Dorset's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026 to 2036

DRAFT



Dorset Council

Working together | ambitious for **Dorset**

Foreword

As Leader of Dorset Council, I am proud to introduce Dorset's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

This plan is not just about paths and trails across Dorset's countryside - it is about connecting people, places and opportunities across our county. Dorset's public rights of way network is a vital asset that underpins many of our strategic priorities, from strong communities to economic growth and responding to the climate and nature emergencies.

The ROWIP helps ensure that our network of footpaths, bridleways and byways meets the needs of residents and visitors now and in the future. It supports active travel, reducing reliance on cars and contributing to our climate goals, while promoting healthier lifestyles by enabling walking, cycling and riding for both recreation and everyday journeys. It strengthens our local economy by improving access to the countryside, supporting tourism and benefiting rural businesses. It also plays a key role in community resilience and wellbeing, providing safe and inclusive routes for people of all abilities.

By aligning with Dorset Council's objectives - tackling climate change, supporting communities and enabling sustainable economic development, the ROWIP is a strategic investment in our county's future. It reflects our ambition to make Dorset a place where everyone can enjoy and benefit from our outstanding landscapes, heritage and natural environment; while ensuring these benefits are accessible to all and improvements are planned for the long term.

Together with partners, stakeholders and volunteers, we will deliver a rights of way network that is modern, inclusive and fit for purpose - helping Dorset to thrive socially, economically and environmentally.

Cllr Nick Ireland

Leader of Dorset Council

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1: Executive Summary

Dorset's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026 to 2036 sets out how Dorset Council will develop a modern, accessible and better-connected network of public rights of way that supports everyday walking, cycling and access to natural green and blue spaces. This new ROWIP replaces the earlier ROWIP published in 2011.

Dorset Council, as the Local Highway Authority, has a statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and review a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). This Plan has been prepared in accordance with Sections 60 and 61 of the Act, which require local highway authorities to assess the extent to which public rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public, the opportunities they provide for exercise and outdoor recreation, and the accessibility of the network for blind or partially sighted people and others with mobility challenges.

In preparing this Plan, Dorset Council has also had regard to wider legislation and statutory duties, including the Highways Act 1980, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Equality Act 2010, Section 69 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, the Environment Act 2021 and relevant provisions of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. Together these help shape Dorset Council's approach to accessibility, biodiversity, environmental enhancement, public access and the long-term stewardship of the rights of way network.

The ROWIP must identify how the network can be managed, maintained and improved to better meet these needs and must be reviewed periodically. This Plan sets out Dorset Council's strategic priorities for improving public access, supporting health and wellbeing, encouraging sustainable travel, strengthening communities and enabling more people to enjoy Dorset's landscapes, green spaces and natural environment.

Whilst the ROWIP is a statutory document, Dorset Council recognises that the rights of way network deliver much wider benefits, supporting active travel, access to nature, tourism, public health, climate resilience, biodiversity recovery and the local economy.

This plan fulfils that duty while setting a broader and more ambitious vision for how Dorset's public rights of way (PROW) network will contribute to the county's communities, economy and environment over the next decade.

We are responsible for recording, maintaining and protecting 2,855 miles (4,594 km) of public rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways, byways and restricted byways. This work is primarily delivered by the Dorset Council Greenspace Ranger Team, alongside the Definitive Map Team. In addition, Dorset Council manages a wider countryside access network, including long-distance promoted routes, over 80 countryside sites, four country parks and other public greenspaces. Together, these form one of Dorset's most valuable shared assets.

Why this plan matters

The way people use Dorset's rights of way network has changed significantly in recent years.
Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a sustained increase in the use of local paths for both physical and mental wellbeing. Natural England's People and Nature Survey (March 2022) found that 39% of adults said that nature and wildlife had become more important to their wellbeing than before the pandemic. Therefore, access to greenspace is increasingly recognised as essential to quality of life, not simply a recreational benefit.

Public policy has evolved to reflect this shift. Access to nature is now embedded within public health thinking, with greenspace seen as a form of preventative healthcare. The Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (2025) **Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2025 - GOV.UK** includes a commitment to ensure that everyone has access to green or blue space within a 15 minute walk of their home. Dorset's public rights of way network plays a key role in delivering this ambition.

At the same time, there is growing demand for safe, accessible routes that support everyday journeys, alongside increasing housing growth and the need to reduce reliance on private cars. Public rights of way are therefore no longer solely transport or recreational assets; they are essential infrastructure supporting health, sustainability, climate resilience and social inclusion. This ROWIP complements the objectives in **Dorset Council's Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4)** sets out the long-term strategy for creating a safer, healthier and more sustainable transport system. Public Rights of Way, Trailways, greenways and multi-user routes contribute to the delivery of LTP4 objectives by providing opportunities for walking, wheeling (including the use of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other mobility aids), cycling and horse riding, supporting both recreational and everyday journeys. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is an important mechanism for delivering active travel, improving connectivity between communities and services, reducing reliance on private cars and encouraging healthier lifestyles.

The ROWIP complements the ambitions of LTP4 by helping to develop an integrated network of routes which connect people to employment, education, public transport, greenspaces and visitor destinations. Through investment in the rights of way network, Dorset Council can support wider transport, public health, climate and economic objectives

What this plan will deliver

Over the next 10 years, this plan will:

- improve the condition and usability of the network, prioritising routes that are most important to local communities
- create safer, better-connected routes linking towns, villages, schools, services and green spaces
- increase accessibility by reducing physical barriers and promoting a range of clearly defined accessible routes
- expand traffic-free and multi-user routes, including trailways, to support everyday walking, cycling and riding
- improve waymarking and information, supported by digital tools such as Dorset Explorer, making the network easier to access and navigate

- support healthier and more active lifestyles by increasing participation and reducing barriers to access
- strengthen Dorset's economy by promoting the county as a leading destination for walking, cycling and outdoor recreation
- ensure new development protects and enhances the network through effective use of the planning process, Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions
- promote responsible use of the network, maintain positive relationships with landowners and land managers, and take proportionate enforcement action where necessary to protect public rights.
- maintain an accurate and accessible legal record of public rights of way through the Definitive Map and Statement

A network with wide-ranging benefits

Dorset's public rights of way network deliver benefits far beyond recreation.

It supports the local economy by attracting walkers, cyclists and visitors. Contributing to Dorset's accommodation, food and retail sectors, particularly in rural and coastal communities. It also helps extend the tourism season beyond peak summer months, reducing reliance on seasonal income.
The network also contributes to wider economic benefits through improved public health outcomes, reducing long-term pressure on health services, and supporting sustainable transport by providing alternatives to short car journeys.
Public rights of way enable people to access Dorset's landscapes, heritage and natural environment, supporting community wellbeing, social interaction and a sense of place.

A strategic and partnership-led approach

This plan sets out how Dorset will ensure the rights of way network meets the current and future needs of residents and visitors between 2026 and 2036. It does not replace our statutory duties but builds upon them, setting out a clear framework for improvement and investment. The ROWIP contributes to the delivery of Dorset Council's Local Transport Plan, the Active Travel Infrastructure Plan, the Dorset Council Plan, Green Infrastructure strategies, climate and nature objectives, and wider public health priorities. The ROWIP provides a framework for identifying and prioritising access improvements that support both recreational use and everyday journeys.

