



Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan

2007 - 2012

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FOREWORD

FROM EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES, COUNCILLOR NICK PEEL



The enactment in the year 2000 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW), often referred to as the CROW Bill, is seen as the most important piece of legislation affecting the countryside for a decade. On full implementation, this Act, which covers a wide range of issues, will empower Local Authorities to provide an improved Rights of Way network and wider access within areas of countryside. Section 60 of the Act requires all Highway Authorities within England and Wales to prepare and publish Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

Improvement Plans provide the basis for how Highway Authorities will manage their Public Rights of Way network in the future. This is Bolton's first plan which will be reviewed after five years; subsequent plans will be reviewed at ten yearly intervals after that.

The improvements will lead to a more effective network which will be better suited to the needs of users.

This document is Bolton Council's first Rights of Way Improvement Plan. We have consulted widely on the plan to ensure that everybody's needs are considered. The plan covers the whole of the Borough of Bolton and in producing it; we have paid specific regard to the following:

- the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future demands of the public;
- the opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and enjoyment;
- the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

SCOPE OF THE RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Within this document we have set out the character of the Town, the smaller satellite towns which surround it and the countryside and network of Rights of Way which both serve and connect them (Section 4) and explained how we manage our access land and Public Rights of Way (Section 5).

Through consultation we have identified the requirements of the different types of users who wish to use the network (Section 6) and made an assessment of how their needs are being catered for and what additional improvements will be needed in the future (Section 7).

Making this assessment has enabled us to recognise the network's strengths and weaknesses. From this process we have formulated our 'Statement of Action', a programme of actions and improvements which over the forthcoming five year period will improve access across the Borough.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

Our consultations have led to the identification of six main themes, or types of work which collectively will encourage increased, and better access across Bolton. The six main themes are;

- **Encourage greater use leading to better health and enjoyment**

We have identified the areas of the Borough which have a high score on the index of inactivity. We will help to tackle inactivity (and poor health), by improving existing routes and implementing new routes, particularly circular walks.

- **Improve accessibility to the network**

The improvements listed under this theme will tackle the 'nuts and bolts' problems often associated with access. Overgrown paths, obstructions and poor path construction/maintenance are amongst the problems we will look to solve.

- **Improve publicity, public awareness and signage**

A common complaint was that people were not aware of the places they could walk, ride or cycle. We will address this by ensuring all of our routes are more appropriately signed and make people more aware of them through other forms of media.



- **Create a safe joined up network of off-road routes**

Many users of Public Rights of Way feel unsafe when having to use the road network.

There are not enough bridleways in Bolton at present, and where they do exist they are often fragmented and unusable as part of a longer journey.

Tackling the lack of bridleways will also bring with it benefits for cyclists and walkers.

- **Improve accessibility to services and destinations**

The condition of urban paths was repeatedly mentioned as a barrier to accessing services such as shops and transport links.

We will look to identify and improve key routes throughout the Improvement Plan period, and influence planning policy with regards to the design of public access.

- **Improve communications with landowners**

Achieving the above will invariably involve the co-operation of a wide variety of landowners, who all have their own diverse concerns regarding public access.

By forming a closer working relationship with landowners we hope to improve the experience of public access, for both users and landowners, by designing out their respective problems.



MAKING THE IMPROVEMENTS

We will tackle the above themes by implementing the improvements tabled in the Statement of Action.

The tables contain timescales of when people can expect the relevant improvements to be made. As this Improvement Plan will only run for a five year period, it may not be possible to achieve all that we would hope to within this period.

If this is the case, then any improvements that we have not carried out will be included in the next Rights of way Improvement Plan.

POLICY CONTEXT

MAJOR PLANS AND STRATEGIES

The success of Bolton's Rights of Way Improvement Plan will be dependant upon its ability to support a wide range of key themes, aims and objectives which are contained within both existing and evolving Council approved documents.

The following plans and strategies have been identified as the key documents which the Rights of Way Improvement Plan should help to support.

- Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan
- Bolton Walking Strategy
- Bolton Cycling Strategy
- Greater Manchester Road Safety Strategy
- Physical Activity Strategy
- Bolton Health Strategy
- West Pennine Moors Bridleway Strategy
- Safe Routes to School Strategy

GREATER MANCHESTER LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN (LTP)

Over the course of the next few years, Rights of Way Improvement planning will be incorporated into local transport planning. Bolton, together with the nine other Local Authorities within the Greater Manchester area has recently produced the second regional Local Transport Plan.

The LTP takes a holistic approach to the provision of transport facilities across the whole of the Greater Manchester area. It provides the framework for the implementation and improvement of the 'public' transport network, this includes trains, buses and the metrolink system. The LTP also sets out how improvements to other types of transport facility such as cycle lanes and safer footpaths, can improve life for those who live and work in Greater Manchester.

It is anticipated that ROWIP's will be fully integrated into the LTP process by 2010.

There are various benefits in integration including:



- Establishment of shared aims and the creation of a definite link between ROWIP's and LTP's.
- Ensure that, as public highways, Rights of Way are embraced by the LTP process and recognised in LTP's as a key ingredient in the development of an integrated transport network that provides choice in a variety of transport modes.
- Recognition of the invaluable role rights of way can play in assisting LTP's to achieve the shared priority and wider quality of life objectives.
- Strengthen and facilitate the long term sustainability of Rights of Way through physical improvement and greater legal protection.
- In the longer term, reduce the number of plans produced by an authority.

By inserting the ROWIP into the LTP, Bolton along with the other Greater Manchester Authorities, will be able to bid for funding to make improvements to its Rights of Way network. Successful bids will be judged on their ability to support key Local Transport Plan Objectives.

There are eight key objectives. These are listed below, along with examples of the types of benefit people have already told us they would like to see.

(1) Support increased activity in the Town Centres and key employment areas. Improve their environment, attractiveness, accessibility and safety.

- Opening up of 'green walkways' within the town centre, such as the route along the River Croal.
- Safe and commodious routes, to and from bus and railway stations for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Improve or create routes when new development is being planned.
- A decrease in the amount of litter often found in the town centre and on the footpaths leading into it.

(2) Improve road and community safety, particularly of the most vulnerable users of the transport network.

- Creation and promotion of safe routes to school for schoolchildren.
- 'Walking buses'. Building on an established idea whereby groups of children are picked up along a walking route and escorted to school.
- Segregating cyclists and pedestrians on shared routes.



- Providing better bridleway and multi user routes within the Borough.
 - Improving driver awareness of the presence of vulnerable road users.
 - Creation of 'missing links' which will enable dangerous sections of road to be avoided.
- (3) Minimise the environmental damage caused by transport, particularly in terms of air quality – so improving the quality of life and health of the population.**
- Create a culture of leaving the car at home when it is not required for short journeys.
 - Promoting the health benefits of walking and cycling.
 - Promotion of 'park and ride' schemes.
- (4) Increase the number of non car trips by: Providing a high quality integrated transport network; Providing safe pedestrian and cycle facilities; Ensure that new development is serviced by public transport; Reducing the number of trips to non-central locations.**
- Provide safe pedestrian and cycling facilities
 - Improved links to public transport facilities and key destinations
 - Promotion of safe off road school links
 - Multi-use town to country links
- (5) Improve accessibility by ensuring that the County's transport system meets the needs of all sections of the community, promotes social inclusion and widens choice.**
- More places at railway stations to store a bike or investigate allowing cycles to be taken on public transport facilities
 - Better disabled access to public transport.
 - Widening of pedestrian areas within town centres
 - Improved signposting and waymarking
 - Use of updated 'more appropriate' furniture on Public Rights of Way
 - Improved bridleway facilities
- (6) Manage all trips so as to reduce congestion, improve reliability and reduce the overall proportion of trips by car without detriment to the regeneration of the centres.**
- Improve bus priority routes to encourage more use of public transport and a reduced reliance on the car
 - Make car parking facilities reflect what the local road network can realistically handle
 - Better marketing of the transport services on offer combined with improvements to the Public Rights of Way which lead to them
 - Continuous improvement in the transport options available and their reliability, through continued investment

- (7) **Improve links with the wider Greater Manchester travel to work area, the rest of the County and the rest of the world, for both passengers and freight, in ways which are consistent with other objectives.**
- Improved access along canal towpaths
 - Creation of long distance cycle paths
 - More cross boundary discussion to establish the needs of those in neighbouring Boroughs
- (8) **Maintain, improve and make the best use of existing transport infrastructure and ensure all schemes offer long term value for money**
- Improve lighting facilities on neglected footpaths
 - Appropriate use of barriers to deter illegal use such as motorbikes, whilst facilitating legitimate access
 - Invest in longer lasting surfaces and drainage facilities



BOLTON WALKING STRATEGY

There is a clear and obvious connection between Public Rights of Way and walking. Walking is the only activity permitted on all classifications of Rights of Way. Bolton Council has adopted this strategy because it recognises the significant contribution walking makes in terms of personal health and wider community benefits.

The needs of pedestrians will now be given greater priority and this strategy sets out objectives as to how the current levels of walking in the Borough can be increased through the provision of safe, convenient and appealing routes. Supporting this document, which is also contained within the LTP, will be fundamental in facilitating improvements.

This strategy has the following objectives

- Promotion of walking alongside other sustainable travel modes
- Adoption of a hierarchy that first considers the needs of the pedestrian
- Emphasise the street as a space for living, by addressing urban planning, design, and maintenance issues to ensure quality and security
- Change the image of walking in cities and towns
- Review these objectives each year in the light of emerging research and best practice.

BOLTON CYCLING STRATEGY 2006-2012

This strategy was produced in 2005 so as to update the original 1996 document. In doing this some alarming trends were discovered, most notably that the use of cycling as a transport option has decreased since 1996.

There has however been a slight increase in the use of cycling for recreational purposes.

The Bolton Cycling Strategy supports the Greater Manchester Cycle Action Plan. The original plan set a target of quadrupling cycle use during the period 1996 to 2012. It is now acknowledged that this is unachievable and a more realistic target of increasing cycling activity by 10% between 2003/04 and 2010/11 has been suggested.

This target has already been incorporated into the Local Transport Plan as an aspirational headline indicator. We will aim to support the achievement of this aspiration through the improvements identified in this plan, paying particular regard to supporting and promoting cycling as a recreational activity.

