

# Tyne & Wear Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007/11 Summary



## FOREWORD

Public Rights of Way are much more than a valuable recreational resource - they are also an important asset in terms of the economy, tourism, sustainable transport, social inclusion and health and well-being. The Public Rights of Way Network is key to enabling residents and visitors alike to enjoy the beauty of Tyne and Wear's diverse natural and built environment.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan provides an opportunity to develop the links between Public Rights of Way and sustainable transport. Over the past five years, funding from the Local Transport Plan (LTP) has helped the Rights of Way Officers to make significant progress in making the network easier to use; however, this Rights of Way Improvement Plan recognises that there are still considerable gains to be made.

Sometimes we take things for granted and never miss them until they have gone. The closure of paths and sites during the Foot and Mouth crisis in 2001 reminded us of how important walking, riding and outdoor recreation is in our lives.

Paths in urban areas can provide a viable alternative to the car for short trips to local facilities such as shops, railway stations, schools and community centres. Such use of the paths can help to reduce the impact of congestion and air pollution in our communities and help to keep us fit and healthy.

The Public Rights of Way network cannot be seen in isolation. As well as the areas of Open Access land, there are many bodies and landowners who provide additional access and the ongoing collation of information and partnership working will ensure that the implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will benefit and lead to a more integrated wider access network. However it is also important that we improve accessibility to this information and raise awareness of people's rights and responsibilities.

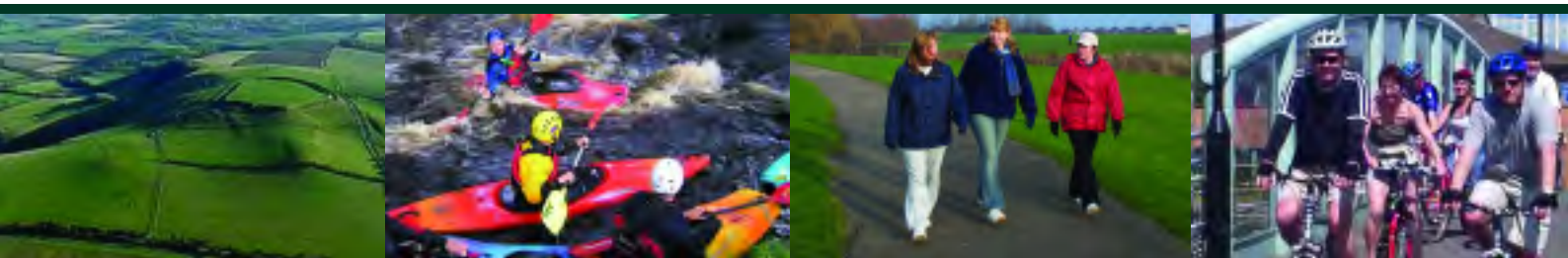
Over the next four years, with funding from the second Local Transport Plan and other sources, we will strive to implement the key priority areas of this Improvement Plan and make Tyne and Wear a place and a destination for enjoyable walking, riding and cycling.

In commending the Plan to you, I would like to thank all those that have contributed to it. This includes all those that so kindly commented on the Draft Plan published earlier this year.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M H Clare".

**Councillor Michael H Clare**  
Chair of the Tyne and Wear  
Joint Lead Members (Transport)



## SUMMARY

The Tyne and Wear Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) has been produced to meet the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act). The RoWIP is required to contain an assessment of the extent to which local Rights of Way meet the present and likely future needs of the public, the opportunities provided by local Rights of Way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and enjoyment and the accessibility of local Rights of Way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

The background to the Improvement Plan activity across Tyne and Wear is considered; including previous initiatives such as the Milestones programme and how the authorities have undertaken work on the RoWIP. Work within the RoWIP guidance provided by Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Natural England is described, together with work to integrate the RoWIP with the Local Transport Plan (LTP).

Rights of Way improvement is but one thread in the activities of the highway authority and its partners. The policy context for the RoWIP is reviewed, and relevant documents and policies are described. Although the local and regional development policies fully recognise the importance of Rights of Way, the rapidly increasing development agenda, makes this a vital time to establish countryside and utility access within new policies.