The plan has been developed through extensive consultation with council services, external organisations, stakeholders and the public. This feedback, alongside Dorset Council's strategic priorities, has shaped the approach and informed the development of 10 policies.

These policies are grouped around four key strategic themes:

- **a high-quality network** – maintaining, improving and connecting routes
- **accessible and inclusive access** – reducing barriers and improving usability
- **supporting communities and the economy** – empowering local involvement and promoting Dorset
- **connecting with wider priorities** – including health, sustainable transport, planning and climate objectives

Dorset Council's strategic priorities:

- provide high quality and affordable housing

- grow our economy
- communities for all
- respond to the climate and nature crisis



Figure 1: Dorset Councils strategic priorities

The 10 policy areas

The plan is delivered through 10 policies which together provide a comprehensive framework for improving the network:

1. Managing and delivering a high-quality, climate resilient public rights of way network
2. Improving information, promotion and awareness
3. Making the network more accessible
4. Empowering communities and stakeholders
5. Supporting the economy
6. Promoting responsible use and the Countryside Code
7. Using new development and the Local Plan to improve the network
8. Maximising health and wellbeing outcomes
9. Supporting sustainable transport and active travel
10. Maintaining the Definitive Map and legal record

These policies provide the focus for investment, partnership working and service delivery over the next decade.

Delivery and investment

The plan will be delivered through:

- strong partnership working with communities, landowners, stakeholders and other Dorset Council services
- targeted investment through Department for Transport funding, external grants, developer contributions and other funding opportunities
- the continued support of volunteers, Rights of Way Liaison Officers, parish and town councils, and community groups
- a coordinated, cross-service approach across Dorset Council to maximise the wider benefits of the rights of way network
- integrating rights of way improvements with wider initiatives relating to active travel, health and wellbeing, nature recovery and climate resilience
- ongoing monitoring and review to ensure the network continues to evolve in response to changing needs and opportunities

This approach will place Dorset in a strong position to attract external funding and prioritise resources effectively.

This plan positions Dorset to develop a high-quality, accessible and well-connected rights of way network that supports healthier communities, sustainable travel and a strong rural economy, ensuring the county's landscapes remain accessible and valued.



Figure 2: Bridleway in West Dorset.

2: Vision for ROWIP

Dorset has a significant opportunity to refresh its Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) to support the Council's wider strategic objectives and maximise the value of one of the county's greatest assets: its natural environment.

Covering almost 1,000 square miles, Dorset has nearly 3,000 miles of public rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways, byways and former railway routes. This extensive network connects towns, villages and rural communities, providing opportunities for recreation, active travel, access to nature, improved health and wellbeing, and economic growth.

Dorset's Rights of Way network will be resilient, well-maintained and increasingly accessible, enabling more people to enjoy the countryside on foot, by wheelchair or mobility scooter, on horseback and by bicycle. The network will support health and wellbeing, sustainable travel, biodiversity recovery and the local economy, whilst responding to the impacts of climate change, including flooding, coastal erosion and extreme weather. Priority will be given to maintaining and improving routes that connect people with their communities, services, employment, education and Dorset's natural environment, alongside strategic county-wide links.

Dorset's outstanding landscapes, including the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and two National Landscapes, make it uniquely placed to become a leading destination for countryside access and outdoor recreation. The network allows residents and visitors to experience the county's rich natural, historic and cultural heritage while supporting nature recovery and sustainable travel.

The new ROWIP aims to establish Dorset as a flagship county for access to nature and one of England's premier walking destinations. The plan will support communities to create and promote local circular routes, improve infrastructure, signage and accessibility, and enhance digital route information through Dorset Explorer and GPS-enabled tools.

For most people, access to nature begins close to home. Local paths, green corridors and nearby open spaces provide opportunities for daily exercise, active travel, social connection and contact with nature.

Dorset Council will prioritise improvements to routes which connect communities with local greenspaces, countryside, schools, public transport, employment and essential services. Creating opportunities for everyday use will deliver significant benefits for health, wellbeing and sustainable travel.

Improving access to the network will help people be more active, improve health and wellbeing, and provide free opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. The plan also seeks to make the network more inclusive and accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

The emerging Dorset Local Plan presents opportunities to incorporate high-quality rights of way infrastructure into new developments. Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding will help deliver sustainable transport and recreational routes that connect communities and strengthen the wider network.

ROWIP has been informed by engagement with the Local Access Forum, user groups, landowners and local communities. Feedback highlighted the importance of a network that is easy to use, well-maintained and supported by clear information and good infrastructure.

Through this plan, Dorset Council will ensure that the rights of way network remain accessible, relevant and resilient, maximising its contribution to health, wellbeing, sustainable travel, nature recovery and the local economy.



Figure 3: Walking route between Corfe Castle and Swanage.

3: Scope of ROWIP from 2026 to 2036

The ROWIP is a statutory strategy to improve and develop Dorset's public rights of way network and wider access to the countryside. It is a strategic document and does not identify improvements on a path-by-path basis. Instead, it sets out the priorities and framework that will guide future investment, decision-making and partnership working across the county. The new ROWIP replaces ROWIP1 which was published in 2011.

The scope of the plan covers how people access and use Dorset's public rights of way network, and how that network should be improved over time.

The plan includes all public access routes and networks such as:

- public rights of way- footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways
- long-distance routes and promoted routes
- trailways and former railway paths
- permissive routes and cycle routes
- Open Access Land and Coastal Access Land
- other publicly accessible land

All user types

The plan considers the needs of a wide range of users including:

- walkers
- cyclists
- horse riders and carriage drivers
- motorised users (where lawful)

We will have due regard to the Equality Act 2010, recognising the needs of a wide range of users, particularly those with mobility challenges.

The relationship between the network and the people who use it has informed the development of the 10 policies set out in this ROWIP.

What the ROWIP delivers

The 10 year ROWIP provides a framework to:

- set long-term priorities for the network
- guide investment and funding decisions
- support partnership working across Dorset Council and with external organisations
- shape how the network evolves to meet future needs

It enables Dorset Council, including the Greenspace Ranger team, to work collaboratively with other services and partners to deliver shared strategic objectives.

While day-to-day maintenance and issue resolution remain important, this plan provides the strategic direction needed to develop a more connected, accessible and higher quality network.

Cross-cutting role of the ROWIP

The ROWIP is a cross-cutting strategy and is not solely a countryside document. It contributes to a range of wider priorities, including:

- public health and wellbeing
- social inclusion and access for all
- tourism and the local economy
- rural businesses and land management
- climate change and sustainable travel
- green infrastructure and biodiversity
- transport and planning
- active travel, including walking and cycling
- safer, better-connected routes, including travel to school

Delivery and partnership

The new ROWIP will be delivered by Dorset Council in partnership with communities, stakeholders and external funders. It has been informed by the first round of pubic and stakeholder consultation and supported by gathered data and evidence and will be subject to ongoing monitoring and review. The draft will be formally consulted with the public during the summer of 2026, with the final version being published in late 2026.

Policies within this plan provide the mechanism for delivery over the 10-year period.

Stakeholder engagement

The plan has been developed through engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. A summary of public consultation and the responses to it are summarise din the Appendix.