GREATER MANCHESTER ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY

Road safety is an issue that should be of concern to every person in Bolton. Everyone uses the roads in some way – as a driver, passenger, cyclist, or pedestrian. While travelling on our roads, or crossing them, everyone is exposed to the risk of death or injury. Some people, such as the elderly, children, cyclists and horse riders are more vulnerable than other road users.

The Greater Manchester Road Safety Strategy which is contained within the current Local Transport Plan:

- Sets the aims and objectives required to produce a reduction in road accidents and casualties;
- Sets road casualty and accident reduction targets for 2005 and 2010;
- Supports the principles contained in the Government's National Road Safety Strategy 'Tomorrow's Roads – Safer for Everyone' and demonstrates how the national strategy will be delivered in Greater Manchester;
- Supports the recommendations in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions publication 'New Directions in Speed Management – A Review of Policy'; and
- Sets best practice guidelines for the future development of road safety initiatives in Greater Manchester.

To meet the new target reduction for 2010 will require a continued co-ordinated approach to the problem of road traffic accidents. This should be a two pronged approach. Firstly, the Council will continue its work of implementing schemes to improve road safety by way of road layout design and education. Secondly, we will look to provide an improved network of off-road facilities for pedestrians, horse-riders and cyclists.





PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY

Participating in physical activity is crucial to the wellbeing of the people of Bolton. Recent research has indicated that there are particular wards within Bolton where people take little or no exercise. Not surprisingly there is a correlation within these areas with higher levels of obesity, coronary disease and other illnesses.

To tackle this, the Council has adopted an integrated and co-ordinated approach to the development of sport and physical activity, which whilst targeting priority areas, also aims to encourage increased activity generally across the Borough.

This is done under an umbrella organisation called BOSPAA (Bolton Sports and Physical Activity Alliance).

BOSPAA's key aim is to increase participation in physical activity by 1% year on year. It will aim to do this by:

- Being an agent for change
- Providing support – information, expertise, resources
- Grouping local deliverers
- Creating a strategic direction
- Procuring and allocating funding.

BOLTON HEALTH STRATEGY

This strategy is delivered through the close working of a number of partnership agencies within Bolton. The local Primary Care Trust is the lead agency, whose main aims are to:

- Improve health
- Deliver effective, high quality and appropriate care
- Ensure access to services

Bolton Council assists in the delivery of these aims as they reflect the aims of the Council's Social Services Strategy and Community Plan. Its key aims include:

- Tackling obesity (especially amongst children)
- Reducing coronary heart disease and stroke mortality by 2010.



WEST PENNINE MOORS BRIDLEWAY STRATEGY

This is a key document to support the management and development of access for the West Pennine Moors over the next few years.

It is anticipated that the development of new bridleways will not only improve access management in the area, but will provide benefits for the rural economy of the West Pennine Moors. Bolton Council is one of seven local authorities who together with United Utilities and local interest groups will implement the construction of key bridleway routes.

This Strategy has been adopted by the Council in response to the acknowledged lack of bridleway provision in the Bolton area.

The development of these routes will be completed by 2013.

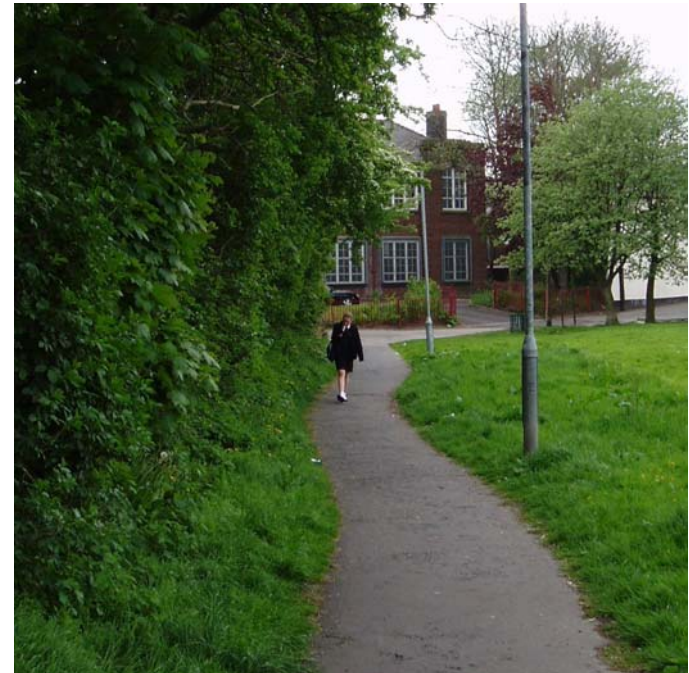
SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL STRATEGY

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that every child in the country can get to school by way of a safe walking or cycling route. The concept of 'Safe Routes to School' was originally devised by Sustrans (the Sustainable Transport charity).

Schools in Bolton are encouraged to produce School Travel Plans by liaising with parents to identify the routes that children use or could potentially use.

The plans form part of a holistic approach to road safety, which together with other initiatives such as 'Kerbcraft' (which teaches road safety) aim to reduce the number of children killed or injured whilst using roads.

It is hoped that where Public Rights of Way form part of an identified route, their inclusion in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will assist in finding the funding needed to create 'safe routes to school'.



THE RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROCESS

Providing a Rights of Way network that meets the current and likely needs of the public will involve the input of a wide range of people at varying stages.

This document has been created in accordance with the Countryside Agency's approved guidance. The Countryside Agency (now part of Natural England) has been appointed by the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), to oversee the implementation of ROWIP's on behalf of Central Government. The guidance is designed to ensure that all those with an interest in Public Rights of Way, whether it is a statutory one, or as a member of the public get the chance to contribute and have their say.

The stages of the Improvement Plan Process can be summarised as follows.

- Consultation with users and other stakeholders
- Assessment of the Rights of Way network
- Statement of actions
- Production of the Draft ROWIP for consultation
- Incorporation of comments from the Draft ROWIP
- Publication of the final ROWIP
- Implementation of improvements



CONSULTATION WITH USERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

There is a huge variety in the interests and personal circumstances of users of Public Rights of Way. Because of this there will also be diversity in their respective needs, in terms of surfacing, furniture and signage. We recognised at an early stage that there would be many representative user groups we would have to contact.

In doing this we have tried to ensure that everyone has had the chance to comment on what they want out of an improved network of footpaths, bridleways and cycleways. So far we have undertaken the following consultation exercises in order to listen to people's comments.

- Advertised the production of the plan in the local media
- Held an 'Open day' to meet those with an interest in Public Rights of Way
- Conducted a survey amongst footpath users in Smithills Country Park
- Written to a wide variety of groups who provide support for people with particular medical conditions. E.g. Cardiac Support Group, SCOPE, Royal National Institute for the Blind.

- Met with representatives of the Primary Care Trust.
- Written to many organisations who are representative of specific types of use. E.g. walking, horse riding, on and off road cycling and motorised vehicle use.
- Held regular meetings with both footpath and bridleway user groups.
- Met and spoken to a wide variety of internal colleagues and neighbouring authorities.
- Advised our Local Access Forum of progress made with the ROWIP on a regular basis.
- Liaised with the Natural England at all stages of the production of the ROWIP

ASSESSMENT OF THE RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK

From our database of requests for maintenance and improvement works, we have added information taken from the above exercises. We have also undertaken a full survey of the existing Rights of Way network and identified 'missing links' from our Definitive Map.

The exercises leading to our assessment highlighted the fact that there is a wide diversity in people's opinions and expectations of the Rights of Way network. It also highlighted that there are some themes that are common to all. Additionally we have recognised that there are particular parts of the Borough where specific types of improvement are needed.

STATEMENT OF ACTIONS

The above processes have enabled us to identify the types of improvement we need to make to the Rights of Way network. Many of these improvements are generic, and so have been grouped together under a series of broader themes. These are our 'Actions'.

Section 8 contains our Statement of Actions. At the side of each key action are a set of numbers which represent the types of user who will benefit from the improvements.

The improvements listed are those which we intend to make over the next five years, as well as details of costs and the approximate timescales involved.

PRODUCTION OF THE DRAFT ROWIP FOR CONSULTATION

We produced a draft plan to invite comments on the Statement of Actions that we propose to undertake over the course of the next five years. Comments were invited on any aspect of this document with regards to anything we may have overlooked, whether it was a specific footpath to be improved or a policy to be included.

The period of consultation for commenting on the draft plan was three months; comments were invited by the 2nd November 2007 and could be made in the following ways:

- By E-mail to Highways@Bolton.gov.uk
- By telephoning the Public Rights of Way Team on 01204 336487
- In writing to The Public Rights of Way Officer
 4th Floor
 The Wellsprings
 Civic Centre
 Bolton BL1 1US

INCORPORATION OF COMMENTS FROM THE DRAFT ROWIP

We received many comments on our Draft Rowip, most of which were positive. The consultation also suggested additional improvements that the plan could support. The majority of additional comments have now been incorporated into the plan. Those that were added were subject to the following criteria:

- The request is feasible in terms of timescale and available funding
- The scale of the net benefit to the public.

PUBLICATION OF THE FINAL ROWIP

Upon publication the final document will be available on the Bolton Council website via the following link www.boltoncouncil.co.uk Paper copies of the plan will also be available at local libraries and in the one stop shop in the Town Hall.

IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENTS

Following the publication of the final plan, we will begin the task of implementing the improvements we have identified. They will take place over the course of the next five years. After five years we will review the progress which we have made and assess whether there are any new issues which should be incorporated into a new plan.

The process of reviewing the Improvement Plan and implementing improvements will then be repeated every ten years.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN AREA

Bolton is one of ten Metropolitan Districts that form the County of Greater Manchester. Within the County Bolton is bordered by the neighbouring Boroughs of Salford, Wigan and Bury, and to the north by the Lancashire Boroughs of Chorley and Blackburn.

The geographical structure of the Borough has been determined by the Rossendale and Pennine anticlines, which have produced a general south westerly dip. This positioning, sloping down from the West Pennine Moors has been instrumental in the formation of the large number of rivers and streams within Bolton.

It was this availability of running water that originally led to the success of Bolton through its textile industry. Today more than 261,000 people live in the Borough, predominantly in the urban areas which account for just under half of the total land area of 140 square km's.



Bolton itself is the largest settlement in the Borough. Farnworth, Kearsley and the southern part of Turton form a continuous built up area with Bolton. The Borough also contains the free-standing settlements of Little lever, Horwich, Blackrod and Westhoughton.