Delivery of significant improvements to recreational and utility access across Tyne and Wear, together with improvements needed for better land management, will also be critically dependant on working in partnership. The contributions required from both internal and external partners are considered in detail.

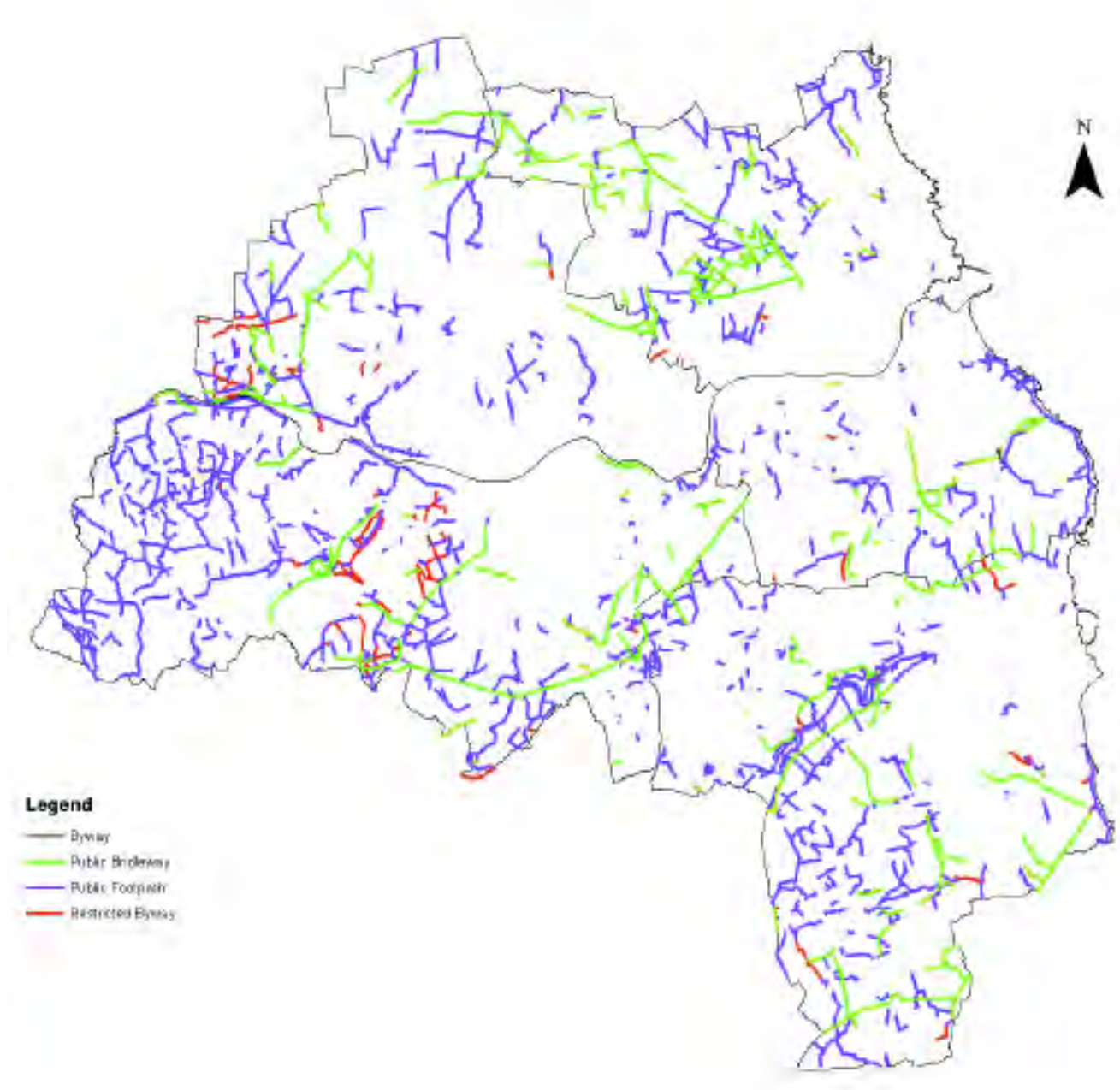


Tyne and Wear, a metropolitan area in the North East of England, is a vibrant, competitive and friendly region. It is making strenuous efforts to recover from a legacy of industrial change and industrial decline. By many of the standard comparative indicators for economic and social well being, Tyne and Wear is significantly disadvantaged compared to many, if not most, urban areas in the United Kingdom (UK) which makes recreational and utility access different from many other authorities and potentially means that generic access solutions are inappropriate.

