byways. The distinction between the different types of PROW is explained fully on the Council's [website](#).

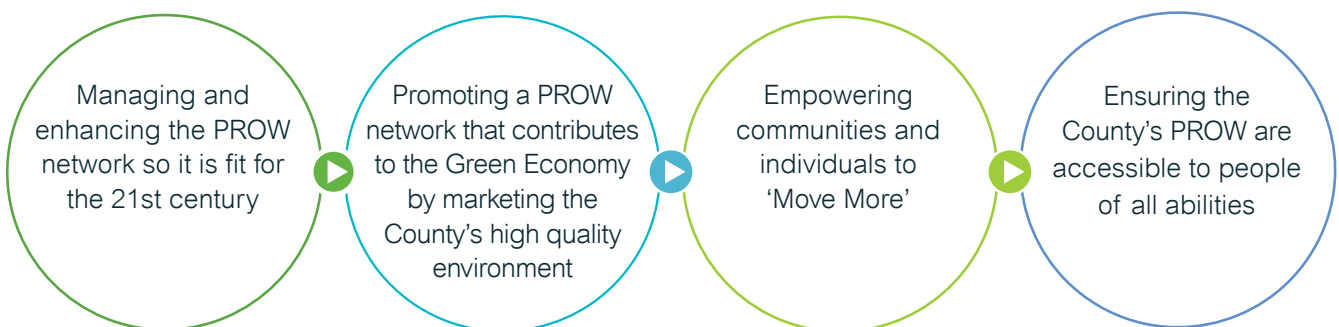
The Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated that our residents, more than ever before, understand the value of using their local PROW routes for the benefit of their mental and physical health. Furthermore, working habits and recreational time has changed for many residents with people spending more time in their local green spaces. Therefore, ROWIP4 comes at a time when people use, need and value their local PROW and other recreational routes.

The ROWIP outlines how the local authority will address the extent to which rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public, ensuring the PROW network is fit for the 21st century. It does not replace the Council's existing statutory duties in respect of PROW but seeks to develop wider aspirations for PROW in County Durham.

The previous ROWIP, [ROWIP3](#), ran from 2015 to 2018, so it is now five years out of date. ROWIP4 intends to be more strategic than the first three ROWIPs, and the 4 strategic objectives and 8 policies are for the next 10 years, rather than 3-year lifespans. The Plan will put the authority in a strong position to draw in external funding and help set priorities for resources already allocated for PROW improvements.

As part of drafting ROWIP4, we carried out extensive co-production across the different Council departments and with external organisations to develop a draft plan. Co-production has been fundamental to drafting 4 strategic objectives and 8 policies that will frame PROW investment for the next 10 years.

The Strategic Objectives of ROWIP 4 are as follows:



The strategic objectives in ROWIP4 deliberately reflect key Council plans and strategies. For example, ROWIP4 sets out to support both the green economy and healthy workforces in alignment with the recently adopted Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES). ROWIP4 further supports all 5 Ps of the IES (people, productivity, places, promotion, and planet) and will additionally align with other key Council strategies, such as the Public Health 'Moving Together' Physical Activity Strategy, the Physical Activity Framework, the Climate Emergency Response Plan regarding sustainable, carbon-free travel and tourism, and the Poverty Strategy.

ROWIP4's objectives have also incorporated ideas from external organisations, such as the National Trust, County Durham Sport, and the County Durham charity [Walk and Talk Trust](#). Most external stakeholders highlighted that residents and visitors have a lack of confidence when using PROW due to the lack of reliable infrastructure, such as the insufficient provision of signs, which creates fear around following routes that do not have clear directions.

The headings of the 8 policies to be consulted on are as follows:

1. Managing and Delivering a High-Quality Access Network
2. Awareness of Public Rights of Way and other routes
3. Making our Network Accessible '10 in 10'
4. Empowering Communities to 'own' their Right of Way Network
5. Promoting the Economy and Cultural Identity of County Durham through our Public Right of Way network.
6. Ensuring the Countryside Code and access legislation is followed, and Landowners are respected
7. Incorporating Public Rights of Way in New Development
8. Monitoring the use of our Public Rights of Way

A summary of the intention of each policy is contained in the main body of the report.

In summary

ROWIP4 is a long-term strategy with an improvement plan for the County PROW network.

We are creating policies as a mechanism for delivering objectives for the benefits of our residents over a 10-year timeframe.

A shorter 3-year delivery plan will be produced following the findings from the full public consultation.

Introduction



2: Introduction

Durham County Council's ROWIP4 is a 10-year long-term plan, which considers Public Rights of Way (PROW) within the County and sets an ambitious but realistic strategic vision of how to improve our PROW network over the next 10 years, from 2024 to 2034.

All local highway authorities have a statutory duty, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 ([CROW](#)), to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The ROWIP outlines how the local authority will address important matters, such as the extent to which rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public, ensuring the PROW network is fit for the 21st century.

In addition, the ROWIP must address the following matters:

- The opportunities provided by local PROW (i.e., cycle tracks, footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways, and byways in the authority area) for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the authority's area; and
- The accessibility of local PROW to blind or partially sighted people and others with mobility problems.

PROW include footpaths, bridleways, and byways. The distinction between the different types of PROW is explained fully on the Council's [website](#). A public footpath is a highway in which the public has a right of way on foot. A public bridleway is different to a footpath since the public has a right of way on foot, as well on horseback, leading a horse and on a pedal cycle. In addition, there are two types of byways - restricted byways and Byways Open to all Traffic (BOAT). On a restricted byway, the public have right of way on foot, on horseback or leading a horse, by cycling and driving vehicles other than mechanically propelled vehicles (e.g., horse and cart). Walkers, horse riders, cyclists, horse-drawn vehicles, and motorised vehicles have right of way on a BOAT.

In the life of this Plan, we are likely to see additional bridleways added to the PROW network, even if only a proportion of the alleged historic bridleways are proven to exist, which will have positive implications for all users, including horse-riders and mountain bikers. Policy 2 of this Plan will help inform people of these changes.

ROWIP4 will focus on the network of recorded PROW, rather than all open greenspace in the County. It is important to note that commonly, PROW will intersect and connect with amenity open greenspace, such as parks, railway paths, forest areas and other open space available for public use. Nonetheless, this does not mean that all types of open greenspace forms part of the PROW network; it is simply a vital aspect of ROWIP4 that PROW link with amenity open greenspace across the County. Amenity greenspace is often situated within housing areas where residents may want or need to access PROW through using the land that is around them. The land must therefore be interconnected, and this notion of connectivity plays a significant part in supporting County Durham Partnership's objective of 'connecting communities' by 2035 and supporting the Inclusive Economic Strategy. This does not mean that ROWIP4 will include specific actions relating to all other types of greenspaces, it is simply understanding the important connections between PROW and other publicly accessible routes, and ensuring these links are appropriate to meet the long-term needs of our communities that are set out within our 4 strategic objectives.

Review of previous ROWIPs

In 2007, ROWIP1, Passionate About Paths, was based upon what people told us were the most important issues and priorities for the PROW network in the future. The objectives of ROWIP1 were designed to be aspirational and conveyed the optimism and ambitions of that time. It helped raise the profile of our PROW work, secure funding for improvements, encourage partnership-working and generate a greater appreciation of the network.

The second plan, Paths for People (ROWIP2), was published in July 2011. ROWIP2 built on the success of ROWIP1 but considered the financial challenges faced by local authorities and other providers of outdoor recreation. As a result, it set out a more focussed approach to reflect a reduction in resources and developed an action plan which targeted key access routes with greatest demand, such as important utility and recreational paths around communities.