External stakeholders including:

- South West Coast Path Association
- Natural England
- Parish and Town Councils
- Community groups
- British Horse Society
- Ramblers
- Members of the public
- Trail Riders Fellowship
- Green Lane Association

Internal stakeholders including:

- Sustainable Travel
- Environment and Greenspace
- Public Health
- Dorset Highways
- Definitive Map Team
- Equality and Diversity / Legal Services
- Visit Dorset
- National Landscape teams
- Planning and Development
- Culture, Sport and Tourism

- Local Access Forum statutory advisors to Dorset Council

4. Policies of the ROWIP 2026 to 2036

The following policies set out how Dorset Council will improve and manage the public rights of way network over the period of this plan. They have been informed by evidence, engagement with stakeholders and the priorities identified earlier in this document. They have not been placed in priority order, all ten are priorities.

Together, these policies provide a framework for decision-making, investment and partnership working. They guide how the Council will prioritise improvements, respond to changing needs and ensure the network continues to deliver benefits for communities, the economy and the natural environment.

Policy 1: Maintaining and improving the existing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network

The first public consultation for the new ROWIP identified a clear priority: people want a well-maintained rights of way network. Dorset Council will therefore focus on protecting, maintaining and improving the existing network, prioritising routes that are most important to local communities and where investment can deliver the greatest benefit. Through strong partnerships and the use of digital mapping and data, Dorset Council will take a targeted, evidence-led approach to maintenance and improvement across the county.

Dorset Council also recognises that a well-connected network is more valuable than a collection of isolated routes. The Council will seek opportunities to address missing links and barriers that prevent people from making safe, convenient and attractive journeys for recreation, active travel and everyday activities. Particular consideration will be given to improving connectivity between settlements, services, schools, employment areas, public transport hubs and key recreational destinations.

Where routes have been identified as delivering significant public benefit, Dorset Council will seek to secure their completion within a reasonable timescale through negotiation, partnership working and, where appropriate, the use of statutory powers available to facilitate public access.

Through these measures, Dorset Council will champion a rights of way network that is well-maintained, accessible and fit for the future, helping more people to be active, spend time outdoors and choose practical alternatives to car journeys.

This policy supports the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** by improving access to nature whilst ensuring that public rights of way contribute positively to biodiversity recovery, habitat connectivity and the long-term resilience of Dorset's natural environment.



Figure 4: Staff and volunteers installing a new, accessible, self-closing gate.

We will:

- **resolve maintenance issues** reported by the public in a timely manner using reports generated on our online portal.
- **improve climate resilience** by identifying and assessing routes, structures and assets vulnerable to flooding, coastal erosion, landslip, drought and extreme weather, and prioritising measures that improve long-term network resilience
- **protect and maintain access** by asserting and safeguarding the public's rights to use the network, supported by sustained investment in maintenance
- **use GIS and digital tools** to identify need, monitor condition and prioritise improvements, supported by mobile technology that enables staff to update information in real time while on site
- **Road severance** Work with highway authorities, developers and external partners to identify and address major road severance points that prevent safe access to the rights of way network. Priority will be given to locations where strategic walking, cycling or equestrian routes are interrupted by heavily trafficked roads.
- **maintain and develop our in-house GIS systems** to support efficient management of the network and provide the public with a simple way to report issues and access up-to-date information maximising the reporting simplicity for the public
- **enhance key routes** through surfacing improvements (mainly natural stone sourced locally) to support year-round use for recreation and sustainable travel

- **upgrade infrastructure** to improve durability and accessibility, including replacing stepped bridges with step-free designs wherever possible. Replace stiles with gaps or gates, using robust and inclusive designs that improve usability for a wide range of users
- **improve waymarking of the network** by increasing high-quality waymarking including signs with destinations and distances, to increase public confidence and usability
- **strengthen connectivity** by developing links between communities, services and green spaces, including investment in bridleways and multi-user routes
- **support delivery of trailways and multi-user routes** by identifying opportunities to upgrade suitable footpaths to bridleways and create new multi-user routes where these improve network connectivity, support sustainable travel and address identified deficiencies in off-road provision for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians.
- **work collaboratively with town and parish councils, partners and landowners** to prioritise improvements and resolve issues locally
- **undertake periodic reviews of network deficiencies** to identify priority schemes which improve connectivity and accessibility.
- **Network improvement** will focus not only on maintaining existing public rights of way, but also on identifying and addressing strategic gaps, severed routes and missing links that limit connectivity between settlements, services, employment areas, schools, public transport hubs and key recreational destinations.

Looking after the network is about more than maintenance, it's about making it work better for people. By combining day to day care with targeted upgrades and a modern, data-led approach. Dorset will continue to unlock the full value of its rights of way: supporting healthier lifestyles, stronger communities and a more sustainable future.

Case Study 1: Upgrading infrastructure

Dorset Council is improving the quality and resilience of its public rights of way network by upgrading bridleway bridges to a more durable and accessible standard. Traditional pressure-treated timber bridges are being replaced with recycled plastic structures, which do not rot and offer a significantly longer service life.

The new bridge designs incorporate robust structural components and slip-resistant decking, providing a safe and reliable surface for a wide range of users, including walkers, cyclists and horse riders. They are designed to meet established standards for equestrian use, supporting the weight and impact of horses while offering wider, more stable crossing points.

In addition to improved safety and usability, these bridges are manufactured from recycled materials and require minimal ongoing maintenance, reducing whole-life costs and supporting environmental sustainability objectives.

All new bridleway bridges are now delivered to this specification, and the replacement of older structures is being accelerated through investment from the Local Transport Plan (LTP).

This programme directly supports Policy 1 by improving infrastructure quality, increasing durability, and delivering a safer, more accessible and user-friendly network.



Figure 5: Two recycled plastic bridleway bridges installed near Broadmayne, with sandbag headwalls forming a gentle, step-free ramp to improve accessibility for all users.

Policy 2: Raise awareness of Public Rights of Way

Dorset will make it simple for people to discover, navigate and enjoy the rights of way network. By combining clear on-the-ground information with accessible digital tools, we will help more people feel confident exploring the county, whether for everyday journeys, health and wellbeing, or visiting Dorset.

Dorset Councils free to use online mapping tool **Dorset Explorer** and locally produced 'Walkabout' leaflets will play a central role in this approach, providing reliable, easy-to-use mapping and guidance, complemented by clear signage and local promotion.