An evaluation of the full range of access within Tyne and Wear has been undertaken, at both strategic and local level. The absence of any material access developments arising in Tyne and Wear from recent 'open access' legislation only adds to the importance of the RoWIP for meeting user expectations and anticipated demand in this area. The following map shows the current Rights of Way network across Tyne and Wear. Even at this scale, it is apparent how disconnected the current off road access network is.



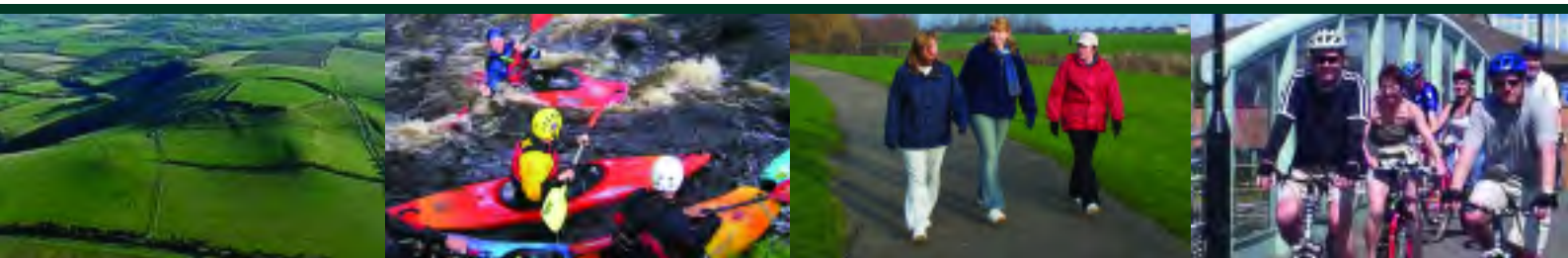
# PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY WITHIN TYNE AND WEAR



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Consultation with able-bodied users and users with disabilities, landowners, businesses, neighbouring authorities and other interested parties has utilised questionnaires (paper and internet) to determine views on current and future access provision.

The core of the plan is a Statement of Action (SOA), which prioritises the work the authorities propose to undertake to secure an improved network of local Rights of Way and access opportunities. Possible activities are presented under eight general themes (below), with an indication of costs, timescales and who needs to be involved. A wider range of activities was presented in the draft RoWIP document and subsequently underwent a statutory consultation with stakeholders to create the thirty-two priority actions.

**SOA1 Making the Countryside More Accessible;**  
**SOA2 A Safer Activity;**  
**SOA3 47,000 new homes;**  
**SOA4 Knowing what's out there?**  
**SOA5 Filling in the Gaps;**  
**SOA6 Better Land Management;**  
**SOA7 Develop Definitive Map and other Records; and**  
**SOA8 A Better Countryside Environment.**

The possible activities were refined in response to the consultation feedback to reflect the issues that most concern people in terms of access to Rights of Way. The following guiding principles were provided to aid in the understanding of the aims behind each section of the Statement of Action. These are as follows:

#### **GP1: Making the Countryside More Accessible**

“Recreational and utility access provision should be physically accessible to the widest possible range of people. Management and improvement of the existing Public Rights of Way network throughout Tyne and Wear should aim to increase that accessibility, while new access provision should generally be planned to avoid imposing restrictions. Where an existing path may not be fully accessible to those with limited mobility due to limits imposed by external constraints, such route limitations should be effectively communicated to users.”

#### **GP2: A Safer Activity**

“Recreational and utility access provision should be safe for users. Where significant potential conflict with motor traffic or railways can be demonstrated, then measures to reduce risk will be considered. Where Public Rights of Way are subsumed within urban development, then planners will be encouraged to ensure that path design is open and unthreatening. Safety-critical path infrastructure will be regularly inspected.”