Just over half of the Borough is rural. The larger areas consist of a predominantly agricultural area on the western side between Over Hulton and Blackrod, extensive areas of open moorland extending from Horwich across to Belmont, and an area of hilly grazing land in south Turton.

In some areas, Bolton Council works in partnership with Red Rose Forest. Located along the western side of the Greater Manchester conurbation, its diverse and attractive landscapes offer lots of opportunities for outdoor recreation.

RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGEMENT AND ACCESS PROVISION WITHIN BOLTON

Within the Borough of Bolton there are lots of opportunities for healthy outdoor recreation and transport. Bolton Council is one of a number of large organisations which together liaise to provide facilities for walking, horse riding and cycling. Other partner organisations include Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive, United Utilities, British Waterways and other private landowners.

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY – LEGAL DEFINITIONS

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) are highways that allow the public a right of passage. Ancient Common Law states that you can pass and re-pass along highways at all times. Public Footpaths, Public Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to all Traffic are all highways. They are protected by the Council as it is the appointed Highway Authority for the Bolton area. These highways are administered via the Highways Act of 1980 and only differ from other forms of highways, such as roads, by the types of traffic entitled to use them and their differing types of surface and furniture.

The four different types of Public Right of Way are:

- **Public Footpath** – Here you have the right to walk with any ‘normal accompaniment’ such as a pram or a dog. Wheelchairs and powered motorised buggies can also be used if they are legitimate aids to pedestrians with mobility problems.
- **Public Bridleway** – In addition to Public Footpath rights, you can also ride or lead a horse and use a bicycle. Additionally there may or may not be a right to drive animals.
- **Restricted Byways** – In addition to Public Bridleway rights, there is also a right to use a horse drawn carriage. Restricted Byways have recently replaced Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPP’s), the effect of which is to confirm, (unless proven otherwise), that there is no right to drive a motorised vehicle on these routes.
- **Byways Open to All Traffic** – In addition to Restricted Byway rights, there is a right to drive motorised vehicles on these routes.

OTHER ACCESS DEFINITIONS

In addition to the above types of routes where the public have an absolute right of access, access provision is also catered for in the following ways:

- **Permissive (or concessionary) Paths** – these are routes over which a landowner grants the public a right of access. They differ from Public Rights of Way in as much as there is no absolute right of access and the terms of use (such as on foot only) can be determined by the landowner and withdrawn subject to agreed terms. It is common for Permissive Agreements to be drawn up between the landowner and the Highway Authority. Much of the land on Smithills Moor (which the Council owns up to the boundary) is subject to a Permissive Access Agreement.

- **Cycle Tracks** – These are routes specifically designated for cyclists. Walking is commonly allowed on an identifiable strip next to the cycle track, except where the cycle track is located within a made-up carriageway.
- **Open Access Land** – The right to use ‘Access Land’ came into effect in Bolton in September 2004. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 designated certain types of land which had a predominant characteristic as ‘Access Land’. Bolton’s Access Land is predominantly moorland in character and allows the public an unrestricted right of access on foot, for the purposes of quiet open air recreation. There is no requirement to stick to footpaths on Access Land, but it is usually safer to do so.

MANAGING OUR PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

As the Highway Authority for the Bolton area, the Council is responsible for the management of over 300km’s of Public Footpaths and over 50km’s of Public Bridleways and Restricted Byways. We do this because various Acts of Parliament have given us statutory duties of care and responsibility.

We can break our duties down into three main areas:

- Maintaining the Rights of Way network
- Carrying out enforcement work where necessary
- Administering our Definitive Map and Statement



MAINTAINING PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

Every year we receive reports of footpaths and bridleways that for one reason or another are in need of maintenance. The most common types of problems involve potholes or other surface defects, or rotten or defective stiles and gates. By far the most common problem that we have to deal with however is that of overgrowing vegetation.

We become aware of these problems in a variety of ways. Most commonly problems are reported to us by members of the public, but we also find problems ourselves or through the organised footpath groups that we work with.

Every report we receive is entered into our database of requests for action (RFA). Each RFA is assigned a level of priority which is based on the nature and seriousness of the particular problem, how much the path in question is used, but most importantly whether the problem is putting the public in danger. By doing this we are able to determine fairly where to spend our maintenance budget to ensure it has maximum benefit for the public.

Keeping our footpaths clear

The majority of our Public Rights of Way are in a rural or semi-rural location, which whilst making them pleasant places to visit represents a major problem in keeping them clear of vegetation.

Between May and October a great deal of our resources are focused on clearing footpaths, bridleways and restricted byways. Over the past few years we have developed a regular maintenance schedule to ensure that the most popular and heavily used routes are kept clear for people to use.

The regular maintenance schedule is a pro-active approach to keeping clear the paths that we know will need clearing every year. Because we receive new requests to cut back paths each year, we know that the schedule needs to evolve so that we can improve our service to the public, so if there's a path near to you that needs attention please let us know by contacting highways@bolton.gov.uk or by ringing us on 01204 336487.

Signposting our Rights of Way

Signposting is important for a number of reasons. The main benefit is to advertise the existence, direction and rights associated with individual routes. By doing this, any uncertainty as to what people can and can't do on a path is removed. We find that this benefits both users and landowners alike. Where the direction of a particular route is unclear, we use waymarkers to indicate where the route leads.

The majority of our Public Rights of Way are correctly signposted, however we regularly find that some footpaths have signposts which have been turned around or defaced, or are simply missing. Each year we decide to spend a certain proportion of our budget on improving the signing of Public Rights of Way.

This is a long term aim which will eventually lead to the whole network being correctly signposted. If there's a path near to you that you think needs a signpost or waymarker then please contact us at highways@bolton.gov.uk or by ringing 01204 336487



CARRYING OUT ENFORCEMENT WORK WHERE NECESSARY

The Council also has a duty to prevent obstructions on the highways for which we are responsible. These responsibilities are contained within the Highways Act of 1980. An obstruction may take one of a variety of forms, but some of the more common types include:

- Stiles or gates in disrepair
- Barbed wire tied to gates or stiles
- Crops and ploughed fields
- Misleading or illegal signs
- Dumping of waste materials or garden vegetation
- Dangerous animals deterring use of the highway
- Damage caused to the surface of the highway
- Electric fences

When we first receive a report of an obstruction, like maintenance requests we assign a level of priority to it. Again, we will always give the highest priorities to those paths where the obstruction poses a physical danger to the public, or where access has been completely restricted.

When investigating reports of obstruction we usually find that no malicious attempt has been made to prevent access. Stiles and gates don't last for ever, and eventually wear out to the point that they represent an obstruction to footpath users. Similarly we often find that complaints that a farmer has ploughed a field come to us during the fourteen day period the farmer legally has to re-instate paths.

In cases such as these we deal directly with the landowner to solve the problem. We give advice on a range of matters from what types of stile or gate to use, to the most appropriate wording for signs. Liaising with landowners is a major part of our work. We usually find that building a rapport with landowners and providing helpful advice helps to prevent other problems from occurring in the future.

Unfortunately there are occasions where people will not work with us to resolve issues of obstruction. In such instances where negotiation fails we use our powers of enforcement to ensure that the public's rights of access are protected. A formal notice is served on the offender giving him/her a month to undertake the required work. If the required work is not completed within this timescale we use our own contractors to undertake the work, and re-claim the public's costs through the courts.

ADMINISTERING OUR DEFINITIVE MAP AND STATEMENT

Details of the Public Rights of Way in Bolton are kept on our Definitive Map and Statement. The 'Map' shows at a scale of 1:10,000, the existence of the footpaths, bridleways and restricted byways that we look after, the rights of access associated with each one and their positions. Accompanying the map is the Statement. This is a written description of the routes on the map. Each route is a unique highway and as such has its own reference. Alongside each reference are details of the location, length, width and surface type of the path and a general description of its route with respects to local landmarks such as farms. Together these documents form a legal record, conclusively proving the existence of Public Rights of Way.

Keeping our Map up to date

We look after our Map and Statement because we are the appointed 'Surveying Authority' for the Bolton area. Like other forms of highway, the Rights of Way network is subject to changes which may come about for a variety of reasons. Amongst the more common types of change which need to be reflected on the Definitive Map are:

- Diversions of Public Footpaths
- Upgrades in status. E.g. from footpath to bridleway
- Creations of new routes
- Extinguishments of sections of footpaths
- Addition of previously unrecognised footpaths or bridleways

Looking after our Definitive Map is probably the backbone of our service. Without an accurate and up-to-date map we couldn't plan surface improvement work, provide signposts, or prove the positions of paths to carry out enforcement work.

BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Every year all Highway Authorities assess the condition of their Rights of Way network by undertaking a sample survey known as a 'Performance Indicator'. Each summer and winter we inspect a combined length of 25km's of footpaths and bridleways, which together gives us a snapshot of the average condition of the Rights of Way network. By making this assessment the public can compare the condition of Bolton's Rights of Way with those of neighbouring Council's. Performance Indicator surveys also help us with our business planning, as we can assess whether we need to focus more resources to improving the network on a year by year basis.

MANAGING OUR COUNTRY PARKS AND ACCESS LAND



Moses Gate Country Park

Located to the South East of the Town centre, Moses Gate Country Park was created through the reclamation of an old industrial site. The parkland contains a wide network of Public Footpaths and concessionary routes, which are jointly managed by the Council's Greenspace Management and Public Rights of Way Services.

The Ranger Service which is based at Rock Hall is responsible for the physical maintenance of routes within the park. The Rangers work with the Public Rights of Way Team to ensure that the best recreational use can be made of the paths that they look after.

In recent years this has meant that the public have been able to use some of the Public Footpaths within the park as concessionary bridleways, this arrangement has worked so well that the Council has recently upgraded them to Public Bridleways.

Smithills Country Park

Dating back to the 15th century, Smithills Hall is surrounded by a large network of Public Footpaths and Restricted Byways, set within 2,000 acres of woodland, farmland and moorland. The Smithills estate extends onto a wider area of 'Access Land' which extends to the north into Chorley and Blackburn, and as such is a major recreational resource for the North West.

The management and development of Public Rights of Way within Smithills Country Park is undertaken by Officers from Greenspace Management, the Public Rights of Way Team and the West Pennine Moors Management Team.

Jumbles Country Park

Jumbles is one of several large reservoirs to the north of Bolton. Running in a north-south direction, the reservoir is bounded by Public Footpaths that run between the Borough's of Bolton and Blackburn. The site is managed as a water resource by United Utilities, who work in partnership with the Public Rights of Way and West Pennine Moors Management Team's to ensure that a safe network of paths is provided.