ROWIP3, Walk, Cycle, Ride (2015), continued to build on the foundations set by its predecessors and adopted the same pragmatic, creative approach to providing a network suitable for the 21st century. The plan looked at how different elements can work together to fulfil access needs for walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, and some off-road vehicle users. The successes of ROWIP3 can be found below.

Partnership Working

The last seven years have seen strong partnerships help deliver important projects and improvements to the PROW network across the County. Partnerships include Developers, Durham County Council's Development Management Team, Landscape Designers, The Heritage Coast, North Pennines National Landscape, formerly North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, etc. Projects which have been delivered as part of this excellent collaborative development include the Northern Saints Trails, The Pennine Way and King Charles III England Coast Path, Brightwater, and The Heritage Way.

PROW and New Development

The Rights of Way Team have begun securing Section 106 funding for new and improved footpaths as part of new planning applications. The Team are now fully integrated into the development management and design process and when new developments are being designed, they are much more likely to respect existing or new PROW routes in housing developments. In addition, policies in the County Durham Plan (CDP)(2020) and its supporting documents (including Policy 7 in this ROWIP) place requirements on developers to ensure PROW are prioritised in new developments. This has enabled the Team to take a more responsive approach to planning applications.

PROW Infrastructure

The Rights of Way Team have replaced hundreds of stiles with kissing gates in locations across Durham to improve access to the countryside. A good example of a project where this occurred was at Tantobie, where a network of stiles was replaced with more accessible gates. In Tantobie and elsewhere across the County, negotiating with landowners was a key part of the process which enabled a satisfactory outcome for all users. This has ensured the PROW network is accessible for a wider range of users. Policy 3 of this Plan seeks to continue to improve accessibility for a wider range of users by creating 10 accessible routes in 10 years.

ROWIP4 will reflect the successful elements of previous Council ROWIPs but will be brought up to date and have a long-term strategic vision by reflecting the current and future needs of stakeholders and local communities. Whilst preparing the first draft, we have carried out extensive external stakeholder engagement to ensure that ROWIP4 is a plan for the County, not just for the County Council.

Vision



3: Vision for ROWIP4

County Durham has much to offer residents and visitors who want to discover its natural beauty. At 2,676 square kilometres, it is a large, geographically diverse area with a vast network of footpaths, converted wagonways and railway lines which connect the many towns and villages within the County. The network of trails and paths are extensive and provide County Durham with some significant advantages in terms of planning and creating routes; allied to this is the landscape itself which showcases the remnants of the County's industrial past.

County Durham has a varying landscape of dales, moors, coastline, and wooded river valleys, as well as beautiful nature reserves, parks and reclaimed land which surround towns and villages throughout the County. This diverse landscape distinguishes County Durham; the rich environmental and industrial heritage can be explored through using PROW. Whether a visitor stops to explore an Anglo-Saxon church in Escomb or to watch otters by the river at Shincliffe, the effect is the same - to paint the County in a positive light as a place of discovery.

The Council and its partners have strong aspirations to put County Durham on the map for its beautiful countryside and PROW to attract both residents and tourists to visit the outdoors and improve their health and wellbeing. Linear tourist routes, such as the Pennine Way, King Charles III England Coast Path, Northern Saints Trails, Weardale Way and Teesdale Way, provide impressive walking, cycling, and riding opportunities. We will support our communities to create, maintain and publicise circular routes from settlements so residents can be more active every day. More routes will be available to communities because of an uplift in digital accessibility and we will have implemented a monitoring system to provide information on where popular routes exist. This will enable the Council and its partnership organisations to invest in the right routes across the County. We will therefore invest in facilities and greenspaces to maximise the potential of our environment.

ROWIP4 will help improve the health and wellbeing of our residents. An objective is to make PROW more attractive and accessible for all. The vision for County Durham in 2033 is to have details of routes which can be accessed online, where navigation is easy and exciting. The Council will help provide 10 accessible circular routes in 10 County Durham settlements in 10 years, promoting formal and informal physical activity close to home. Our PROW network will therefore be more accessible and inclusive, and this will help embed physical activity into the fabric of everyday lives for residents and tourists.

Through ROWIP4, we will deliver a range of planned green networks which incorporate and provide multiple benefits simultaneously to local communities. These benefits can include the protection of biodiversity and wildlife, improvement to mental and physical wellbeing, the development of recreational sport and the reduction of carbon emissions.

The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the importance of accessing PROW, the valuable role greenspace has in managing physical and mental wellbeing and has subsequently altered the behaviour of many County Durham residents, encouraging physical activity and engaging people with the outdoor environment.

We have analysed Google's Covid-19 Mobility Data, which suggests that the physical activity of County Durham residents increased by 89% in the summer months of 2022, compared to December 2020 where it was only a 21% increase in physical activity, though take into consideration that the UK was in a tiered lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The data can be accessed [here](#). Physical activity was measured through residents accessing greenspace, such as visiting national parks, beaches, and public gardens. The data, which was collected through manipulating mobile location history settings, illustrates that more people are using greenspace, exhibiting the need to provide relevant infrastructure to provide for this growth in use. Therefore, the ROWIP4 project comes at a time when people in County Durham communities value their local greenspace more than ever.

ROWIP4's Strategic Objectives

- Managing and enhancing the PROW network so it is fit for the 21st century.
- Promoting a PROW network that contributes to the Green Economy by marketing the County's high-quality environment.
- Empowering communities and individuals to 'Move More'.
- Ensuring the County's PROW are accessible to people of all abilities.

Scope



4: Scope of ROWIP4 from 2024 to 2034

While economic pressures continue to shape how local authorities can function, there are also positive changes with more opportunities to build partnerships and seek new funding. In particular, the integration of public health functions within the local authority allows a new approach to contributing to quality of life and health and wellbeing by enabling and encouraging everyday physical activity.

ROWIP4 differs to previous ROWIPs published by the Council in terms of the project's duration – the plan is set out to be published and applicable to County Durham for the next 10 years (previous plans only covered 3 to 4 years). This 10-year plan gives the Council's Rights of Way Team the time to work with other departments and partners on shared goals, enabling investment on strategic objectives rather than always reacting to day-to-day issues. Whilst it is important to be able to respond to public concerns, there is a need for a plan to build a better PROW network in line with our strategic objectives set out above. ROWIP4 therefore has greater longevity and aims to provide a longer strategic vision for PROW across the County.

ROWIP4 aims to be community led and informed by the quality of information with continuous monitoring methods and regular reviewing of the policies in the document. We aim to achieve our strategic objective of making the network fit for the 21st century.

ROWIP4 is a long-term strategy with an improvement plan. Policies are set out as the mechanism for delivering the objectives within this 10-year timeframe. As part of ROWIP4, extensive consultation has been carried out across Council departments and with external organisations to develop policies and deliver this draft plan (see table below). This engagement has additionally formed part of the draft implementation plan, since stakeholders highlighted specific areas of the PROW network which need improving and prioritising. In addition, quantifiable data from internal and external stakeholders has been gathered to inform our strategic objectives for the PROW network and these priorities inform the policies in the plan.

Internal Stakeholders

Sustainable Travel
Countryside Team
Public Health
Rights of Way Team
Highways
Equality and Diversity
Legal Services
Visit County Durham
North Pennines National Landscape Team
Planning and Development Management
Culture, Sport, and Tourism

External Stakeholders

Area Action Partnerships
National Trust
Forestry England
Local Access Forum
Sport England
County Durham Sport
Special Access Consultant, Experience Community
Cycling UK: North of England
Wolsingham Wayfarers
Walk and Talk Trust
British Horse Society

It is more important than ever that the access network provides high quality links to work and to local services from new and existing housing areas. High quality path provision assists regeneration and encourages businesses to invest and expand in County Durham.

The Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated that people now, more than ever before, understand the value of local PROW that are close to their home and recognise the importance of utilising greenspace for the benefit of their mental and physical health. This is in part due to the number of people who are now working from home, which increased significantly during the pandemic, as well as the isolation felt by many during lockdown. ROWIP4 comes at a time when people need and value their local PROW.

Although previous ROWIPs focussed on the PROW network, we recognise that this is one element within the wider access network. To strategically manage and improve the whole network, ROWIP4 will consider all routes and as such it covers PROW (footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways, and byways), railway paths, permissive paths, promoted routes, cycle routes, Open Access, or Coastal Access Land and other public sector land where public access is available. Where the plan states “path” this is in its broadest sense and refers to all types mentioned.

There are a wide variety of users of our PROW network, and the importance of encouraging the broadest cross-section of users from local communities is paramount; from horse-riders and cyclists who use the multitude of bridleways to walkers and running groups who utilise extensive footpaths for recreational means. Through ROWIP4, we will continue to have due regard for the Equality Act 2010 by considering the widest range of users, in particular individuals with mobility issues.

We will also continue to adhere to our duty to protect sensitive habitats and biodiversity in managing and improving access. Natural England’s National Character Area profiles will be used to help determine access improvements which are appropriate to the landscape character of each area. Opportunities to contribute to leisure options will be a key objective of the plan.

Policies

The policies in ROWIP4 are different to policies seen in the previous three ROWIPs, as the policies seek to bring digital data and mapping into how the Council plan and monitor our PROW network for the benefit of communities, which will ultimately guide investment.

ROWIP4 is designed to promote County Durham’s PROW network to ensure it is more accessible and attractive for all our residents and visitors.

An objective is to establish County Durham as the flagship area for access to the outdoors and to be seen as the nation’s premier walking County.

Policies



5: Policies

Policy 1: Managing and Delivering a High-Quality Access network

The Council and its partners will deliver high quality improvements to the network and their working practices to enable a sustainable, attractive, and efficient use of resources.

The Council and its partners will:

- A. Protect and maintain the network by ensuring the rights of the public are asserted and protected through the allocation of an annual budget for maintenance and continuing the registration and protection of unrecorded rights, as well as the ongoing maintenance of network records;
- B. Modernise the network by improving existing routes and creating new paths only where there is a need and ensuring permissive access agreements are in accordance with the policies contained later within ROWIP4;
- C. Prioritise improvements. Specific priorities for ROWIP4 include:
 - a. Auditing and subsequently prioritising significant investment in signage across the County;
 - b. Identifying and investing in a network of bridleways;
 - c. Delivering the Stockton and Darlington Heritage Railway walking and cycling routes;
 - d. Prioritising PROW routes close to settlements (See Policy 2: Awareness of Public Rights of Way and other routes);
 - e. Allocating resources to work and liaise with communities (See Policy 4: Empowering Communities to own their Public Right of Way Network); and
 - f. Supporting the diversion of PROW out of farmyards where possible and rationalising routes only where appropriate (See Policy 6: Ensuring the Countryside Code and access legislation is followed, and Landowners are respected)

The Council and its partners will strive to manage and deliver the PROW network so that it fulfils its potential and is an available and enjoyable resource for the public. Good management includes maintenance, which is crucial to making the most of the network, as well as investment in improvements and encouraging people to use and enjoy the routes. Enforcing the Highway Law is also a vital area of work, and the Council and its partners will fulfil their duties to assert and protect the public's right to use the routes.

Local Highway Authorities have duties under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Highways Act 1980 to ensure that PROW are adequately signposted, maintained, and free from obstruction. ROWIP4 will fulfil this duty by directing investment into the auditing of signage across the County, since there has been no strategic investment in signage in the last 20 years. This will enable signage to be of a high standard and available for people to use. It is crucial to have high-quality signage on the ground for people to feel confident using these routes, and many stakeholders agree that signage is the most important piece of infrastructure which needs improving to encourage public engagement with PROW. Due to the scale of the County, auditing of signage needs to be planned and carried out in a strategic and logical way.

Bridleways are an important element of the PROW network, yet despite this, they lack connectivity, safe access for horse-riders and suitable parking. Subsequently, the British Horse Society want to create new routes to expand the number of bridleways that already exist. It must be ensured that the development or enhancement of new bridleways is strategic, therefore, as part of the ROWIP4 delivery plan, we are planning to invest in enhanced bridleways close to local communities. This will create desirable, accessible and convenient locations where investment can take place to provide high-quality bridleways for all users.

In alignment with Policy 2, stakeholders believe ROWIP4 should focus its investment near local settlements and communities, in both rural and urban environments, to develop circular routes for residents. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that having PROW or accessible routes close to communities meets the needs of a variety of users and encourages physical activity since routes are closer to people's homes and therefore easier to access. Policy 1, criteria d, states that ROWIP4 will target investment in routes near populations, with H100 routes as an example of this.

It is evident that social media has enhanced the number and variety of localised walking groups, who have an interest in improving walking and riding routes. In recognition of this growth in user-group popularity, all partners must liaise with these groups in local communities to stimulate greater engagement and investment of the PROW network, which will require the allocation of resources. Policy 4 reiterates the importance of engaging local communities and promoting the use of PROW routes.

Rationalising the number of routes may be necessary to ensure sustainability based on local need. It is a central issue which could save maintenance resources and benefit both private landowners and public users by closing some routes to provide a more sustainable, suitable route. Rationalising a route will only occur where necessary and will improve the PROW network rather than cause detriment through unnecessary removal.

CASE STUDY: The Stockton and Darlington Railway

The Stockton and Darlington Railway is a 26-mile route in which people can walk, cycle and ride. The active mode route connects heritage attractions along the old railway line, which was the first public railway to use steam locomotives. The Stockton and Darlington Railway corridor will be a leading heritage transport destination and will improve the environment, economic growth and development, connectivity, physical activity, and place-making for rural communities. The route has £7.m worth of funding from the Levelling Up Fund and is to be completed by 2024, ahead of the bicentenary of the railway in 2025.

Policy 2: Awareness of Public Rights of Way and other routes

To support the tourist economy, connect communities and improve access to and the useability of PROW, the Council will increase awareness of the County's access network.

The Council will:

- A. Work with internal and external partners to digitise the wider access network and public routes onto one digital platform. Actions will include integrating the Definitive Map of PROW with permissive routes within the County onto one digital sharing platform;
- B. Identify and map, onto a digital platform, a tiered system of PROW routes to ensure investment in the right places. Tiers will consist of branded national and regional routes, tourist routes and local routes, including the railway paths;
- C. Develop a working relationship with a smartphone app company who can host our branded routes:
 - a. Allocate a resource to monitor the app and website.
- D. Identify and improve signage to gateway sites to public spaces and deliver improvement to key entry points (See Policy 1, criteria C).

The overall aim of this policy is to map the PROW network digitally to create awareness of PROW and permissive routes for the public in order for these routes to be used for recreational, tourist and leisure means. The digital platform is for all to use which will include all leisure, tourism, and utility information and routes. The digital platform will use GPS software to provide directions and confirm positioning on the PROW network; the digital platform will not be reliant on broadband activity and thereby be reliable and efficient. Digital mapping additionally ensures the PROW network is fit for the 21st century as many people do not rely on paper maps anymore. Smartphones and a multitude of apps, including Strava, Komoot and the Ordnance Survey (OS), are being used more frequently.

It is more accessible if data on where PROW routes are and how to access them, the facilities available and general information about the PROW exists all in one place. This will undoubtedly facilitate increased usage of the network. Access to PROW will therefore be attractive and convenient for our residents and help achieve the County Durham Partnership priorities which include connecting communities and helping people achieve long and independent lives.