#### **GP3: 47,000 New Homes**

“New development should not damage recreational and utility access provision, either directly or indirectly. New settlements should be integrated into the Public Rights of Way network, and improved provision made for the increased population. Where appropriate, development should contribute to the provision of new links and / or improvement of the existing Public Rights of Way network”.

#### **GP4 Knowing what's out there?**

“Up to date, accurate, comprehensive and integrated access information should be made available to all users of countryside and utility access provision.”

#### **GP5: Filling in the Gaps**

“Recreational and utility access provision should build on the platform of the historical network to meet the needs of today's users and land managers.”

#### **GP6: Better Land Management**

“Management and improvement of recreational and utility access should consider the needs of land management, conservation, heritage and concern about rural crime.”

#### **GP7: Develop Definitive Maps and Other Records**

“The Definitive Map and Statement should be an accurate, comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible record of the Public Rights of Way network in Tyne and Wear. Proposals for legal changes to the network should be promptly resolved and cost-effective.”



## GP8: A Better Countryside Environment

“The countryside access experience in Tyne and Wear should be straightforward, enjoyable and inspiring.”

The RoWIP concludes with a consideration of what will need to be done to turn actions with wide support into improvements on the ground



### WHAT IS THE PLAN ABOUT?

The five Tyne and Wear Authorities have produced the RoWIP after detailed auditing, assessment and consultation with stakeholders. Under the CROW Act, highway authorities must produce a RoWIP that contains an assessment of:

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

The RoWIP should contain a statement of the action the authority proposes to take for the management of local rights of way, and for securing an improved network of local rights of way. Background information is available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/rowip/rowip.pdf>.

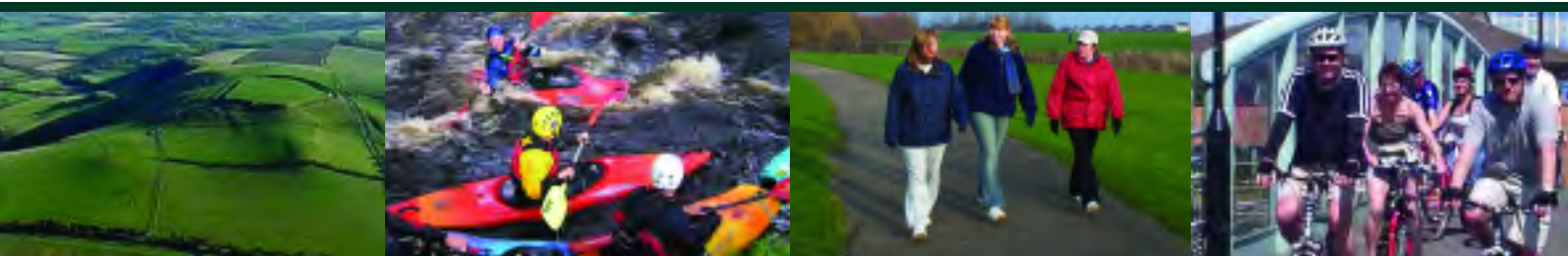
The RoWIP will be evaluated by different criteria by both the Department for Transport and DEFRA.

The RoWIP builds on previous work, specific research and on new, detailed consultation with many interested people including the Tyne and Wear Joint Local Access Forum, statutory advisors to the authorities on access issues. The Plan is intended as a strategy document; more detailed proposals at local level should build upon the principles agreed in this work. Despite the acknowledged length and complexity of this document, we hope that you will be able to contribute to a shared vision of improved access in Tyne and Wear

### WHAT SORT OF IMPROVEMENTS ARE PROPOSED

A key issue for the RoWIP is prioritising issues and potential improvements. With a wide range of interest groups, often with conflicting interests, and limited resources, this can be a difficult balance to strike. The highlighted actions from the consultation processes now form the final Statement of Action and will be the focus for the improvement and future management of the access network.

The SOA priorities will not act in isolation, the management of local Public Rights of Way and securing an improved network of local Public Rights of Way will involve one or more of the Statement of Action priorities in conjunction with the policies outlined throughout the RoWIP.