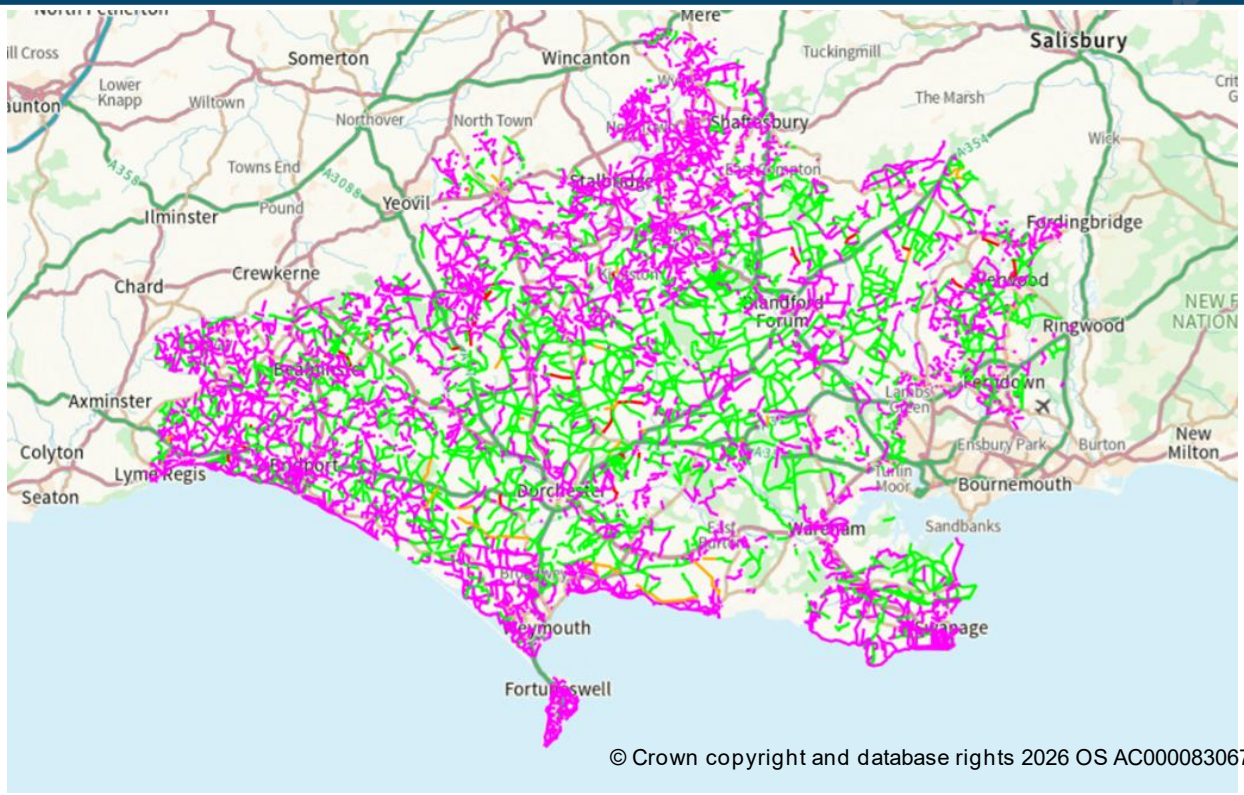


Figure 6: Screenshot from Dorset Explorer showing all Dorsets' public rights of way.

We will:

- promote 'Dorset Explorer', with a comms campaign, helping people easily find and follow routes across the county using the built in GPS function using this link **DorsetExplorer**.
- make digital tools simple to use, including short guides and videos to help people confidently access Dorset Explorer mapping and reporting network issues
- develop inclusive virtual 'walks' that allow people to experience Dorset's rights of way remotely, seeing the route, hearing the surroundings and getting a genuine sense of place. Improving access for those unable to visit in person
- improve confidence in the network by ensuring routes are clearly signed and easy to navigate, both digitally and on the ground
- work with town and parish councils to promote local routes, and improve signage, supporting communities to showcase easy to use walks and rides
- support the creation of local community led, 'Walkabout' routes, encouraging short, circular walks that are easy to use, well-connected and attractive to residents and visitors
- promote the network more widely, using social media, local networks and partners to highlight routes, encourage use and support local businesses
- encourage real time feedback from users, making it easy to report issues through an online portal and help keep the network up to date and well maintained
- encourage people to explore. Public feedback shows that people enjoy the rich natural and cultural heritage of Dorset, but many don't know how to access it
- encourage awareness and confidence through supported entry level activities, for example Dorset Councils Health & Activity programme
- work with schools, both for active travel to and from school and by educating young people of the network of recreation and transport possibilities on their doorstep

People are far more likely to use the network when they know where to go and feel confident getting there. By improving signage, simplifying digital access and celebrating local and long-distance routes, Dorset will make its rights of way easier to use, better understood and more widely enjoyed.

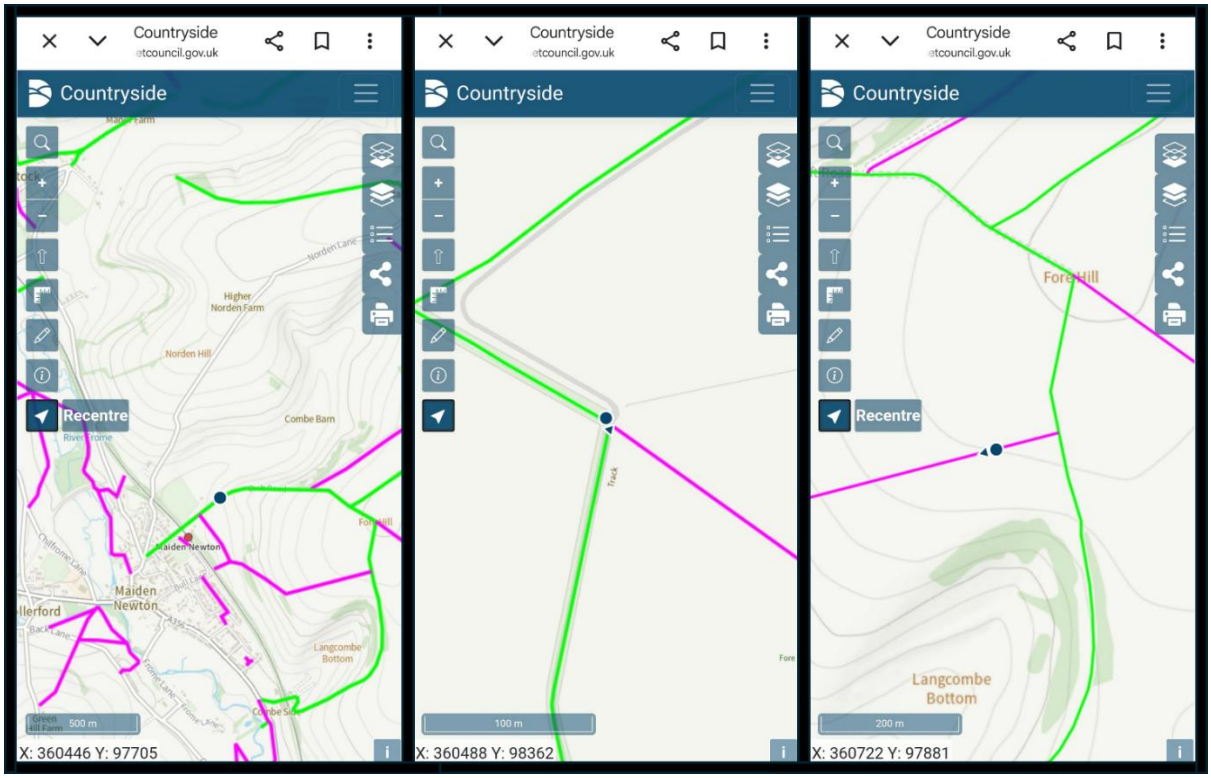


Figure 7: Dorset Explorer on a mobile device using the tracking function, helping users stay on public rights of way and giving them confidence to explore new routes. The blue dot above shows live tracking, effecteively a free “sat nav” for our rights of way.