County Durham Sport and Sport England highlighted that lack of confidence in using PROW exists due to the lack of reliable infrastructure, such as the insufficient provision of signs, which creates fear around following routes that do not have clear directions. People may be apprehensive about using new routes because of the uncertainty about what they will find when they venture off-road. Having access to information about PROW on digital platforms across the County thereby reassures people and provides confidence that PROW are available for the full range of users. By improving signage to gateway sites and key entry points, residents and tourists will feel more confident, safe, and welcome, as routes are clearly and physically signposted.

With a digital platform, users will also be able to report issues with routes in real time, pinpointing specific locations and addressing specific matters. By providing a real time digital platform, users will be able to provide feedback to the County Council and other partners to help them understand where issues are and to tackle them effectively, providing a network of PROW that are to a high standard. Therefore, the creation of a digital platform is a well-designed and strategic approach to ROWIP4.

To ensure digital information is up to date and is continually providing the correct information is the requirement of a specific role within the Council's Rights of Way Team. Hence, as part of this Policy, it is necessary that resources are allocated within the Rights of Way Team to monitor and contribute to social media sites and the digital platform created by ROWIP4. Ongoing maintenance of the digital information is vital if ROWIP4 is to adapt to technological changes and provide relevant information on PROW. This ensures that digital information and Policy 2 of the Plan are future proof by being kept up to date.

Additionally, to support County Durham's tourist economy, and in connection with the provision of a county-wide digital platform, it is intended to identify and map a tiered structure of branded PROW routes to encourage their use by visitors and County residents. The first tier consists of national and regional routes, such as the King Charles III England Coast Path, Pennine Way, Northern Saints Trail, Coast to Coast Cycle Route, Teesdale Way and the Weardale Way. These routes will act as core spine routes, and we will look at the connections from other PROW to this core network. The second tier will consist of notable tourist destinations. Areas will include routes to and from Beamish, the Bishop Auckland Project, Durham City Peninsula, and Low and High Force. The Council will work in partnership with Visit County Durham, County Durham Sport, the Woodland Trust, the National Trust, and Forestry England, as well as the North Pennines National Landscape Partnership, the Durham Heritage Coast Partnership, and other stakeholders. Finally, as part of the third tier, it is intended to identify and map local walking and riding routes along PROW and railway paths, and as part of the Heritage 100 (H100) franchise (see case study on H100 in Policy 4).

As part of Policy 1, criteria d, ROWIP4 has targeted investment in routes near populations. The H100 project is an example of a programme of branded walks which have been created close to populations and settlements.

Policy 3: Making our Network Accessible – ‘10 in 10’

The Council is committed to making PROW more accessible for all our residents.

To achieve this, the Council will:

- A. Establish and promote at least 10 accessible routes in 10 years. These accessible routes will be prioritised in the northern, central, and coastal areas of County Durham, where there are fewer promoted accessible PROW. These routes will need to be wheelchair accessible; and
 - a. Avoid routes with impassable bridges, stiles, and spring-loaded gates which hinder access for disabled users; and
 - b. Have accessible parking and detailed route information to encourage their use and provide awareness of accessible PROW.
- B. Consider how existing PROW can link with railway paths to create circular routes which supply a useable network of PROW for people to enjoy.

The Council is committed to the principles of equality and ensuring people can have long and independent lives. Regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, economic status or ability, all residents of County Durham should have accessible, safe, and convenient choices to help them move more. We will continue to abide by the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that when we devise strategic policies that direct investment, we will not discriminate against protected characteristics.

As part of the ‘10 in 10’ Policy set out in criteria A. above, the Council will create the ‘10 in 10’ routes in northern, central, and coastal parts of County Durham, as many of our main population centres are located in these destinations. The northern, central and coastal parts of County Durham, defined by their landscape character areas and which correspond spatially with the Tyne and Wear Lowlands, the Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe and the Pennine Magnesium Limestone Plateau as set out in the [2008 County Durham Landscape Strategy](#), are pivotal for the development of accessible routes. This is because some accessible routes already exist and are promoted in the west and south of County Durham, as illustrated by phototrails.org. (see case study).

The 10 accessible routes will be audited by a specialist Disabled Access Consultant and will help the Council devise a database where accessible routes are highlighted, and quality information and photographs are pinpointed about specific routes for people to make their own decision as to whether they can use a particular PROW. As a minimum, these routes will include appropriate infrastructure to ensure the PROW routes are largely accessible, with advantageous rest points, the replacement of stiles with gates where possible, and sufficient signage. It is additionally advantageous to have accessible routes near toilets; there must be ‘a loo, a brew, and a view’. People need the appropriate services.

Accessibility means making routes suitable for a range of different users and ensuring they are maintained to a certain standard to help disabled users access the PROW network, thereby creating an inclusive network of routes. It also means providing the right information about a PROW for the individual to make the decision as to whether the route is accessible for them. ROWIP4 will aim to achieve this by providing accurate and high-quality information about PROW.

We believe that everyone should have some capacity to access the PROW network regardless of their personal mobility, and we will work with landowners to help support the provision of infrastructure on the PROW network to help achieve this inclusive approach. Infrastructure can include accessible parking and toilet facilities, family-friendly routes for people who use pushchairs and stable footpaths for people with carers. It also needs to be recognised that some PROW routes will never be accessible for all.

We understand that everyone across the County has varying needs, and there is no set standard for accessibility, though we believe it is about giving people access to quality information so individuals can make their own personal decision as to whether the PROW is suitable for them. Information can include the 'level' of the route, in terms of the route's difficulty, which could reflect the gradient and the existence of obstacles. Residents and tourists need physically accessible routes which must be successfully promoted so that everyone is aware these routes exist.

A major theme that came out of the stakeholder consultation was the need for circular routes for our communities to enjoy. Regardless of mobility issues, the requirement to develop a network of circular routes in communities is a theme for ROWIP4. Circular routes are important because they make the PROW more attractive by enabling individuals to see and access a variety of interesting landscapes compared to 'out and back' routes, and thereby engage a range of users. Users can include dog walkers, families, running clubs, cyclists, horse-riders, and those with disabilities. It is comforting to users of circular routes to know that the route will always take them back to the start.

Furthermore, the railway paths around the County are valuable components in achieving accessible routes, since they provide a network of routes that are already largely accessible in terms of width, gradient, and surface. We will use the railway paths as a method for achieving circular routes by improving those PROW which connect to the railway path network. Railway paths provide a good starting point and usually comprise sufficient facilities and destination points due to their popularity. Moreover, by providing a network of PROW that a range of people can utilise for recreational means, biodiversity and surrounding land will also be protected and preserved since a sufficient variety of designated routes will exist, preventing 'footpath-creep'.

CASE STUDY: Phototrails

[Phototrails.org](https://www.phototrails.org) provides key information on the accessibility of a route, with details on the terrain and gradient of a PROW, and with photos attached to illustrate the route's valuable features. This website is an excellent example of a website which incorporates important details about PROW in County Durham and elsewhere. The details on the website enable individuals to choose routes which are suitable to their skillset and needs. Condition surveys are also carried out annually to understand what specifically needs maintaining and improving on particular PROW on the website.

Policy 4: Empowering Communities to 'own' their Public Right of Way Network

The Council will, in alignment with the principles of the whole-systems approach and placed-based approach, advocated in the Council's 'Moving Together' Strategy, encourage communities to take 'ownership' of their local paths and PROW.

The Council will build on the success of the Parish Path Partnership over the last 30 years and the Council will:

- A. Work with local community ambassadors in communities to help promote local routes and navigate people on certain PROW which intersect settlements;
- B. Link with the community wellbeing resource within Culture, Sport and Tourism to raise awareness and maximise the local environment that supports physical activity;
- C. Develop a strong relationship between local community ambassadors and the Rights of Way Team to manage the PROW network in local areas on a grass-root level;
- D. Identify community hubs with facilities where information about local PROW is accessible for individuals to have a greater understanding of local PROW and the history or culture that is attached to them. These hubs could be local community centres or town halls;
- E. Work with partners in education to promote local PROW and their links to local history and archaeology; and
- F. Allocate specific resources within the Rights of Way Team to work with residents and Town and Parish Councils and local community groups to map where important PROW are in the different settlements.