Open Access Land

Bolton's Access Land is located to the north of the Town centre and lies predominantly within the Smithills Estate and on the Cheetham Close area of Egerton. There are 196 Hectares of Access Land in Bolton which extend north into Lancashire and east into Bury.

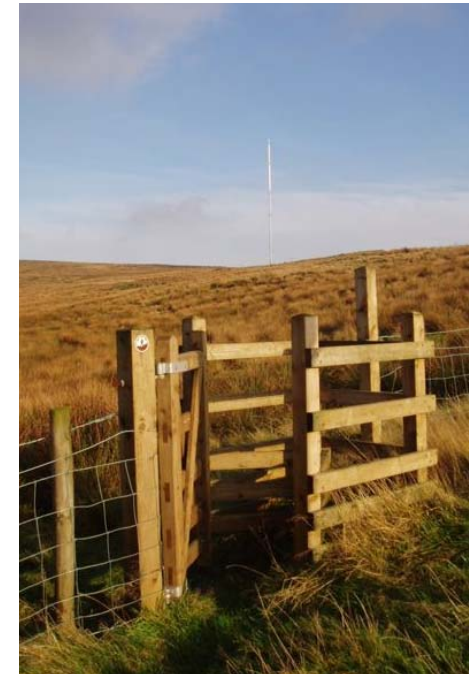
Although the designation of Access Land gives people an unrestricted right to walk, there are times when the right can be suspended. Landowners have the right to close access land for up to 28 days a year for the purposes of land management. Examples would include grouse shooting, or to burn the moor in a safe and controlled environment.

Bolton Council is the appointed 'Access Authority' for the Bolton area and part of its function is to advise the public of planned closures. We also construct stiles, gates and bridges to aid access, and provide information boards to inform the public of where they can walk and of any restrictions that may be in place.

Greater Manchester Pennine Fringe Local Access Forum

Our Local Access Forum was set up to oversee the implementation of Access Land and the production of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. All Highway Authorities have a statutory duty to establish a Local Access Forum; their purpose is to ensure that the diverse recreational interests that people have, such as landowners or walkers are fairly represented, and to encourage the public to make more use of the countryside.

As its name suggests our Local Access Forum covers more than the Bolton area, its remit extends to the neighbouring Borough's of Bury, Rochdale, Oldham & Tameside and collectively helps to look after more than 3,000 Hectares of Access Land.



ACCESS USERS AND THEIR NEEDS

WALKERS

Walking is the most commonly undertaken activity on Public Rights of Way. It is a means of transport in its own right and is the only method of transport permitted on every Right of Way. Walking usually accounts for at least a part of every journey, even if it's only to gain access to the bus stop or train station.

There is great diversity amongst walkers, they range from the physically fit to those with a range of disabilities, from the very young to the very old, and from the keen ramblers to those who rarely take part in physical exercise. Those who are able to walk can be split into two distinct groups, there are those who walk for purely practical reasons, to go shopping or to get to work, and those who participate in walking for recreation or health.

Within Bolton a great deal of resource is currently targeted towards improving pedestrian access within the urban areas. Such improvements are often funded through large capital projects, either as part of a road replacement or road safety scheme. Because of this urban walkers are well catered for. This plan will look to support further improvements in the urban areas, mainly by supporting initiatives that tackle inactivity, and by helping to improve safe routes to school, but will mainly concentrate on improving the network for those who walk for recreation and health benefits, mostly in the countryside.



MOBILITY/VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The results of our survey indicate that the following points are up what most walkers would expect to encounter on a good rural path:

- Solid and stable surfaces made of loose stone
- Natural surfaces such as grass which are free from mud
- Well drained paths with maintained gulleys or ditches
- Well maintained stiles and gates
- Paths free of overgrown vegetation
- Paths not obstructed – no obstructions caused by landowners, headlands not ploughed and no electric fencing
- Clear and sufficient signage and waymarking
- No litter or fly tipping
- Clearly visible routes through farmyards
- No dogs or farm animals putting people off
- No conflict with other users such as cyclists or horses

People with disabilities have varying needs and capabilities. The last National census estimated that 10% of the UK population has some form of physical, mental, or sensory impairment. Translated to a more local level, this would mean that there are approximately 26,000 people in Bolton with such a disability. The CRoW Act specifically requires us to consider the needs of blind and partially sighted people when writing our Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Within Bolton some 2,500 people are registered as blind or partially sighted.

Prior to the CRoW Act, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 required that 'from 2004, service providers will have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter or provide reasonable means of avoiding physical features that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service'. The management of Public Rights of Way is considered a service for the purposes of this Act, meaning that we must try to accommodate the needs of the disabled when undertaking our duties.

Providing for the needs of disabled people can often conflict with the unfortunate need to protect the public from unauthorised users such as motorbikes. Public safety is paramount in our service, and we use a combination of design and enforcement measures to ensure that keeping our paths safe does not interfere with the passage of disabled people.



As part of our consultation we wrote to many groups who represent disabled people and have studied the guidance issued by the Fieldfare Trust. Below is a list of the main points which we think are of general importance to disabled users. The list is not exhaustive. If you think we have missed an important point, please let us know. highways@bolton.gov.uk

- Routes which are free from obstructions and trip hazards
- Signposts which are at the appropriate level, show information about distances and are easy to interpret
- Gates which are easy to open and close, with easily accessible catches
- Smooth surfaces which are well drained, non slip and free of vegetation
- Well defined edges to paths
- Gradients, ideally limited to between 1:20 and 1:12
- Handrails where steps or steep sections of path occur
- Benches and other places in which to rest
- Availability of car parks and toilet facilities



HORSE RIDERS

Horse riding is the fastest growing leisure pursuit involving Public Rights of Way. A recent survey by the Bolton Bridleways Association revealed that in the Smithills and Horwich areas alone, there are 32 liverys, some of which stable more than 50 horses. The increase in the number of stables has in part been due to the decline of farming. Some farmers have changed the use of their land from traditional agricultural use, to providing stabling for horses. It appears that this increase in supply has been readily met with demand.

Horse riders typically like to ride for 1-1/2 hours, meaning that most rides tend to be at least 5 miles long. Some riders do however regularly ride for up to five hours. Unlike walking and cycling, horse riding is almost exclusively a recreational activity, it is rarely used as a means of transport in its own right.



The Council's Public Rights of Way Team regularly liaises with horse riders, and from this we have gained a better understanding of the horse rider's perspective. Below is a list of what we think horse riders would want when using the bridleway network.

- Quiet off road routes away from traffic
- Smooth well drained surfaces free of obstructions or vegetation
- A more strategic network offering longer off road rides
- Circular routes that return to their liverys
- Safe crossing points (where roads are unavoidable)
- Well signed routes with destinations and distances

CYCLISTS

The needs and rights of cyclists are comparable to those of horse riders, both are entitled to use roads as well as the Public Bridleways and Restricted Byways that make up part of the Rights of Way network. Cyclists are also vulnerable users of the network, especially on the busier roads where the number and speed of passing vehicles can often lead to feelings of apprehension.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the level of cycling in Bolton is decreasing. To address this there have been a number of initiatives over the last few years which have been aimed at improving the safety of cyclists, and providing quieter more direct routes. The creation of cycle lanes on some main roads and shared use paths leading into centres of employment are recent examples of improvements to the cycling network.

Other barriers to cycling activity in Bolton are the weather, and the naturally hilly nature of most of the Borough. Because of this cycling activity tends to be restricted to those who have a particularly keen interest in cycling (often competitive) and are likely to cycle to work, and those who would use the network seasonally for recreation (such as families).

Cyclists ride for different reasons and so have different requirements to making their activity safe and enjoyable: they can be summarised as follows:

Urban cyclists

- Solid surfaces free of mud, barriers and other obstructions likely to slow them down
- Direct routes which are quiet and traffic free
- Signs with information on destination and distance

Recreational cyclists

- Flat quiet off road routes
- Mud free hard standing surface
- Links to the wider road network/car parks

Mountain bikers

- Quiet off road routes free from other users
- Testing bends and climbs
- A mixture of hilly and flat terrain
- Varying surfaces, including loose stone, dirt and water

DISABLED CYCLISTS AND HORSE RIDERS

The benefits of cycling for the disabled are just the same as for able bodied cyclists. Although the nature and severity of disability will vary between individual people, most will recognise that their disability limits the opportunities they have for recreation and transport.

Disabled people value mobility more than most: cycling can noticeably extend the speed and distance of independent movement, and play a large role in combating the recognised problems of weight gain, muscle wastage and poor circulation which are often associated with a sedentary lifestyle.

There are over 23 thousand disabled horse riders across the UK. The physical benefits of horse riding include improved balance, mobility and co-ordination. Horse riding also benefits disabled people by promoting a sense of wellbeing through the creation of a unique environment that combines learning, therapy and fun. Disabled horse riders often feel safer when riding a horse than they would on foot.

Below is a list of the main characteristics we think disabled riders and cyclists would wish to find on our Rights of Way Network.



- Wide vegetation free routes to accommodate wide cycles or a helper leading a horse
- Easy to open gates with latches at appropriate levels
- Bridleway routes close to stables or car parks
- Resting facilities along routes
- Mounting blocks to assist getting on and off a horse
- Destination and distance information

CARRIAGE DRIVERS

Like horse riders, carriage drivers are entitled to use the network of roads and restricted byways, but not public bridleways. Due to the physical dimensions of a horse and trap a minimum width of at least three metres is required. Similarly consideration must be given to linear access and forms of obstruction that carriage drivers may encounter. A horse and carriage will not be able to negotiate a horse stile, nor some of the gates that a horse and rider may negotiate. Other hindrances are tight turns, a lack of passing places and a lack of confidence in being able to complete a route due to unadvertised obstacles.

Carriage driving tends to be a relatively long distance activity compared to other Rights of Way interests. Drives of 40 to 80 km's over one or two days are common and require a high level of training. Consequently carriage driving tends to be restricted to those with a particularly high level of interest and commitment.

The following criteria have been identified as being important for carriage drivers.

- Well surfaced, traffic free routes
- Wide and obstruction free routes
- Signs giving directions to wider destinations
- Good sight lines
- Space for manoeuvring

MOTORISED VEHICLE USERS

There are two main types of off road user: 4 wheel drive vehicle users and trail bike riders. Both require quiet routes with good sight lines where potential conflicts with other classes of users can be avoided. Wide lanes which are accessible from the main road network are required. Solid surfaces are preferable, but do not always represent the challenge that some users may look for.