Case Study 2 - Priority Signing

Dorset Council’s Ranger Teams have worked in partnership with parish and town councils over many years to deliver enhanced public rights of way signage through a shared “Priority Signage” approach. (photo below). This partnership model combines local funding and council expertise to deliver higher-quality, more informative directional signage across the network. Improved signage includes clearer signs with named destinations and more consistent direction markers, making routes easier to follow and understand. This is especially important where routes leave the metalled carriageway, i.e. roads. Standard statutory signage does not show a destination, just the classification of the PROW, e.g. footpath or bridleway.

As a result, this approach helps reduce both physical and psychological barriers to using the network.

Users are more confident navigating routes, leading to increased use for recreation, everyday journeys and access to local services.

The success of Priority Signage demonstrates the value of working collaboratively with local councils to deliver practical improvements on the ground. Dorset Council will seek to expand this approach, working with all parish and town councils to extend high-quality signage across a wider proportion of the network.

By improving route legibility and user confidence, this partnership approach supports increased use of the network while delivering wider benefits for health, wellbeing, local economies and sustainable travel.

Figures 8 and 9 show two different examples of the priority signage that currently exists on the network in North Dorset.



Figure 8: Staff member and a volunteer installing a 'priority sign' in north Dorset.



Figure 9: Oak 'priority' fingerpost in North Dorset.

Case Study 3: Sturminster Newton Walkabouts

Every community has its own well-loved local routes. By identifying, promoting and improving these, we can help more people discover and enjoy the rights of way network.

In Sturminster Newton, the Town Council has worked in partnership with Dorset Council's Ranger team to create a series of eight circular "Walkabout" routes. These routes start from the town and explore the surrounding Blackmore Vale, using a combination of Public Rights of Way and permissive paths.

The routes vary in length from 1.5 to 5.5 miles, offering a range of options suitable for a range of abilities and time commitments. They are supported by clear information, with downloadable maps and printed leaflets available locally through community venues or printable at home.

This approach makes it easier for residents and visitors to access and confidently use the network, removing uncertainty about where to go and how to navigate routes. By presenting simple, clearly promoted circular walks, the Walkabouts encourage regular use, support physical activity and help people connect with their local environment.

The Sturminster Newton Walkabouts demonstrate how working with town and parish councils can successfully promote local routes. Dorset Council will build on this model to support other communities in developing and showcasing their own "Walkabout" networks across the county.

See the appendix for Sturminster Newton Walkabout leaflet 1.

Find all of **Dorset Council's Walkabout leaflets on our website**, including routes around our nature reserves. While some of these sites do not contain public rights of way, they are publicly accessible and connect to the wider rights of way network.



Figure 10: Walkabout leaflet for Thorncombe Wood Nature Reserve.

Policy 3: Making our network more accessible

Dorset will provide a rights of way network that is more accessible, inclusive and easier to use for a wider range of people. By improving physical infrastructure alongside the quality of information available, the council will enable more residents and visitors to confidently access the network.

Dorset Council will adopt the principle of Least Restrictive Access wherever practicable, applying the requirements of BS 5709:2018 and relevant national guidance, including Outdoor Accessibility Guidance and By All Reasonable Means. The Council will favour gaps over gates and gates over stiles, seeking to remove unnecessary barriers wherever possible. Improvements will be informed by engagement with disabled users, including people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments, to ensure the network is accessible to the widest possible range of users.

“We have pathways but are unable to use them as we can’t use stiles, five bar gates or kissing gates” Disability Action Group, Child Okeford.



Figure 11: Offroad wheelchair or 'tramper mobility scooter' using a bridleway in East Dorset.

We will:

- **develop and promote accessible routes**, including creating a dedicated layer on Dorset Explorer showcasing at least 10 high-quality accessible circular routes across the county
- **work with disabled users** and representative organisations to co-design accessible promoted routes and publish accessibility information that enables users to make informed choices before travelling.
- **improve physical accessibility** by removing or reducing barriers where possible, including replacing stiles with accessible gates, improving bridge access, and addressing restrictive infrastructure
- **promote inclusive access to the network**, working with communities and partners to understand and address barriers faced by underrepresented groups and encourage wider and more confident use of the rights of way network
- **provide clearer information to users**, including detailed route descriptions, gradients, surfaces, distances and potential obstacles, enabling people to make informed decisions about route suitability
- **improve links to supporting infrastructure**, including accessible parking, signage, and links to facilities such as toilets, seating and refreshment points
- **maximise the use of trailways and well-surfaced routes** to create accessible circular routes linking communities, services and green spaces
- **target investment in surfacing and infrastructure improvements**, using internal and external funding to support year-round use and expand opportunities for everyday journeys such as walking and cycling to school
- **work with partners and landowners** to improve access across the network, supporting practical, deliverable solutions that benefit a wide range of users
- **improve access to Open Access Land and Registered Common Land** by creating or enhancing connections to the existing rights of way network and improving route information, particularly where legal access exists but practical access is currently limited
- **Seek opportunities to improve accessibility** through the removal of unnecessary barriers, the replacement of restrictive infrastructure with the least restrictive option appropriate to the route, surfacing improvements where appropriate, and the enhancement of routes to enable use by the widest possible range of people, consistent with the character of the countryside, heritage interests and environmental sensitivities.

Accessibility is not just about physical infrastructure, it is also about information, confidence and choice. Dorset recognises that users have different needs and abilities, and there is no single definition of what makes a route accessible. Instead, we will focus on providing high-quality, accurate information so individuals can decide what works for them.

As part of this approach, we will develop a countywide accessible routes database, supported by user groups. These routes will include appropriate infrastructure such as improved surfaces, accessible gates, rest points and clear signage, and will be supported by photographs and route-level detail.

Dorset's extensive network of Greenspaces, Country Parks and Trailways provides a strong foundation for delivering accessible routes. These routes often already benefit from good access, facilities and proximity to communities, making them ideal starting points and examples for an expanded accessible network.

Dorset Council is committed to the principles of equality and will continue to meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010. Improving accessibility will help ensure that more people - regardless of age, ability or background, can enjoy the benefits of being active outdoors, supporting healthier, more independent lives. This policy directly supports the **Dorset Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy** by seeking to reduce barriers to accessing the countryside and ensuring that the benefits of Dorset's rights of way network can be enjoyed by people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

While it is recognised that not every route will be accessible to all, the overall aim is to create a network that offers a greater range of accessible options, supported by clear information and improved infrastructure.

Trailways and former railway paths will play a key role in this approach. Their width, gradients and surface quality often make them inherently more accessible, and they provide valuable opportunities to create connected, multi-user routes linking towns and villages.

A consistent theme identified through consultation is the importance of circular routes. These routes are particularly attractive as they provide a complete experience, are easier to navigate, and naturally return users to their starting point. Dorset will work with Town and Parish Councils to prioritise the development of well-designed circular routes that are accessible, engaging and connected to local communities.

Case Study 4: North Dorset Trailway

Improving accessibility and connectivity can support everyday journeys as well as recreation. Enhancing links between communities and nearby towns enables more people to walk, cycle and ride with confidence, reducing reliance on cars and supporting healthier lifestyles.