Community engagement is key to ROWIP4 as the PROW network is a community asset which meets a variety of policy agendas. Local authorities have fewer resources due to budgetary constraints, thus, the Council's Rights of Way Team need to work in partnership with local Town and Parish Councils, as well as voluntary and charity organisations in the County and other partners.

Organisations such as Sport England and County Durham Sport have found that Covid has changed the way people exercise and get active, therefore, ROWIP4 must support the provision of infrastructure which enables people to undertake different types of exercise that are suited to their needs and located close to their homes. Thus, identifying community hubs that already exist in settlements, such as town halls or community centres, provides a space where information about PROW can be accessed to further encourage physical activity in 'hyperlocal' environments.

Getting communities to feel passionate about routes which are local to them helps encourage a wide range of people to use the network, since contextualising the PROW network personalises PROW. It generates a more intimate connection and promotes physical activity in 'hyperlocal' environments, which in turn, benefits mental wellbeing and reduces the reliance on the private car. Moreover, getting people to care about their local path networks results in PROW being maintained as people have more pride in their local routes. It also helps protect the environment through reducing footpath-creep, since people are less likely to go off-route when PROW are well signposted and maintained.

To achieve local involvement and to promote physical activity, the Council are adopting a placed-based approach and have taken inspiration from the [Culture, Sport and Tourism Volunteer Programme](#), which establishes health walks and trains leaders; and from discussions with the Walk and Talk Trust on a number of educational programmes they offer to schools in County Durham. As part of ROWIP4, we want to contribute towards a partnership approach to raise awareness of the importance of physical activity as a tool to change lives. Partners include the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, and Living Streets.

Similar to the Culture, Sport and Tourism volunteer programme, ROWIP4 will support local community volunteers who will encourage physical activity in local areas. These local community volunteers will serve as volunteer community representatives and will monitor the PROW network, manage community involvement, provide knowledge about local routes, and create community-based routes. These ambassadors are active advocates who encourage physical activity through their knowledge of activities and opportunities specific to the area. We additionally aim to involve participants in the Guided Walking Programme; a programme managed by the Council's Countryside Team which comprises experienced walkers who have a great knowledge of the PROW network. Accessing 'hyperlocal' community-based routes in partnership with community ambassadors will help residents build their confidence in using PROW across the County for recreational means, thereby encouraging exploration to take place further afield. Local routes are therefore good starting points to help develop personal confidence.

Public Health's Moving Together strategy takes a similar approach to Culture, Sport and Tourism's Physical Activity Framework strategy and volunteer programme. The Moving Together strategy aims to enable every resident in the County to access a range of movement opportunities to improve their physical and mental wellbeing by 2028. It achieves this through a placed-based and whole-systems approach, where a variety of stakeholders are responsible for implementing the mechanisms at local level to enable this change. ROWIP4 is adopting the same placed-based approach through the aim of encouraging physical activity in local communities by improving the PROW network through greater maintenance of signage and path surface, as well as supporting the involvement of local community ambassadors, for example.

Another way to engage with local communities is through education. As part of the H100 programme, the charity 'Walk and Talk Trust' are creating 100 circular walking routes which connect to the heritage and culture of 100 settlements in County Durham. The concept is to promote and launch these walks in co-production with schoolchildren in the County. Once the schoolchildren are passionate about their local H100 walk, they will become ambassadors for the walks and have a lifelong interest in these local walking routes. These educational routes will enable children to develop skills such as map reading and to understand grid references, for example. See the case study below for more information on the H100.

CASE STUDY: Wolsingham Wayfarers

The [Wolsingham Wayfarers](#) are an example of local involvement in PROW and represent the positive community involvement we hope to see across the County. They are a voluntary group and were set up around 30 years ago in 1993 by the community in Wolsingham. The group support PROW in the local area and their objective is to maintain and promote 140 miles of designated footpaths within the Parish of Wolsingham and Thornley. The group additionally provide guided walks and receive funding from grant aid, including from the Parish Paths Partnership, which contributes towards the walking leaflets and footpath repairs they provide. For example, the group recently purchased posts to waymark local footpaths. The Wolsingham Wayfarers also work with private landowners on a regular basis, as well as Durham County Council, and have conducted path audits and devised local walks which are accessible for wheelchairs and pushchair users.

CASE STUDY: Heritage 100

The [Heritage 100](#) project aspires to create 100 walking routes throughout County Durham, with each route being circular and between 3-to-10 miles long. The aim is for these walks to be 'collectable', giving people the motivation to collect walks to complete together with friends and family. Each H100 walk will have a name and a narrative – a story to connect County Durham communities to the industrial and environmental heritage of the area through the PROW network, developing community knowledge about local PROW. 100 walks have now been identified including walks in Consett, Ushaw Moor and Seaham. These walks are a great way to connect to County Durham's unique heritage whilst simultaneously enhancing physical health and mental wellbeing. The charity Walk and Talk trust are now seeking to deliver the appropriate infrastructure, including physical and digital waymarking. The H100 walks, which are based around 100 settlements in County Durham, fit nicely with our priorities in Policy 1, which includes improving and investing in PROW close to where people live.

Policy 5: Promoting the Economy and Cultural Identity of County Durham through our Public Rights of Way Network

The Council will market PROW to promote the tourist economy and cultural heritage of County Durham and to engage people of all ages.

The Council will:

- A. Promote walking, and the other activities available on PROW, as a tourist pursuit in connection with Visit County Durham to enhance the tourist economy; and
- B. Publicise PROW on local news sites, social media and through other means to promote PROW to local communities.

The Council will promote and market routes that are important to the County and hold significant value, such as the newly created Northern Saints Trails (see case study below). It was highlighted during the stakeholder consultation stage that promoting and marketing PROW is a priority for stakeholders as the Council and its partners can make residents and visitors more aware of this marketable asset.

Outdoor recreation is an important income generator for County Durham due to the magnificent variety in landscapes and abundance of greenspace. It is important that ROWIP4 supports the tourist economy by improving existing PROW in all areas of the County and particularly in rural areas. Visit County Durham note that the annual income brought in through tourist attractions in County Durham is £507m. All areas in County Durham will economically benefit from developing PROW tourist attractions, but it is particularly important to the economies in the rural west of the County. The Plan is therefore focussed on developing the tourist PROW network and attracting visitors to the west of Durham, since the west faces greater rural isolation and deprivation in terms of employment and infrastructure. Notwithstanding this, the west of the County is superbly located due to the proximity of the North Pennines, which has attractive walking, horse-riding and cycling routes; it is thereby an ideal place to enhance PROW.

Furthermore, as part of the Inclusive Economic Strategy, the UK Active Deloitte report projected that the potential economic benefit of getting physically inactive workers to be active is up to £17bn per year, measured in healthcare savings and increased productivity. In addition, in line with the emerging Inclusive Economic Strategy, ROWIP4 promotes outdoor recreation as a major asset for the County as a method to improve physical connectivity between places and enhance digital infrastructure. Therefore, the Plan supports the ambitions to grow our green economy and support the economic growth that can be fostered through the walking and riding activities promoted by Visit County Durham. It is thereby essential for the County's economy that physical activity is promoted.