NON USERS

There are a number of reasons why people do not use Public Rights of Way. The following summarises the main reasons for the lack of use amongst some people.

III Health

Poor health is a major obstacle for people who may want to use Public Rights of Way. The varying nature of illnesses determines when and whether people can walk, how far they can walk and what obstacles they are able to negotiate. For example people with some types of joint problems may be able to walk reasonable distances, but may not be able to progress if they cannot lift their legs over stiles.

Routes in poor condition

Waterlogged and churned up surfaces, stiles and gates in a poor condition, obstructions by livestock, machinery or other static obstacles, and blockages to paths caused by overgrowing vegetation have all been identified as reasons why people do not use Public Rights of Way.

Knowledge of Public Rights of Way

Knowledge of the Rights of Way network varies greatly. Some people don't know what Public Rights of Way are or that they have a right to use them, whereas some simply aren't aware of the location of Public Rights of Way in their local area because they are not signed. For those that do know about Public Rights of Way, there is sometimes confusion over which routes they can use. For example some cyclists are unaware that they are entitled to use bridleways.

Lack of nearby routes

Some areas in Bolton do not have the types of Public Rights of Way that people would wish to use. Areas that are predominantly urban in nature will by definition not have as many opportunities for quiet recreation as more rural parts of the Borough do. Similarly within more rural areas, there may be more of a tendency to rely on the car for transport than to walk.

Culture and choice

Not using Public Rights of Way is for many people a way of life. Some sections of the public have a non-exercise culture, linked to unhealthy lifestyles or lack of time. Other sections of the public have no concept of using Public Rights of Way for recreation and exercise, but this may be because alternative forms of recreation are preferred. Before the invention of cars and buses, non-use of Public Rights of Way would invariably mean being unable to travel to shops and places of work or recreation. So tackling inactivity is important because historically it is not natural.

Fear for Safety

Many people feel vulnerable when they use paths. Older people and lone females naturally spring to mind, but such feelings can affect anyone, especially if they have had bad experiences in the past, or feel that their local paths are dark and uninviting places. Crime, or the fear of crime are major barriers to people using some routes.



LANDOWNERS

Virtually all of the land in England is under private ownership, which is also the case in Bolton. Consequently access to the countryside is only possible by way of the existing rights of way network, Open Access Land or through concessionary agreements from landowners.

Improving the Rights of Way network (where needed) will therefore involve the co-operation of local landowners, which can only be achieved by understanding their concerns.

Recent research by the Sport Industry Research Centre revealed that landowners have particular concerns regarding public access. Some of these problems are unfortunately malicious or deliberate in nature, whilst others seem to be caused by a lack of thought or understanding of land use and countryside practices.

Problems caused deliberately or through malice

- Vandalism
- Arson (including stolen vehicles)
- Leaving of litter
- Fly tipping
- Opportunistic theft and burglary
- Unauthorised camping



Problems caused unintentionally

- Stress caused to livestock due to poor control of dogs
- Dog fouling
- Prying leading to an invasion of privacy
- Leaving gates open or closed when not required
- Compromising conservation work
- Blocking access through gates due to inconsiderate parking

THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE

The Countryside Code was first introduced in the 1950's to promote care for the countryside, through a mutual understanding of the needs and responsibilities of access users and landowners. The new Countryside Code was launched in July 2004 and applies to all parts of the countryside. Most of it is just good common sense as it's designed to help us all to respect, protect and enjoy our countryside.

Whilst land managers have their own distinct sections of the code, the following five sections apply to the public.

- **Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs**

Many routes are in isolated areas where mobile phone signals may not be good and weather conditions may change suddenly. Let someone know where you are going, check the weather forecast and be sure to wear suitable clothing. Take notice of warning and information signs on the route.

- **Leave gates and property as you find them**

Gates on farmland control livestock and are usually closed. Occasionally, they are left open by the farmer to allow livestock access to water or food. Leave them as you find them. Avoid damage to crops, stiles, gates and buildings, including historic sites and ruins. If you see an animal in distress, contact the farmer.

- **Protect plants and animals and take your litter home**

Litter and leftover food spoil the beauty of the countryside, may cause disease, or damage livestock/wild animals. Dropping litter and dumping rubbish (fly-tipping) is a criminal offence. Fires destroy habitats and wildlife – don't drop lighted matches or smouldering cigarettes.

- **Keep dogs under close control**

Control your dog so that it does not scare farm animals, especially during the lambing season (1st March to 31st July) and do not allow your dog to disturb wildlife. Farmers are entitled to destroy dogs that injure or harass farm animals. Clean up after your dog. If chased by a farm animal, don't try to protect your dog – it's safer for you both if you let your dog off the lead.

- **Consider other people**

Walking on your own or in a group impacts on the environment. Be considerate when driving, especially on narrow country roads. Do not block gateways or entry points. Cycling, sharing lifts or using public transport lessens the impact. Remember that cyclists must give way to walkers and horse riders on bridleways. Keep out of the way when livestock is being moved. Support the rural economy – buy local produce where possible.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

To enable us to make an assessment of the current state of our network we have used a variety of sources of information. These can be grouped together as:

- A physical analysis of the network, which has involved the accumulation of information from a number of field surveys and previously reported problems.
- An analysis of the responses from our various user surveys.
- An analysis of the views and recommendations of professional partners and colleagues, who are involved in various activities such as producing school travel plans and active health strategies.

From the assessment we have identified several main issues with themes common to a majority of users, as well as specific requests for route improvements or linkages.



Summary of general use

One of the most pleasing things our assessment told us was the fact that those people who do use routes within Bolton, tend to do so on a fairly regular basis. More than half of those who use Public Rights of Way do so every day (53%), and nearly all users use routes at least once a week (92%). From this it would seem that people feel that our routes are either pleasant to use (for recreation) or are likely to form an important link in their journey, hopefully both. Using Public Rights of Way is obviously an important part of people's lives.

By far the biggest type of use was pedestrian use. 99% of people who responded to our survey in the Bolton Scene walk on our footpaths or bridleways. Of these many are involved in other pursuits. 6% of people participate in horse riding, 10% cycle, and 5% use our routes for vehicular activities.

This last point is disturbing because it suggests a significant level of illegal use on our routes, most probably by motorbikes.

The main reasons people use Public Rights of Way are for leisure and recreation. 88% of respondents stated that they used routes for this reason, whereas only 25% of people stated that they used routes for getting around as part of their normal (non leisure) daily activities. When choosing which routes to use, the most popular reason given (71%) was that they were near to home. This suggests that if good routes are located close to people's homes, they will use them.

When it came to assessing people's perceptions of the condition of paths, the results varied. Very few people rated the condition of paths as either excellent or very poor. Most people rated the average condition somewhere in the middle, ranging from Good (25%), Average (36%), and Poor (22%).

HOW THE NETWORK MEETS THE NEEDS OF USERS

Walkers

We have found that across the Borough the provision of pedestrian routes for walkers tends to vary greatly. There are distinct differences between the opportunities available in rural and urban areas, as well as the managed parks, so we will look at them separately.

Rural areas

Most recreational walkers want to use quiet off road routes where they can escape from the presence of traffic and other sources of noise. The rural parts of the Borough present the best opportunities for long uninterrupted walks, but require people to be adequately dressed i.e. boots and waterproofs. We have identified four predominant areas.

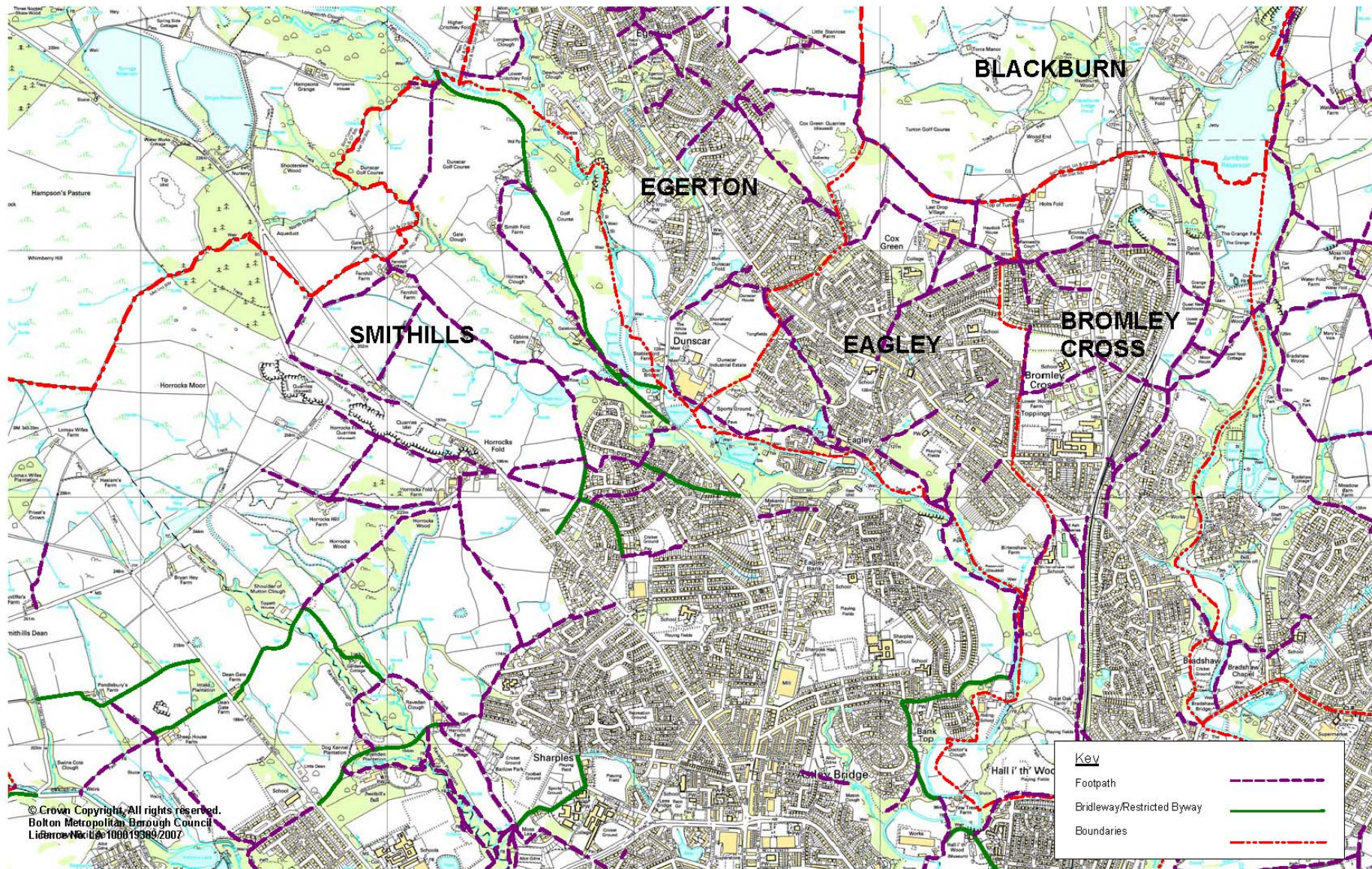
South Turton:

To the north east of the Borough the urban fringe areas of Harwood and Egerton contain wide networks of footpaths which connect to the neighbouring Boroughs of Bury and Blackburn.