The North Dorset Trailway is a key example of this approach in practice. Following the former Somerset and Dorset railway line, the route provides an approximately 11-mile multi-user corridor suitable for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Its gentle gradients, wide paths and largely traffic-free alignment make it particularly accessible to a wide range of users, including families, less confident cyclists and those using mobility aids.

The trailway connects a number of rural communities, linking villages such as Shillingstone, Sturminster Newton and Spetisbury with the surrounding countryside and local services. It also provides access to heritage features, including the restored Shillingstone Station, helping to celebrate Dorset's history while encouraging visitors to explore the area.

Importantly, the accessible nature of the route means it can be used not only for recreation but also for everyday journeys. The trailway is used by local residents for walking and cycling between communities, including journeys to school and local facilities, offering a safer alternative to road-based travel. It is also used for organised health walks and informal exercise, supporting both physical and mental wellbeing.



Figure 12: Horses and bicycles sharing the path on the North Dorset Trailway.

The development of the trailway has been supported through strong partnership working, including Dorset Council, parish councils, community groups and volunteers. Local communities have played a key role in promoting and using the route, highlighting the importance of accessible infrastructure that meets local needs.

By providing a safe, attractive and inclusive route, the North Dorset Trailway reduces both physical and psychological barriers to accessing the countryside. Its design allows more people, including those who may be less confident or have mobility limitations, to enjoy the network and take part in outdoor activity.

The trailway demonstrates how investment in accessible infrastructure can deliver wide-ranging benefits. It improves connectivity between communities, supports healthy lifestyles, enhances access to heritage and green space, and contributes to a more sustainable transport network.

The development of the North Dorset Trailway has also supported wider promotion and partnership working. Visit Dorset has developed dedicated online content to promote the Trailway, alongside additional digital and social media content highlighting routes such as the White Hart Link.

These initiatives have helped raise awareness of the area as a visitor destination and provided a catalyst for the formation of the North Dorset Tourism Partnership. This partnership brings together towns and organisations across North Dorset to promote collaboration, increase visitor numbers and strengthen the local economy.

Dorset Council will continue to build on this approach, extending and enhancing trailways and similar routes to provide inclusive, accessible connections across the county.

Case Study 5: Electric Bikes and Expanding Access to the Network

The increasing use of electric bikes, also known as Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (EAPCs), is changing how people access and use Dorset's public rights of way network. Nearly 10% of new bicycle sales are now electric, reflecting a growing shift in how people travel and recreate.

E-bikes can make the network more accessible to a wider range of users, including older people, those with lower fitness levels, and those travelling longer distances or on more challenging terrain. This has the potential to increase use of the bridleway network for both leisure and everyday journeys, supporting healthier lifestyles and more sustainable travel choices.

In the UK, EAPCs are subject to specific legal requirements. To be used on public rights of way where cycling is permitted, such as bridleways, restricted byways and Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs), an e-bike must have pedals capable of propelling the cycle, a maximum continuous motor output of 250 watts, and motor assistance that cuts off at 15.5 mph (25 km/h). Where these criteria are met, the e-bike is legally treated as a bicycle and may be used in the same way under existing legislation.

However, non-compliant e-bikes - such as those with higher power outputs, throttle-only operation, or modified speed settings are classified as motor vehicles. These cannot be used on bridleways and are restricted to roads where legal requirements such as registration, insurance and licensing apply.

While the growth in e-bike use presents clear opportunities to widen access and encourage sustainable travel, it also requires careful management. Increased speeds and higher levels of use may create conflicts on shared routes, particularly where paths are narrow or heavily used by walkers and horse riders. This highlights the importance of maintaining high-quality infrastructure, clear signage, and promoting responsible behaviour through the Countryside Code.

Dorset Council will continue to support the appropriate use of EAPCs as part of a modern and inclusive access network, while ensuring that safety, shared use, and the character of the countryside are carefully managed.



Figure 13: Electric bike using a public right of way.

Case Study 6: Improving Routes with appropriate Surfacing

Dorset Council has improved the usability and accessibility of sections of the public rights of way network by introducing compacted stone surfacing. This cost-effective approach creates a firmer, more even surface that is suitable for a wide range of users, including walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

These improvements significantly enhance year-round access, particularly during wetter conditions when unsurfaced routes can become muddy and difficult to use. By carefully selecting appropriate materials and locations, we can balance accessibility with the rural character of the countryside.

The example below shows a bridleway where compacted stone surfacing has improved the reliability and inclusivity of the route.



Figure 14: Before and after pictures of a path where contractors used compacted stone surfacing to improve the network for all users.

Policy 4: Empowering Communities to help improve their Public Rights of Way Network

Dorset Council will work in partnership with local communities to care for, improve and promote the rights of way network. By supporting parish and town councils, volunteers and community organisations, the Council will enable greater local involvement in shaping and maintaining the network.

Public rights of way will form part of the "Community Conversations", helping to strengthen relationships between DC and parish / town councils and third sector organisations. This will support a more collaborative approach, encouraging co-design and co-delivery of services, including greenspace and access to nature. Local communities make a vital contribution to the management and improvement of Dorset's rights of way network. Volunteers provide local knowledge, identify issues, support practical improvements and promote responsible access.

This approach supports Dorset Council's commitment to working closely with communities, ensuring local knowledge and effort plays a key role in delivering improvements on the ground and supports the ambitions of the **Dorset Health and Wellbeing Strategy** by encouraging social connection, volunteering and community-led initiatives that improve access to nature and opportunities for physical activity.

Rights of Way Liaison Officers (RoWLO), community volunteers and user groups play a vital role in monitoring the network, identifying local priorities and supporting improvements. Dorset Council will continue to strengthen these partnerships through training, information sharing and recognition of volunteer contributions



Figure 15: Local community volunteers working alongside Dorset Council rangers to open up a new section of bridleway, creating an important link within the wider network.

We will:

- **work in partnership with parish and town councils** to improve and promote local routes, including maintenance and capital improvements that reflect local priorities, including a “ROWIP road show” visiting PC’s and TC’s to engage and promote joint working and supporting each PC and TC to have a Rights of Way Liaison Officer (RoWLO) on the council.
- **more Rights of Way Liaison Officers** Increase the number of parish and town councils participating in the RoWLO scheme and provide regular training opportunities for volunteers.
- **support the role of Rights of Way Liaison Officers (RoWLO)**, strengthening links between communities and the Ranger Team and helping to identify issues and opportunities at a local level and engaging their help with condition surveys.
- **expand Service Level Agreements (SLAs)** and the development of local “walkabout” routes, enabling communities to take an active role in maintaining and promoting well-used routes
- **grow and support a strong volunteer network**, providing opportunities for people to contribute to path maintenance, vegetation clearance, waymarking and monitoring route condition. Volunteers currently work on PRoW across Dorset every day, this will be expanded to maximise the benefit
- **provide training, guidance and support** to volunteers, parish councils and community groups, ensuring work is delivered safely, effectively and to a consistent standard
- **encourage community-led improvements**, supporting local groups to identify missing links, enhance circular routes and develop projects that improve access and connectivity, such as removing stiles in favour of accessible gates
- **support access to funding and external grants**, working with partners to help communities bring forward deliverable projects that improve the network
- **promote local stewardship of the network**, encouraging a sense of ownership and pride in Dorset’s rights of way as a shared community asset
- **support local rights of way priorities** by encouraging communities to develop projects and action plans that complement and support delivery of the county-wide ROWIP
- **provide training opportunities** for volunteers and students - encouraging participation and supporting countryside access as a career path
- **engage elected members and stakeholders** through briefings, events and regular communication to promote the ROWIP and opportunities for joint working

Community involvement is central to the long-term success of the rights of way network. By combining local knowledge with our support and professional expertise, Dorset will deliver a more responsive, better maintained and widely used network.