Effective promotion and marketing, as well as physical and digital signposting (set out in Policy 2) of PROW will encourage the use of the PROW network and educate potential users about the heritage of County Durham and how this can be linked to physical activity. Visitors and many County Durham residents are unaware of how extensive the PROW network is and how it can be used. This increased awareness could attract more visitors, and this would bring benefits to the County's visitor economy, since visitors are more likely to spend money in local facilities such as shops and pubs, putting back into the local and 'green' economy. For example, the Northern Saints Trails have an estimated net impact of £4.7m annual expenditure, with a significant proportion of this expenditure spent on food and drink. The estimated economic impact of the Northern Saints Trails on the County as a whole is £2.2m, illustrating how important it is to promote PROW in the County and attract a range of users.

The Council will additionally aim to connect PROW with local news platforms, such as Durham County News, as well as efficiently promote ROWIP4 and PROW to local communities through social media, an online website, leaflets, and bulletins, to generate greater awareness of county-wide PROW. This will make it easier for people to see the routes they can access which are located nearby, and thereby encourage the use of the PROW network.

CASE STUDY: Northern Saints Trails

The [Northern Saints Trails](#), which are based on ancient pilgrim routes, are marketed through a website, which outlines the trails, itineraries and where visitors can eat, drink, and stay when visiting the trails. This website highlights the importance of promoting tourist attractions through an informative online presence and is what ROWIP4 is aiming to achieve in Policy 2 of the Plan.

CASE STUDY: Hamsterley Forest

The Forestry England, who manage [Hamsterley Forest](#), have found that naming their trails after local features to incorporate the local landscape makes the walks more attractive, and helps people navigate the routes since there is a clear destination point. In addition, clearly waymarking the routes attracts an audience who utilise the routes as starting points to get more confident in following more advanced PROW across the County, since clearly waymarking routes makes the routes easier to follow with less confusion. The routes then become more accessible and inclusive too. Naming routes will also help bring attention to the cultural history of County Durham. The Hamsterley model of branding walks was supported by many stakeholders and this model was used recently when developing the Northern Saints project.

Policy 6: Ensuring the Countryside Code and access legislation is followed, and Landowners are respected

The Council is committed to educating users of the PROW network about the Countryside Code and the work of private landowners to ensure the network is used in a responsible way.

The Council will:

- A. Work with local communities and all educational facilities to promote the accepted and expected behaviour when using the PROW network;
- B. Develop a shorthand summary of the Countryside Code for Council Rangers and users;
- C. Continue the strong working relationships with private landowners to ensure PROW are managed effectively;
- D. Continue to support appropriate diversions of PROW out of farmyards and other working areas where such diversions will reduce conflict and benefit both land managers and path users; and
- E. Continue to work in partnership with the Police in matters regarding anti-social behaviour to make the PROW network safe.

Promoting the Countryside Code is important particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic, which increased the number of people accessing the PROW network and attracted a diverse set of new visitors. Unfortunately, however, this has also led to increased levels of anti-social behaviour. Therefore, educating the public about how to behave and respect the countryside is more important than ever.

County Durham has an extensive network of PROW and these need to be respected to ensure their high standards are maintained. Residents and tourists should be made aware of what is expected of them when accessing and utilising PROW in order to be responsible and create a safe PROW network. We will therefore produce shorthand copies of the Countryside Code for both Council Rangers and the public, which detail the rules and responsibilities for all users accessing PROW.

It is important that landowners understand what their duties are, and that people have a right to use PROW. Continuing to work with landowners to ensure PROW remain useable and well maintained is vital. We will aim to provide support to landowners and farmers to deliver greater security by re-directing particular PROW out of farmyards through the allocation of a dedicated diversions officer in the Council's Rights of Way Team. It is also important that private landowners maintain the diverted footpaths to the legal standard required. Providing suitable alternative routes is essential, as it will make it easier for the public who will not have to negotiate relevant farmyards and thereby provide security to farmers through reducing potential criminal activity on PROW and subsequently their private land. The Wolsingham Wayfarers offer a prime example which illustrates that having a strong relationship with private landowners ensures that the process of maintaining PROW to a high standard is much easier. We will additionally work with local communities and schools to communicate how important maintaining the PROW network is.

Furthermore, continuing to work in partnership with the Police will ensure the PROW network remains safe and secure. Anti-social behaviour, particularly illegal motorbike use on PROW, is becoming an increasing issue in urban and urban-fringe areas. We are seeing the fear of motorbikes gaining access as a key barrier to some landowners agreeing to make footpaths more accessible. Ultimately, illegal motor vehicle use is a police matter, but a partnership approach is the preferred method of addressing it. Balance between access and user security is required. Therefore, we will share information with the Police in terms of the locations of where anti-social behaviour is most prominent to tackle the issue at hand. This will minimise the disruption for lawful users on PROW across the County and provide extra security to farmers and/or private and public landowners. We will also adopt 'Share with Care' signage which the Countryside Team have implemented on railway routes across the County, reinstating the importance of using PROW with consideration.

Policy 7: Incorporating Public Rights of Way in New Development

The Council will protect and enhance existing PROW and seek additions to the PROW network when new development is being planned. This will help promote mental and physical wellbeing.

The Council will:

- A. Prioritise, protect, or maintain PROW in development within the County in accordance with Policy 26 of the CDP; and
- B. Provide clear guidelines on securing S106 money and the spending of this funding in the right places to prioritise and protect the PROW network.

Links to existing PROW from new developments are required to encourage sustainable travel, discourage reliance on the private car, and promote mental and physical wellbeing. This was a top priority of stakeholders. ROWIP4 will therefore make it easier, through a digital platform as stated under Policy 2, for property developers to understand where links to PROW can be achieved from development sites and to understand that ROWIP4 is a valuable resource to create wellbeing and healthy infrastructure.

Green Infrastructure, under Policy 26 in the CDP, is important to highlight here because it fulfils several important functions for our communities, which ROWIP4 is similarly aiming to achieve. These functions include equality of access, increasing recreational and sport activities, making towns and settlements attractive, improving health and wellbeing, and climate change mitigation. Furthermore, Green Infrastructure is important because it can enable the provision of safe and sustainable modes of travel (in accordance with Policy 21 of the CDP), such as walking and cycling, to take place through using the PROW network. PROW in development sites should enhance links to existing services and local amenities for the convenience of all users, increasing opportunities for healthy living and sustainable transport through active travel.

In terms of financially prioritising the PROW network and to support improvements to the PROW network across the County, financial contributions can be sought from open space contributions or through creative and quality site design. Financial contributions must be negotiated on a site-by-site basis depending on the characteristics of the site.

CASE STUDY: Mount Oswald, Durham City

Planning developments are starting to prioritise access to greenspace and PROW, particularly in terms of footpaths and cycleways. This is illustrated by Mount Oswald. The 38.62-hectare site is occupied by built development and is surrounded by university accommodation and buildings, residential blocks, and housing. Residential properties exist to the north west of the site and a footpath and cycleway runs adjacent to the northern site boundary. The newly widened and re-surfaced demarcated footpaths and cycleways connect residents to the A167 and to nearby facilities in Durham City.

The resurfacing and widening of such routes has provided an accessible means of access for residents, which are well lit and useable.

Policy 8: Monitoring the use of our Public Rights of Way

The Council is committed to monitoring the use of the PROW network and understanding how the use of the PROW network impacts ecology and climate resilience. The Council will seek to support the provision of improved infrastructure for popular PROW destinations, whilst protecting local biodiversity.

The Council will:

- A. Work with internal and external partners to develop technology-based methods of monitoring the PROW network; and
 - a. Understand how Bluetooth and GPS data can be mined and utilised to help monitor the use of the PROW network.
- B. Increase the number and distribution of reliable 'counters' on the PROW network.