## 1. Making the Countryside More Accessible.

- New Structures to BSI Standards.
- Selected Surface Improvements.
- Access to Information.
- Disability Awareness Training.

## 2. A Safer Activity.

- Endeavour to ensure that new Public Rights of Way are open and non-threatening.
- Connect Dead end Rights of Way.
- Future major road improvements to avoid the creation of network severance.
- Implement Safer Road Crossings.

## 3. 47,000 new homes

- Ensure the Rights of Way are protected during development and that new facilities are provided to a good standard.
- Minimise damage to existing network.
- Secure funding and liaise with planners and developers to provide new countryside access linking into existing network.
- Liaise with planners and developers to provide new open space for new populations.

## 4. Knowing what's out there?

- Better Integration of Waymarking.
- Better Public Transport Provision.
- Better access to Information.
- Conflict reduction through signage.

## 5. Filling in the Gaps.

- Identify and prioritise missing links in the network and the action required to resolve them.
- Prioritise new and upgraded waterside routes with the least possible effect on conservation and river management.
- Develop and promote routes based on existing bridleways and which are suitable for off-road leisure cycling.
- Increase priority of circular walks with interpretation.



## 6. Better Land Management.

- Work with landowners to improve signage and waymarking where straying and inappropriate use is causing problems.
- Support wider authority schemes of education and publicity on dog control, including provision of bins for waste.
- Encourage landowners to dedicate more land as Open Access.
- Promote the new countryside code by all media.

## 7. Develop Definitive Map and Other Records.

- Consolidate changes from existing definitive maps onto a single reissued map.
- Catalogue problems with existing definitive routes to help reduce fragmentation of the network.
- Research and define path widths not recorded on the definitive statement. Rights of Way are also important biodiversity corridors and so establishing their boundaries is crucial to conserving that resource.
- Map unclassified roads and other routes with public access, which integrate the network.

## 8. A Better Countryside Environment.

- Support schemes to deal with fly tip backlog including clearing vegetation from tip sites.
- Effective use of more volunteer groups to improve / inspect paths.
- Consider opportunities for provision of additional dog waste bins at popular rural Rights of Way.
- Increase monitoring and survey work of the access network by employing contractors and utilising local volunteers.





## HOW THE PLAN IS STRUCTURED

Firstly, the plan looks into the background of Access and Rights of Way in Tyne and Wear, examining the historical legacy of the transport system and landscape to discover what the network has to offer.

Secondly, the plan assesses the network resource, what it includes, where it is and what needs to be improved. Where policies are required these will be indicated and referenced within the Statement of Action tables at the end of the plan.

The plan then looks at the outcomes of the network assessments and explores the different categories of access and Rights of Way users and what they like to do. Looking at opportunities and the future the plan addresses ways to improve, promote the network and deliver new ways of working.

The closing stage of the Plan includes our ambitious Statement of Action, outlining targets for short to long-term delivery. It is vital that the partners who have generated the actions and policies are inspired to work with us to ensure effective implementation and delivery.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TYNE AND WEAR ROWIP

The plan is a working document informing each of the authorities annual business plan and associated work programmes.

Both capital and revenue funding will be required to put any improvements into practice and to ensure their long-term maintenance. The authority officers will have to be innovative in sourcing funds to support the improvements. They will consider seeking funds from lottery bodies, the Tyne and Wear Local Transport Plan, European schemes and agri-environment schemes.

In order to be successful in developing these new funding partnerships, there will be a need to demonstrate that making improvements to the Public Right of Way network will link into much broader policy objectives, such as health, reducing dependence on the car, tourism, economic development, safe routes to school or work, accessibility for those with limited or restricted mobility and for those who are socially excluded.

## COPIES OF THE ROWIP CAN BE OBTAINED FROM:

Access Development Officer (Tyne and Wear),  
Transport Strategy,  
Gateshead Council,  
Civic Centre,  
Regent Street,  
Gateshead,  
NE8 1HH  
or by telephoning 0191 433 2375  
or e-mail: [kevinvigars@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:kevinvigars@gateshead.gov.uk)