Harwood and Egerton were formerly part of Turton Urban District Council. A legacy of Turton's first Definitive Map is that all routes surveyed in the area are footpaths. Because pedestrians are the only class of user allowed on these routes, this helps to ensure that quiet walks away from other types of use are possible. The restriction of use does mean though that a lower standard of route is required. Footpaths in these areas are typically unsurfaced grassed paths, leading across agricultural pasture land. The presence of grazing animals leads in turn to the need for stiles and gates, which when coupled with the steepness of many of these paths, makes them difficult to use or inaccessible to many people with mobility problems. For able bodied walkers, the main problems encountered are usually pooling water and mud, the churning effects of hooves and more deliberate obstructions such as locked gates and poor signposting.

Summary – There are plenty of routes for walkers within this area. Improved signposting and liaison with landowners should provide for easier use. Stiles and gates in South Turton are often poor, frequently having surpassed their normal working life and since rotted. Maintenance of footpaths often conflicts with current land use.

BOLTON COUNCIL
Map showing the typical distribution of
Public Rights of Way in the north Bolton/South Turton area





Smithills area and Open Access Land:

To the North and North West of the main built up area steep pasture land merges with a vast expanse of Moorland. Located partly within the Smithills Estate and connecting on a wider scale with Access Land towards Rivington Moor and beyond.

Routes within the Smithills area are quite diverse. Here footpaths mingle with Restricted Byways, providing a mix of both surfaced and unsurfaced paths and wider more formal looking tracks. Restricted Byways in particular tend to be well surfaced and free from obstructions.

Many of our moorland Rights of Way are located within the Smithills Estate or on Open Access Land owned by United Utilities. Before this land was designated as Access Land, it was subject to access agreements between United Utilities and the neighbouring local authorities. This additional layer of management has helped to maintain the footpaths in these areas to a good standard.

Summary - Most routes within this area are well signposted and obvious on the ground. The provision of information boards also assists those planning long or circular walks on Access Land. Stiles are gradually being replaced with kissing gates across the Smithills area, whilst on the wider Access land there are virtually no obstructions. Footpath surfaces are generally good, but occasionally localised flooding and the build up of mud occurs around working farms.

Agricultural farmland surrounding Blackrod and Westhoughton

To the west of the Borough there is a significant area of farmland that borders with Wigan. This land is largely flat in character and sweeps down from Blackrod and Horwich in a south easterly direction, via Westhoughton towards Atherton. There is a well established network of footpaths that envelop these towns, which predominantly have grass surfaces. More formal surfaces are located within Borsdane Wood (Westhoughton) and Arley Woods (Blackrod). Apart from these sites long uninterrupted walks tend to be fragmented by stiles and gates, many of which in the Blackrod area especially tend to be in poor condition. In addition there are seasonal problems caused by mud or standing water on cross field paths.

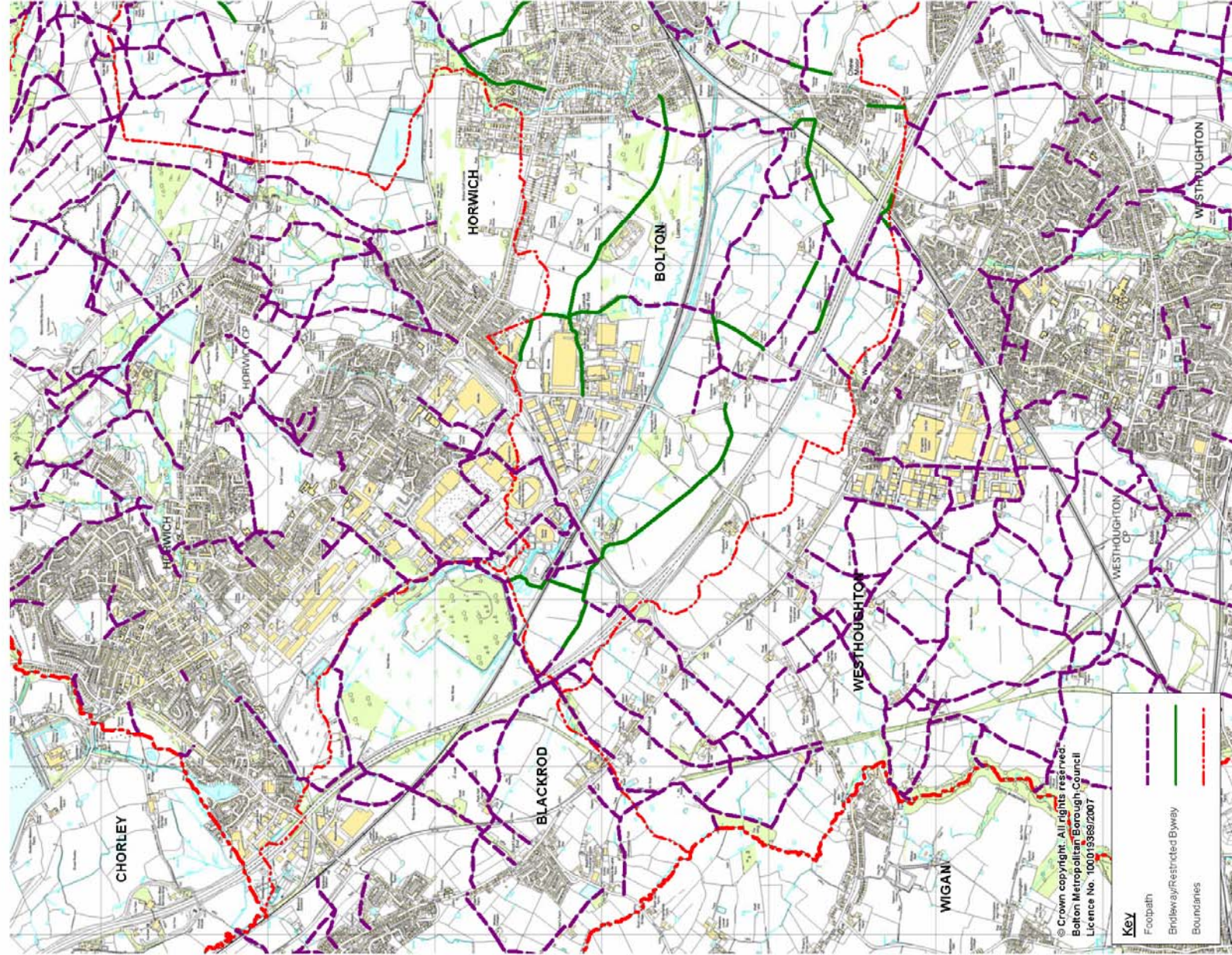


Summary - Around the satellite Towns to the West of the Borough (Blackrod, Horwich and Westhoughton) access provision tends to be both plentiful and relatively close. The furthest that any built up parts of these towns are from the countryside are:

Blackrod	250 metres
Horwich	600 metres
Westhoughton	700 metres

Footpath signage and waymarking, the condition of existing stiles and the regular ploughing of footpaths are the main concerns within this area.

BOLTON COUNCIL
Map showing the typical distribution of
Public Rights of Way
on the agricultural western side of the Borough



The Middlebrook Valley

The Middlebrook Valley runs between Red Moss at Middlebrook and Bolton town centre. From the town centre there is a purpose built footpath and cycleway that leads via Deane Church Clough and Ladybridge to Lostock Junction. Connecting with this route, access to Middlebrook is possible via the Restricted Byways that cross the Municipal Golf Course.

Summary – Long flat walks, without encountering obstructions are possible within this area. Some surface improvements are needed on footpaths connecting farms at Wingates Lane, Chew Moor and via Deane Church Clough.

Urban Areas

Because of their built up nature, urban areas tend to fragment opportunities for longer distance walking. The shorter walks that remain appear to be used more for functional purposes, such as access to shops and services, rather than purely for recreation. A Council study of inactivity shows that there is a distinct correlation between wards with high scores for inactivity and obesity, and wards that are heavily built up.

On average the standard of surface of urban paths is better than rural paths, but this does not necessarily mean they are more fit for purpose. We would not expect people to have to wear boots on urban paths in the way it is reasonable to expect them to do so on moorland footpaths. Additionally we would expect more urban paths to be accessible by wheelchair users and people pushing double buggies. The vast majority of Public Rights of Way (predominantly footpaths) in the urban areas have either a tarmac or concrete surface. There are few examples of urban Public Rights of Way where no type of formal surface has been constructed.



Urban footpaths are generally less appealing in character when compared to rural routes. Our surveys have shown that the presence of litter, dog fouling, mud, poor lighting and the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour are amongst other barriers to people using paths.

Summary – The majority of urban Public Rights of Way are used for access to services rather than for recreation and leisure. Routes are generally in good condition, but future improvements are needed in terms of width, surfacing, gradient and lighting to make them compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. Additional anti-social problems such as illegal motorbike use, dog fouling and littering also need to be addressed.

Country Parks

Country parks offer the best mix of recreational facilities for walkers. The Council has had a dedicated Ranger Service to look after its country parks since the 1980's. Together it looks after the two main country parks at Smithills and Moses Gate as well as several smaller town parks. The country parks provide a well surfaced network of concessionary footpaths and bridleways which interconnect with the existing Definitive Public Footpath and Restricted Byway network.