This approach also supports Dorset Council’s wider health and wellbeing ambitions. Through initiatives such as “Dorset Health Walks”, we will work with partners to enable more people to be active in their local area, with the rights of way network playing a key role in providing accessible opportunities for everyday movement.

Improving local routes, signage and surface quality, alongside supporting community ambassadors and volunteers, will help create places where being active is a natural and easy choice.

Case Study 7: Community Led Creation of a New Bridleway at Chideock

Local communities play a vital role in identifying opportunities to improve the rights of way network and helping to bring forward projects that meet local needs.

At Chideock, a new bridleway has been created following a request from the local community group, supported by the Parish Council. The project identified the need for safer, off-road access for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other users, addressing a gap in the existing network.

Crucially, the new route provides a safe alternative to the A35, allowing users to climb Quarr Hill without needing to use this busy and hazardous road. This has significantly improved safety and accessibility for local residents and visitors.

Dorset Council worked in partnership with the Parish Council, the Bridport to Lyme Link (BLLINK) group and other stakeholders to develop and deliver the project. Funding support was secured through the National Landscapes team, enabling the route to be brought forward.

A key element of the project was the generous donation of land by a local landowner, demonstrating the positive outcomes that can be achieved through strong relationships and collaborative working.
The new bridleway provides an important addition to the local network, offering a safer and more accessible route for riders, walkers and cyclists. It improves connectivity between existing paths, reduces reliance on road sections and enhances access to the surrounding countryside.

This project demonstrates how community-led initiatives, supported by partnership working and landowner cooperation, can deliver practical improvements to the rights of way network. It highlights the importance of local knowledge, collaboration and shared ownership in shaping a network that is safer, more accessible and better connected for all users.

The path was opened in 2025 and is dedicated to the memory of Winston ‘Meash’ Maskell who was the driving force behind making this ambition, a reality.



Figure 16: View from the newly surfaced and fenced bridleway looking towards Chideock, where the improved path and boundary fencing enable public access while protecting adjacent grazing land.



Figure 17: View west across the path and pasture towards the coast, demonstrating the scenic landscapes that the public rights of way network make accessible.

Case Study 8: Community-Led Upgrade of a Disused Railway Path between Portesham and Abbotsbury

In Abbotsbury a disused railway line forming part of the bridleway network had become difficult to use for many people. The uneven surface limited access for a wide range of users, including children on small bikes, people using pushchairs or wheelchairs, and older residents.

Following a request from the Parish Council, Dorset Council worked in partnership with the local community, the Dorset National Landscapes team and the landowner to develop and deliver improvements. The Ranger team designed an appropriate specification and installed a new, high-quality surface along the route, carefully considering the needs of both public users and farm vehicles that continue to use the route.

The enhanced path, approximately 1.2 miles in length, now provides a reliable and accessible route for everyday use. Seating has been installed along the route, allowing people to rest and use the path in shorter sections, making it more inclusive for a wider range of users.

The improvements provide a safe, off-road route for children travelling to school and improve access to local facilities such as the village shop, reducing the need to use the main road. The scheme also enhances connectivity within the local network, supporting both recreational and everyday use.
There is now an ambition to extend the route towards the coast, further improving connectivity and creating a longer, continuous corridor for walking, cycling and wider access.

This project demonstrates how community-led initiatives, supported by partnership working, funding and landowner cooperation, can deliver practical and lasting improvements to the rights of way network. It highlights the importance of local knowledge, collaboration and shared ownership in shaping a network that is accessible, relevant and well used.



Figure 18: New benches installed as part of the path work allow for rest, breaking long journeys into manageable stages.

Policy 5: Building the Dorset Economy through our Public Rights of Way Network

The rights of way network contribute significantly to the Dorset economy by supporting tourism, recreation and active travel. Opportunities will be sought to improve connections between the public transport network and the rights of way network, enabling residents and visitors to access the countryside without reliance on private cars.

Dorset will use its rights of way network as a key asset to support the local economy. By promoting high-quality routes, improving access to destinations and working with local businesses, the Council will help increase visitor numbers, extend stays and encourage spending across the county.

Dorset's landscapes, heritage and extensive network of paths provide a strong foundation for a thriving visitor economy. From the Jurassic Coast to the county's trailways and rural routes, the rights of way network enables people to experience Dorset in a healthy and sustainable way.



Figure 19: Walkers using the English Coast path in Dorset.

We will:

- **promote Dorset as a leading destination for walking, cycling and riding**, working in partnership with Visit Dorset and other organisations to showcase the county's network and landscapes
- **improve access to key destinations**, ensuring routes link towns, villages, visitor attractions and local businesses such as cafés, pubs and accommodation providers
- **encourage greater use of the network**, supporting local economies by increasing footfall in rural communities and market towns
- **develop and promote themed and circular routes**, including heritage trails, coastal walks and local "walkabout" routes that encourage visitors to explore and stay longer
- **support local businesses** by encouraging connections between the rights of way network and services that enhance the visitor experience

- **promote the network through digital and physical channels**, including Dorset Explorer, social media, printed materials and partnerships with tourism platforms
- **align with Policy 2 (raising awareness of public rights of way)**, ensuring consistent and high-quality information, mapping and signage to improve navigation and user confidence

Dorset already demonstrates the economic value of its rights of way network. The South West Coast Path attracts around 9 million visitors annually, generating approximately £500 million in visitor spend across the whole route. **Economy - South West Coast Path**. Dorset's 89 mile section alone contributes an estimated 1 million visits and £55 million in annual spend, highlighting the impact of accessible, well-promoted routes. Visit Dorset's 2023 visitor survey found that 19% of visitors are motivated by outdoor activity, 70% go walking during their stay, while only 2% cycle, and 40% would like more free activities.

The Dorset coast path follows the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, providing almost continuous access to one of the UK's most significant natural landscapes. This combination of high-quality access and internationally recognised heritage creates a distinctive offer that supports tourism and the wider economy.

This approach aligns with the emerging Dorset Destination Management Plan for the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), which sets an ambition to establish Dorset as a flagship destination for access to the outdoors and one of the nation's premier walking counties. The rights of way network will play a key role in delivering this ambition by improving access, promoting high-quality routes and supporting local businesses, contributing to economic growth, community wellbeing and sustainable transport.

Walking and outdoor recreation help extend the tourism season, attracting visitors throughout the year and supporting sustainable economic growth. Increased participation in walking and cycling benefits not only tourism, but also the wider economy through improved health, productivity and reduced pressure on public services.

Despite this strong offer, many residents and visitors remain unaware of the extent and quality of Dorset's rights of way network. Increasing awareness and improving access will help unlock further economic benefits, ensuring more people can easily discover, use and enjoy the network.
By combining effective promotion with targeted improvements to infrastructure and connectivity, Dorset will strengthen its position as a leading destination for outdoor recreation while supporting local businesses and communities across the county.