Monitoring will be achieved by installing additional counters onto the PROW network, as counters are used extensively by other organisations such as the National Trust, and they help provide accurate data on the number of visitors to a site or using a route. Counters are already in place on the Pennine Way and the King Charles III England Coast Path in County Durham, on the Northern Saints Trails, and on a key local route in the Deerness Valley. In addition, monitoring could be achieved by harvesting Bluetooth and GPS data from mobile phones.

Appearing as a common theme throughout this plan, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the behaviour of County Durham residents. The pandemic increased the number of people using the PROW network, therefore, monitoring the usage of the network is crucial to understand whether increased usage has been sustained and which routes are the most popular. Monitoring can also be used to measure the effectiveness of information and promotional campaigns which seek to encourage use. This will then inform decisions on the provision of infrastructure and where resources should be focussed to ensure these routes are maintained to a high standard. Infrastructure can include the surface of a PROW and sufficient signage/waymarking to protect biodiversity and direct people to the right place. Monitoring will therefore help the Council and its partners identify the relevant and correct infrastructure to invest in which will aim to accommodate the number of users in a particular destination in County Durham.

This Policy is of particular importance following the Council's Ecological Emergency declaration, which aims to bring awareness to the decline in the abundance of natural life and therefore aims to restore habitats and species across the County. The Council are working on a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which sets out strategic priorities to protect the County's biodiversity. Furthermore, when specific routes become popular, it is essential that the local environment and existing biodiversity is not harmed. Monitoring the PROW network and the number of users helps the Council seek to prevent harm to the environment in popular areas, by directing people along designated path networks that are fit for purpose, which in turn helps stop footpath-creep, preserving the surrounding land and protecting wildlife. Promoting and waymarking branded routes, as mentioned previously, would also contribute to this.

During the development of ROWIP4, the Council engaged with external stakeholders such as the North Pennines National Landscape Team, who stated that due to the extensive nature of PROW in the County, monitoring is important because of ongoing maintenance issues, partly caused by climate change. Extreme weather (such as Storm Arwen) and coastal erosion affects many routes, and the ground is often difficult to navigate. Monitoring the PROW network regularly will therefore identify where areas need specific attention. Climate change is important to consider as the impacts of are likely to get more severe in the future.

Conclusion



6: Conclusion

ROWIP4 is our plan to develop and deliver a high-quality PROW network which is fit for the 21st century in terms of travel, recreation, and enjoyment. The plan follows on from previous Council ROWIPs and continues to promote the vital contribution the PROW network makes to the wider economic, health, environmental and social agendas, as well as Durham County Council's corporate objectives.

Despite ROWIP4's differences to previous Council ROWIPs, as illustrated through the policies which seek to develop digital information, we believe this will stimulate public accessibility to the PROW network and help convey the natural beauty of the County. It is a 10-year strategy and has a strategic plan to improve PROW throughout the County. Therefore, the policies in ROWIP4 are vital to enable the Council and its partners to improve, implement and maintain county-wide PROW and provide accessible infrastructure for both residents and visitors.

Note

ROWIP4 is not a replacement for the statutory duties of the County Council as a Highway Authority, and we will continue to carry out the full range of functions relating to PROW in accordance with legislation.

Appendices



7: Appendices

Appendix A: ROWIP4 and the Council's Key Corporate Plans and Objectives

ROWIP4 will help implement and support the Inclusive Economic Strategy, which aims to physically connect communities in County Durham. The plan will be monitored annually and periodically reviewed to ensure the policies in ROWIP4, and the Inclusive Economic Strategy, are being delivered and this monitoring will be reported to the Local Access Forum.

The vision for County Durham 2019 – 2035

The [County Durham vision](#) was adopted in 2019 and set out the long term vision for the County as a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive. The vision was built on an extensive public consultation and one of the outcomes highlighted through the consultation was that residents were rightly proud of the history and heritage of the county and its beautiful countryside.

The Council's Plan 2022-2026

The [Council Plan 2022-2026](#) supports ROWIP4 through the variety of objectives incorporated within the Plan, which will make the County a better place to work, live and visit. The corporate document sets out the vision for the Council in terms of making the Council fit for the future.

In accordance with ROWIP4, the Council Plan includes environmental objectives to 'create a physical environment that will contribute to good health'; to 'work with others to achieve a carbon neutral County'; and to 'protect restore and sustain our natural environment for the benefit of future generations'. ROWIP4 will aim to support these objectives by delivering a PROW network which is fit for the 21st century through improved signage and digital accessibility, for example.

The Council Plan additionally provides health-related objectives which link to ROWIP4: to 'tackle the discrimination of poor mental health and build resilient communities'; and to 'protect and improve the health of the local population'. ROWIP4 will help deliver these objectives through the promotion of a high-standard PROW network which will encourage local communities to engage with their local routes, thereby benefitting physical and mental wellbeing through physical activity.

Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES) 2022-2035

The IES will create a strong County economy through harnessing the County's strengths, addressing areas for improvement, and delivering what 'levelling up' means to local people. ROWIP4 can support both the green economy and healthy workforces in alignment with the IES, as well as improve physical connectivity between places in the County and enhance digital infrastructure and connectivity. ROWIP4 therefore supports all 5 Ps (people, productivity, places, promotion, and planet) of the IES.

North East Transport Plan 2021-2035

The North East Transport Plan sets out the vision and objectives for transport in the North East from 2021 to 2035. The objectives include a healthier North East, appealing sustainable transport choices, and a safe and secure network. Policy areas include a commitment to Active Travel and Making the Right Travel Choice.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

LCWIPs enable a long-term approach to developing high-quality local cycling and walking networks, increasing the number of trips made by foot or cycle for utility means, such as to places of work or education. The focus of LCWIPs being centred around utility trips enables ROWIP4 to focus on recreation and everyday movement for local people.

Physical Activity Strategy for Durham – Moving Together

This strategy is currently in development but will focus on a whole-systems and place-based approach to ‘build stronger communities, including improved facilities and infrastructure to help make activity an easy option’. A whole-systems and place-based approach reflects the partnership position we are taking in ROWIP4.

Traffic Asset Management Plan 2021

The strategy looks at the quantity and quality of the existing transport assets infrastructure to determine how best to manage them now and in the future. The Plan set out what the Highways priorities are for funding the PROW network to ensure the network is maintained to a high standard.

Other relevant strategies include:

Public Health’s Time to Talk initiative

[Public Health’s Time to Talk initiative](#) is to get people together to talk about their mental health.

Public Health’s Healthy Communities Report

[Public Health’s Healthy Communities Report](#) This report ensures that the design of the built and natural environment contributes to improving public health and reducing health inequalities.

Culture, Sport, and Tourism’s Physical Activity Framework

This is an overarching strategy which will be developed in co-production with a number of community stakeholders to develop a whole systems approach to tackle inequalities in relation to physical activity and to develop effective and sustainable solutions.

Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Ensuring all organisations and services in the County prioritise wellbeing.

Poverty Action Plan 2022-2026

The Plan has been consulted on and the final version of the Plan is going to Cabinet in November 2022. The Plan addresses the socio-economic factors associated with inequalities which prevent residents from accessing Council services.

Climate Emergency Response Plan

The [Climate Emergency Response Plan](#) was adopted by our Cabinet in June 2022 and is committed to reaching Net Zero by 2030, with an 80% real carbon reduction to emissions. County Durham aims to be carbon neutral by 2045.

County Durham Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan 2019-2029

The [County Durham Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan](#) sets out the Council's goals to help more people experience the benefits of cycling and walking. It will deliver local and regional plans and policies which aim to reduce the reliance on private car travel and create confident cycling and walking communities.

The North East Active Travel Strategy 2023

The [North East Active Travel Strategy 2023](#) will thereby enable people to walk, cycle and wheel short journeys that would usually be made by car. The strategy will support local authorities and voluntary groups to deliver more walking and cycling routes.