Summary – There are excellent routes for walkers available in the country parks. Smithills estate has a mix of flat parkland paths, grassed paths and tracks and moorland routes. Moses Gate tends to have predominantly flat parkland paths. Stiles, gates, surfaces, signposting and information boards are generally of a high standard at both locations. Good car parking facilities are also available.

Mobility/visually impaired

Our disabled user survey revealed that collectively, all areas of Bolton are used for either health or recreation walks. From what people have told us we have identified several common problems.

The hilly nature of much of Bolton makes access difficult as stiles and steps pose a problem for those with arthritis or mobility problems. A lack of seating was identified as an issue that prevents the use of some footpaths, as people with mobility problems need the opportunity to rest and take a break. Similarly a lack of car parking and direct links to public transport also hinder access.

A lack of confidence in what would be encountered on paths was also identified as an obstacle. Poor signing in terms of destination and distance, and uncertainty over whether surfaces would be slippery or uneven also prevented use.



Summary – People clearly do want to use routes for access but don't necessarily know where the most suitable ones are. The routes currently used tend to be close to their homes and do not meet the criteria of the Disability Discrimination Act for a disabled friendly path.

Horse Riders

Horse riding has been identified as the fastest growing rural pursuit. Country parks were identified as the locations most often used for horse riding, followed equally by areas of open countryside and moorland. All of the horse riders we have spoken to and heard from ride for recreation whilst many recognised the health benefits of riding. By far the biggest problem with the bridleway network is the fact that it is fragmented. Busy roads or connections with footpaths prevented longer distance rides. Access to the wider bridleway network, such as the Pennine bridleway feeder route was amongst the most requested improvements.

There were several concerns relating to existing bridleways. The most common concern was a lack of correct signage. Some routes were described as too narrow which often led to difficulties when passing other users. Low growing trees and an almost complete lack of mounting blocks were other problems mentioned.

Accessing bridleways invariably means using one or more roads where traffic will be encountered. This was identified as a major issue that riders wanted to see addressed. Pegasus crossings, appropriate warning signs, traffic calming, better use of highway verge and more bridleways were identified as possible improvements.

Summary - The bridleway network is too fragmented. It is not always accessible from local stables meaning that use of vehicular highways is often unavoidable. Longer distance routes are possible but are not circular in nature. Connection with the Pennine bridleway feeder route (and the rest of the country) and more off road bridleways are seen to be priorities.

Cyclists

In Section five we mentioned that cyclists fell into one of three broad categories:

- Urban Cyclists
- Recreational Cyclists
- Mountain Bikers

The current and likely future needs for each of the above groups differs widely.

• Urban Cyclists

Apart from walking this is perhaps the most accessible activity within Bolton. We would associate the term 'urban cyclist' with those people who cycle to work or to services such as shops or schools without expecting to get muddy. Almost every property in Bolton is served by a road which has cycling rights associated with it, the vast majority of which have been adopted by the Council. The fact that most of these roads are adopted guarantees that they will be maintained to the generally higher standard that the 'urban cyclist' requires.

In addition to the road network, urban footpaths are being widened to create shared use routes wherever an appropriate opportunity arises. This is being done on a strategic basis, primarily to encourage cycling to the major centres of employment.

Summary - Provision for 'urban cyclists' is excellent. The road network offers good links to all parts of the Borough. Heavy traffic and the behaviour of drivers are hazards to users. To alleviate this urban footpaths are being utilised to create shared routes. Further measures include the implementation of cycle lanes on main routes.



- **Recreational cyclists**

We have found that facilities for 'recreational cyclists' tend to be fragmented in much the same way as they are for horse riders. Most hard standing off road routes tend to be located on the network of restricted byways within the central Bolton area. These routes vary greatly in terms of standard of surface. It is important that cyclists have solid clean surfaces because there are only two points of contact with the ground. Where this is not possible it is often as a result of the conflict with other users, occasionally horse riders, but more predominantly vehicular users.

Recently a shared footpath/cycleway was created from central Bolton to Middlebrook, via the Middlebrook River, but additional off road facilities linking other areas of the Borough are missing. A lack of signage, particularly information regarding destinations and distance was also identified as a problem.

Summary - The current network for recreational cyclists does not offer particularly useful strategic links and is poorly advertised. The network does not help the Council in achieving key strategic aims such as reducing levels of obesity and additionally would not help to encourage the use of alternative forms of transport to the car.

- **Mountain bikers**

Facilities for mountain bikers vary across the Borough. The countryside of the central Bolton area contains a network of Restricted Byways that many riders would enjoy riding on. There are problems associated with these routes though. Firstly, use of Restricted Byways (or bridleways) is not the exclusive right of cyclists, so the potential for conflict between fast moving cyclists and other users is high. Secondly, having consulted with mountain bike riders, the type of surfacing found on Restricted Byways is not necessarily what is needed for a challenging ride.

Providing routes exclusively for mountain bikers seems to be prohibitively expensive. This was best demonstrated during the 2002 Commonwealth Games when the mountain biking events were held in Bolton. Although Bolton provided an excellent route, this involved using a mix of Public Footpaths and quiet unsurfaced roads.

Summary - There are no routes exclusively for mountain bikers within Bolton, although what was originally a low level of demand is growing steadily each year. A dedicated mountain bike route is proposed at Healey Nab in neighbouring Chorley, which will be the nearest such facility for people within the Bolton area. The success in terms of use of that facility will have a major bearing on whether or not dedicated mountain bike routes are created in Bolton.

Disabled Cyclists and Horse Riders

Parks

The best routes which cater for the needs of disabled users are to be found in the country parks. Both Moses Gate and Smithills offer lots of relatively flat routes which are safe, wide and obstruction free. Historically these routes have been footpaths, which through thoughtful design have had their surfaces and widths modified to cater for cyclists and horse riders. As gates and stiles are largely unnecessary most routes tend to be free of obstructions. Because parking is readily available at these locations they are relatively accessible for most people across the Borough

Other areas of Bolton

Whilst there is plenty of potential for providing suitable routes across the Borough, the reality is that most are currently only truly suitable for able bodied users. Generally, most routes can only be fully accessed by way of stiles or gates. Where gates are in place, they are often not hung properly and have latches that are not easy to operate, especially when sitting on a horse.

There is a general lack of information about distances and destinations. This leads to a lack of confidence in using routes, stemming from a fear of the unknown. Disabled users have told us that there is a definite lack of formal resting areas on our paths. Disabled horse riders (and able bodied riders) have also expressed a desire for more mounting blocks.

Difficult surfaces are also a problem. Some sections of some routes are virtually unusable due to the damaging effects of tractor tyres repeatedly going over them or the deep ruts caused by illegal motorbike use. Uneven cambers on paths lead to the pooling of water and mud. Broken or blocked drainage facilities occasionally make some parts impassable due to flooding or serious erosion of the surface.

Summary - Suitable facilities (including parking) are readily available at the main country parks. Outside of these, many routes do not comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. There is insufficient information in terms of distance or destination and many stiles and gates require repair/removal or replacing with something more suitable. A lack of formal resting areas is seen as a barrier to use. Surfacing problems, and in particular uncertainty relating to standards of surfacing also present barriers to use.

Carriage Drivers

This activity can only be undertaken on the network of Restricted Byways within the former Bolton Borough area. Most of these routes are free from vehicular traffic, but are used by pedestrians and horse riders, and to a lesser extent cyclists. All of these routes are signed, but do not necessarily show wider destinations. The majority of Restricted Byways are free from levels of vegetation that would make their use difficult or impossible, but formal turning facilities are often few and far between.

Summary - Our surveys have suggested that carriage driving is not a particularly popular pursuit. We did not hear from any carriage drivers, and do not anticipate any significant increase in demand for suitable routes in the future.

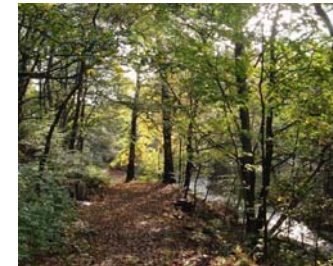
Motorised Vehicle Users

There is virtually no provision for this type of use within Bolton due to the complete lack of Byways Open to All Traffic. The nearest comparable type of route would be an unadopted back street that all vehicular traffic has the right to use.

Summary - We are not aware that there is any demand for off road vehicular routes because we have not received requests to provide them. Therefore we feel that the current provision meets the present and future demand.

Non Users

It was perhaps not surprising that we did not receive many responses to our surveys from non-users. We expected users of footpaths and bridleways to respond in numbers, because they already have a vested interest in the Rights of Way network. The way to tackle non-use of the network is obviously to encourage its use. To do this we need to educate people of the health, recreation and transport benefits of using Rights of Way, and to make sure that they are well advertised and maintained in a condition that will encourage their continued use.



Landowners

Most of our knowledge of landowners concerns has come about as a result of previous conversations with them. The problems encountered vary according to the location and type of land use. We have found that Golf Clubs and owners of recreational land tend to state the dropping of litter, dog fouling, malicious damage and under age drinking as their main concerns. On farms the complaints mostly relate to the compromising of animal welfare and a lack of regard/understanding of farming practices.

Summary - Our past experience of dealing with landowners has shown that where problems relating to access have occurred, they were usually connected to legitimate land management concerns. Finding the right balance between landowners concerns and the rights of the public is the key to better access and avoidance of user conflict. Improving communications with landowners is therefore essential.

STATEMENT OF ACTION



The Assessment and Analysis of the network together with people's comments has helped us to identify what needs to be done. These actions can be summed up as six key themes;

These are:

- A safe joined up network of off road routes (N)
- Improve Accessibility to the network (A)
- Encourage greater use leading to better health and enjoyment (H)
- Improve accessibility to services and destinations (S)
- Improve publicity, public awareness and signage (P)
- Improve communications with landowners (L)

The tables below show the actions that we intend to take with respect to each of the six themes. To the side of each action, one or more of the following numbers will indicate the type/s of user that will benefit from that particular action.

Walkers	1
Mobility/visually impaired	2
Horse riders	3
Cyclists	4
Disabled cyclists & horse riders	5
Carriage drivers	6
Motorised vehicle users	7
Non users	8
Landowners	9

Within the tables we have listed some specific improvements to footpaths or bridleways at a particular location. We have done this deliberately because this way people will be able to judge for themselves at the end of the ROWIP period, whether we have done what we said we would do.