Durham Tourism Management Plan 2022-2026

The [Durham Tourism Management Plan 2022-2026](#) is the prototype for how County Durham intends to grow the volume and value of its visitor economy between 2016 and 2020.

North Pennines National Landscape Management Plan 2019-2024

The [North Pennines AONB Management Plan 2019-2024](#) provides a framework for action for the conservation and enhancement of wildlife, landscape, and aspects of our cultural heritage between 2019 and 2024.

Durham Heritage Coast Management Plan 2018-2025

The [Durham Heritage Coast Management Plan 2018-2025](#) identifies the main concerns by covering the natural resources, the cultural and historic elements, and the social and economic conditions in coastal communities. These elements frame the Plan for the next 7 years.

National strategies

Nationally, ROWIP4 supports a variety of important strategies and policies which aim to get people more physically active.

UK Active

[More people, More active, More often](#) a mission and vision to improve the health of the nation through promoting active lifestyles by facilitating partnerships, providing support, and a platform to help people get active.

Sport England

[Uniting the Movement](#) a 10-year vision to transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity.

Public Health

The [Everybody active, every day framework for physical activity](#) is an evidence-based approach for national and local action to address the physical inactivity epidemic.

Appendix B: County Durham Plan Context

In the [County Durham Plan 2020](#) (CDP), PROW are directly referenced in Policies 5, 26, 29, 42 and 58 and indirectly referenced in Policies 6, 34 and 38. Other policies in the CDP also protect the integrity of the countryside.

Policy 5 relates to Durham City's Sustainable Urban Extensions. At Sniperley Park, new PROW will link to the wider footpath network in the Browney Valley to the south and new PROW will provide opportunities for circular walks on the land north of Potterhouse Lane and south of Little Gill. Land at Sherburn Road will be allocated for sustainable patterns of development, enabling sustainable travel through the development of routes close to new housing estates for walking and cycling.

Policy 6 Development on Unallocated Sites, states that development on unallocated sites must not result in the loss of open land that has recreational (PROW), ecological or heritage value.

Policy 26 Green Infrastructure (GI) refers to the network of green and blue spaces and corridors that exist within and between cities, towns, and villages. PROW are an important part of this GI network since the Policy states that development will be expected to maintain or improve the permeability of the built environment and access to the countryside for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse-riders.

Policy 29 Sustainable Design, requires major development proposals to create a well-defined, easily navigable, and accessible network of streets and spaces which respond appropriately to local context to ensure that rights of way are well-managed and durable.

Policy 34 Wind Turbine Development: several issues influence the location of wind turbine developments and the acceptability of planning application proposals, one being PROW.

Policy 38 North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be conserved and enhanced. In making decisions on development, great weight will be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty.

Policy 42 Internationally Designated Sites, recognises that the increase of recreational pressure can cause substantial issues for internationally designated sites, thus, when maintaining PROW in these protected sites, internationally designated sites must be protected at all costs.

Policy 58 Preferred Areas for Future Carboniferous Limestone Extraction requires local landscapes and PROW to be taken into consideration to minimise the views into extractions sites from nearby PROW.

Appendix C: ROWIP4 Delivery Plan 2024-2027

The ROWIP4 Delivery Plan sets out the initial priorities for the first three years of the County Durham Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2024-2034. The Improvement Plan is a plan for County Durham, and many organisations can help to deliver its policies and objectives.

As a Highway Authority, Durham County Council has a key delivery role, and this Delivery Plan has a focus on projects which the County Council hopes to deliver during the three-year period. It should not, however, be seen as simply a work programme for the Rights of Way Team or the County Council; it is a guide to how all partners can help deliver the ROWIP objectives over the next three years.

The focus for this Delivery Plan in terms of practical 'on the ground' improvements will be on ROWIP4 Policy 1 and Policy 3, with three key themes:

Theme 1 Linking settlements

Theme 2 Accessible routes

Theme 3 Improving the bridleway network

Work to deliver the other policies will also take place over the period of this Delivery Plan.

Where possible, improvements will see to 'add value' to existing projects, whether County Council projects are delivered by partner organisations or the Council itself. A particular focus will be on accessible routes and a better bridleway network based on the walking and cycling routes developed as part of the Stockton and Darlington Railway project; accessible routes and linking settlements as part of the National Trust's Durham Green Corridor and the work of The Auckland Project around Bishop Auckland. All will need further investigation, discussions with landowners and appropriate resources before physical works can commence.

The Delivery Plan will be hosted on the Council website alongside the ROWIP4 strategic document and can be updated at the end of the first 3 years to ensure that the projects are relevant and reflect the latest priorities and funding opportunities. Not all the funding for the ROWIP4 Delivery Plan is secure but the Delivery Plan will act as a detailed bidding document, giving an indication of the costs of specific projects and allowing the Council and its partners to work up further details relating to the individual projects. For the first year, funding has already been allocated from the Highways capital budget while Elected Member funds, grant funding and partner funds offer the potential for investment in future schemes.

Glossary of terms

IES	Inclusive Economic Strategy
AAP	Area Action Partnership
ROWIP	Rights of Way Improvement Plan
PROW	Public Rights of Way
Rationalising	This involves removing PROW to create one or two more sustainable routes, only where there is a need and to benefit the user.
Elements	Elements include the provision of important infrastructure, such as the highway network, sufficient transport facilities, cycling, walking, and riding routes.
The Heritage Way	This is an 80-mile route which covers the North East, from North Shields, Northumberland, and Durham to Gateshead and Sunderland. It showcases the rich historic and industrial heritage of the area. The Heritage Way
Discover Brightwater	Discover Brightwater is a landscape partnership which has been funded by the Lottery Heritage Fund. Brightwater follows the River Skerne through County Durham. Discover Brightwater
The Pennine Way	This is a 268-mile trail which starts in the Peak District and finishes in Scotland, passing through the North Pennines National Landscape in County Durham. The Pennine Way
English Coast Path	Also recognised as the King Charles III England Coast Path. Part of the route follows the Durham Heritage Coast. English Coast Path
Weardale Way	The Weardale stretches from Cowshill in Upper Weardale to the mouth of the River Wear and the Sunderland Coast. Weardale Way
Teesdale Way	This is a 92-mile route which follows the River Tees, starting in Cumbria and reaching Teesside; it passes through County Durham from west to east of the county. Teesdale Way

Notes

County Durham Partnership, an organisation made up of key public, private and voluntary sector organisations that work together to drive a common purpose and ambition for the County, and to improve the quality of life for County Durham residents. More information can be found [here](#)
Data can be accessed [here](#) showing the provision of important infrastructure, such as the highway network, sufficient transport facilities, cycling, walking, and riding routes, for example, compared to December 2020 where it was only a 21% increase in physical activity, though take into consideration that the UK was in a tiered lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Footpath-creep is when individuals do not use the footpath in place and instead use the surrounding land, which is not suitable or lawful. During the extensive consultation (stakeholder set on page 13), Area Action Partnerships highlighted that ROWIP is a community asset and is a useful document for communities because it intersects a variety of corporate policy agendas, from leisure to climate change. This data can be accessed [here](#)

Once the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been adopted, a link will be provided to the document.

Storm Arwen hit the north of England in November 2021 and caused significant damage to the County in terms of fallen trees and power cuts.

This Is Durham Northern Saints Trails Successes and Outputs [link](#)

The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 can be found [here](#)

The Equality Act 2010 can be found [here](#)

Natural England's National Character [Natural England's National Character](#)

The UKactive mission and vision can be found [here](#)

Sport England 10 year vision can be found [here](#)

Everybody active, every day: framework for physical activity: an evidence-based approach for national and local action to address the physical inactivity epidemic. Publications can be accessed [here](#)