Improvement	Who will this help	Time scale	Approximate cost	Lead organisation	Reference
(H) Encourage greater use leading to better health and enjoyment					
Promote health walk groups through Bolton Council website.	1,2,8	2008/09	£1000	Bolton Council, PCT	H1
Provide information on the health and social benefits of walking, cycling and riding.	1,2,3,4,5,8	2008/09	£2000	Bolton Council, PCT	H2
Undertake the improvements identified by the active health team on the 'move it' guided walk routes.	1,2,8	2008/09	£10,000	Bolton Council, PCT	H3
Continue to consult with the PCT to identify the wards with most inactivity.	1,2,8	2007/12	Nil	Bolton Council, PCT	H4
Support the active health projects such as 'green exercise'.	1,2,8	2007/12	Nil	Bolton Council, PCT	H5
(A) Improve accessibility to the Network					
Create one circular walk for disabled/visibility impaired people per year.	1,2,8	2008/12	£20,000/Yr	Bolton Council, PCT	A1
Assist landowners to provide/replace stiles with gates (as appropriate) to assist access for more users.	1,2,8,9	2008/12	£2000/Yr	Bolton Council	A2
Increase use of cost effective maintenance resources such as the probation service to clear more paths.	1,2,8	2007/12	Nil as savings will be re-directed towards further path clearance	Bolton Council, Probation Service	A3
Create a database of pictures on 'images system to assist in enforcement matters.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/12	Nil	Bolton Council	A4
Create a circular walk with access improvements to connect Hall Lee Bank Park with the Washacre Estate in Westhoughton.	1,2,8	2008/9	£5,600	Bolton Council, PCT	A5

Improvement	Who will this help	Time scale	Approximate cost	Lead organisation	Reference
Ensure all gate latches on Public Bridleways can be used by disabled riders.	3,5	2008/09	£2000	Bolton Council	A6
Encourage landowners to remove all redundant or unnecessary barbed wire.	1,2,3,4,5,8,9	2007/12	£1000	Bolton Council	A7
Identify the most used paths for inclusion in a bi-annual clearance programme.	1,2,8	2008/12	£10,000	Bolton Council, Probation Service	A8
Review the Public Rights of Way enforcement policy	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/08	£1000	Bolton Council	A9
(L) Improve communications with Landowners					
Advertise the country code on line and make it an integral part of leaflets.	1,2,3,4,5,8,9	2007/8	£1000	Bolton Council	L1
Encourage greater responsibility in the countryside by dog owners, via website, signs on site, leaflets, dog wardens.	1,2,3,4,5,8,9	2007/8	£1000	Bolton Council	L2
Advertise the common problems that landowners face in connection with footpaths via a Right of Way web page.	1,2,3,4,5,8,9	2008/09	£1000	Bolton Council	L3
Ensure that landowners are consulted with prior to any maintenance of clearance work.	9	2007/12	Nil	Bolton Council	L4
Increase the provision of advisory signs regarding nuisance to farm animals.	9	2008/09	£1000	Bolton Council	L5
Claims for new Rights of Way. Advise landowners of the facility to protect their land from claims by making a S31(6) declaration.	9	2008/09	Nil	Bolton Council	L6
Review the customer care policy.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/08	Nil	Bolton Council	L7

Improvement	Who will this help	Time scale	Approximate cost	Lead organisation	Reference
We will support the principle of diverting footpaths out of farmyards where this is clearly in the interest of farming practice and an alternative route of equal or greater public benefit will be offered.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/12	Nil	Bolton Council	L8
We will provide site specific waymarking to assist users unfamiliar with the area.	1,2,3,4,5,8,9	2008/09	£2000	Bolton Council	L9
(P) Improve Publicity, Public Awareness And Signage					
Maintain the number of correctly signed Rights of way at 100%.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/12	£1000/Yr	Bolton Council	P1
Create a specific Rights of Way website page with links to access land, local access forum, fault reporting and rights and responsibilities.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/08	£1000	Bolton Council	P2
Produce a leaflet for landowners explaining our duties, how we would like to improve the network, the service they can expect from us and the mutual benefits of working together.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9	2008/09	£1000	Bolton Council	P3
Assist archive research unit (ARU) in implementing discovering lost ways project.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/12	£10,000/Yr	Bolton Council, ARU	P4
Prioritise definitive map anomalies and inconsistencies to remove cul-de-sac routes/rights.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8	2007/08	Nil	Bolton Council	P5
Resolve 10% of anomalies per year.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/12	£8000/Yr	Bolton Council	P6
Promote the wider Greater Manchester Fringe Local Access Forum area through appropriate media.	1,2,3,4,5,6,8	2007/08	£1000	Bolton Council, LAF	P7
Produce strategically important signposts with destination and distances on them.	1,2,3,4,5,6,8	2007/12	£6000/Yr	Bolton Council	P8

Improvement	Who will this help	Time scale	Approximate cost	Lead organisation	Reference
Provision of Signs to assist the Police in Tracking Illegal Motor Cycle Use	1,2,3,4,5,6,8, 9	2008/12	£1000/Yr	Bolton Council	P9
(N) Create a safe and joined up network of Off Road Routes					
Implementation of the West Pennine Moors Bridleway Strategy.	3,4,5	2007/12	No funding required	Bolton Council, WPM	N1
Cutacre Coal Site. Implement the agreement to turn all public footpaths into Public Bridleways as part of the restoration scheme.	3,4,5	2011/12	£30,000	Bolton Council, UK Coal	N2
Disused Railway lines. Secure agreements to create an extended bridleway facility linking Westhoughton, Blackrod and Horwich.	3,4,5	2008/12	£30,000/Yr	Bolton Council, Network Rail	N3
Develop links with and implement neighbouring authorities to maximise use of routes in improvements N1,N2,N3.	3,4,5	2008/12	£20,000/Yr	Bolton Council, Neighbouring Local Authorities	N4
Improve footpaths linking Arley Woods with Leeds – Liverpool Canal.	1	2009/10	£10,000	Bolton Council, Chorley MBC	N5
Improvement of Restricted Byway at Deane Church Clough leading onto Middlebrook route for cyclists and walkers.	1,2,3,4,5	2008/09	£20,000	Bolton Council	N6
Moss Hall Farm. Creation of Public Bridleway to remove cul-de-sac Rights and create a wider strategic Bridleway network.	3,4,5	2007/08	£2000	Bolton Council	N7
Wilson Fold to Matchmoor Lane. Surface improvements to concessionary Bridleway.	2,3,4,5	2007/09	TBA	Bolton Council	N8

Improvement	Who will this help	Time scale	Approximate cost	Lead organisation	Reference
Use of Highway verges off Walker Fold Road to provide safe Bridleway access to the Smithills Country Park Bridleway network.	1,2,3,4,5	2009/10	£20,000	Bolton Council	N9
Produce a programme of overhead vegetation clearance for strategic Bridleways that will link to our existing maintenance list.	3,5	2007/12	£4000/Yr	Bolton Council	N10
Upgrade Footpaths to Bridleways within Central Bolton area where Restricted Byways form Cul-De-Sac Bridleway Rights where appropriate.	2,3,4,5,6	2008/12	£8000	Bolton Council	N11
Install Kent carriage gap designed barriers in place of gates where suitable.	2,3,4,5,6	2007/12	TBA	Bolton Council	N12
The Rotaryway. Develop new links and improve existing paths linking in with the Rotary Way.	1,2,8	2007/12	£10,000/Yr	Bolton Council, Bolton Rotary Club	N13
The creation of Community Links between urban communities.	1,2,3,4,5	2007/12	TBA	Bolton Council	N14
Create a circular route in the Eagley Valley, linking the Hall I'th Wood estate.	1,8	2009/12	TBA	Bolton Council	N15
Create a circular route linking Great Lever to the Highfield Estate.	1,2,8	2010/11	£52,000	Bolton Council	N16
Maze Street – Darcy Lever. Secure dedication of footpaths linking into Moses Gate Country Park.	1,2	2008/09	£10,000	Bolton Council	N17
Printers Lane. Secure re-opening of important link between Bradshaw Hall and Turton Road	1, 2, 8, 9	2007/08	£1,500	Bolton Council	N18
Footpath 5 - Little Lever. Upgrade to Public Bridleway to take Horses off Radcliffe Road	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8	2009/10	£12,500	Bolton Council	N19

Improvement	Who will this help	Time scale	Approximate cost	Lead organisation	Reference
Create a formal route from Lucas road along the former mineral Railway line in Farnworth, linking in to routes on Farnworth & Great lever Golf Course.	1,2	2009/10	TBA	Bolton Council	N20
(S) Improve accessibility to services and destinations					
Safe routes to school. We will continue to provide access improvements for parents and pupils on the basis of the greatest risk being identified. We will also prioritise those schools that have produced a school travel plan.	1,2,8	2007/12	Funding already in place	Bolton Council	S1
Development. We will produce new guidance notes to assist planning control when setting out consultation and advertising.	1,2,8	2007/08	Nil	Bolton Council	S2
Development. We will produce new guidance notes for planning control that will encourage developers to integrate safe-well lit pedestrian access facilities to services, recreational and transport facilities.	1,2,8	2007/08	Nil	Bolton Council	S3
Transport infrastructure fund. Continue to identify new schemes that improve pedestrian links to public transport facilities.	1,2,8	2007/08	Funding already in place	Bolton Council, GMPTE	S4
Westhoughton railway station. Widen and re-surface footpath 104 linking to Manchester road (A6).	1,2,8	2008/09	TBA	Bolton Council, GMPTE	S5
Rivington and Blackrod High School. Re-surfacing of footpath 167 Horwich to coincide with connecting routes in Chorley.	1,2,8	2008/09	£10,000	Bolton Council, LCC	S6
Bolton Economic Development Zone (EDZ) walking and Cycling Strategy. Re-visit promoting the recommendations made in this 2003 report that were not fulfilled.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	2007/12	TBA	Bolton Council, GMPTE	S7
Promoting recreational routes from major links with the Public Transport network.	1,2,4,8	2008/09	£1000	Bolton Council, GMPTE	S8

Improvement	Who will this help	Time scale	Approximate cost	Lead organisation	Reference
Create a link path from Chapel Street, Egerton to Druids Close.	1,8	2009/10	£4000	Bolton Council, GMPTE	S9
Create a link footpath from Grange road to bridge south of the Jumbles reservoir	1,2	2009/10	£8000	Bolton Council, United Utilities	S10
Footpath 2 - Turton Eagley. Create safe stepped access leading to network of paths behind the last Drop Village.	1,2	2008/09	£8000	Bolton Council	S11