Case Study 8: South West Coast Path part of the King Charles III England Coast Path

Dorset's 89-mile section of the South West Coast Path, with some sections forming part of the King Charles III England Coast Path, represents one of the most economically significant assets within the county's rights of way network. These routes provide internationally recognised access to the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and play a vital role in supporting Dorset's visitor economy.

Walking tourism associated with long-distance routes such as the Coast Path is particularly valuable. Visitors tend to stay longer, travel between communities, and spend money on accommodation, food, transport and local services. This creates sustained economic benefits for coastal towns and rural areas, many of which rely on tourism income. Long-distance walking routes also help to extend the tourism season, attracting visitors throughout

the year and supporting business viability outside peak summer months.
Investment in coastal access delivers strong economic returns. Evidence suggests that every £1 invested can generate up to £8 in wider economic benefit, demonstrating the value of continued investment in infrastructure, maintenance and promotion of the network (SWCPA, 2026).

Unlocking Funding through the King Charles III England Coast Path

The ongoing delivery of the King Charles III England Coast Path, a new 2,700-mile National Trail around the entire English coastline, presents a major opportunity for Dorset.
As new sections of the Coast Path are approved and opened, Dorset Council is able to work in partnership with Natural England to secure external funding for:

- route establishment and improvement (including surfacing, drainage and structures)
- signage and waymarking
- accessibility enhancements
- environmental mitigation and habitat improvements
- ongoing maintenance support

This funding, typically provided through DEFRA and Natural England, supports both the planning and delivery of coast path infrastructure. In many cases, the cost of developing and establishing new routes can be fully externally funded, reducing the direct financial burden on the Council while delivering significant improvements to the network.
Importantly, the Coast Path programme acts as a catalyst for wider investment. The process of bringing new sections into use creates opportunities to upgrade existing public rights of way, improve links to inland routes, enhance connections into towns and villages, and develop high-quality circular routes. These improvements benefit both residents and visitors and strengthen the wider network.

A Flagship Asset within a Wider Network

While the South West Coast Path part of the King Charles III England Coast Path represent one of the most significant contributors to Dorset's visitor economy, they are part of a much wider and equally important rights of way network across the county.

Dorset's extensive inland network of footpaths, bridleways and trailways plays a vital role in supporting tourism, connecting communities and distributing economic benefit beyond the coast. The Coast Path often acts as a gateway into Dorset, attracting visitors to the county, while the wider network enables them to explore further, linking coastal destinations with inland towns, villages and attractions.

Together, this combined network creates a diverse and resilient offer that encourages visitors to stay longer, return more frequently and explore more widely. This approach helps ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are shared across Dorset, supporting rural communities as well as coastal destinations.



Figure 20: Walkers enjoying a newly surfaced section of the South West Coast Path on Portland.

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

Dorset Council recognises that successful management of the rights of way network relies on the shared responsibilities of users, landowners and public authorities. Information and guidance will be promoted to encourage understanding of statutory responsibilities, good land management practices and responsible countryside access.

Dorset will promote responsible use of the rights of way network by encouraging all users to follow the Countryside Code and understand the importance of respecting landowners, the natural environment and other users.

We will take a balanced approach, combining education, engagement and proportionate enforcement to ensure the network is safe, welcoming and well managed.

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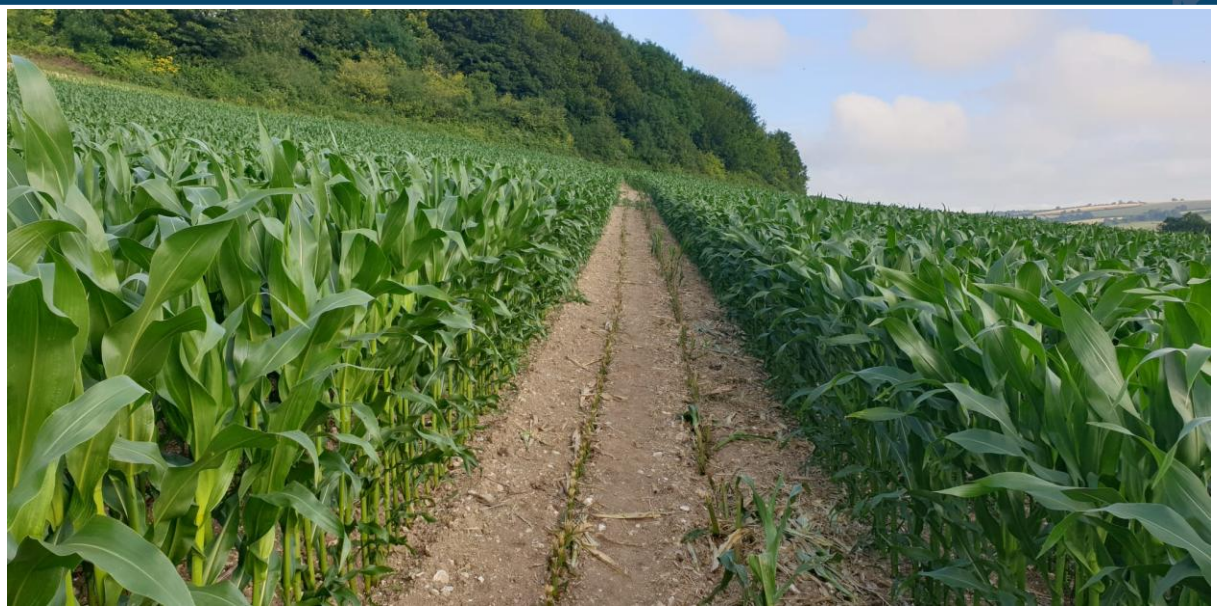


Figure 21: Public footpath maintained through a growing maize crop, demonstrating good land management and continued access for path users.

We will:

- **promote the Countryside Code**, ensuring clear, consistent messaging is available to residents and visitors through signage, digital platforms and promotional materials
- **provide simple, accessible guidance**, including a concise summary of the Countryside Code for users and landowners, supported by digital content such as videos and online resources
- **promote responsible dog ownership**, encouraging users to keep dogs under effective close control, particularly around livestock and wildlife, and to follow Countryside Code guidance including keeping dogs on leads where required and taking mess home.
- **Enforcement** Continue to use available enforcement powers where necessary to address unlawful obstructions, cropping, ploughing and other activities that prevent the lawful use of public rights of way.
- **work with schools, colleges and community groups** to raise awareness of responsible behaviour when using the network, helping to embed good practice from an early age
- **support positive relationships with landowners**, recognising their essential role in managing the landscape and maintaining access across the network
- **provide advice and guidance to landowners**, helping them understand their rights and responsibilities, including vegetation management, obstruction removal and maintenance of routes to the required standard
- **reduce conflict between users and land managers**, supporting appropriate diversions of routes away from farmyards, working areas and sensitive locations where this delivers clear benefits
- **work in partnership with the Police and other agencies** to address anti-social behaviour and misuse of the network, including illegal vehicle use and other forms of disturbance

- **use proportionate enforcement where necessary**, ensuring that rights of way are kept open, safe and available for public use
- **encourage shared use of the network**, promoting awareness of different user groups and supporting respectful behaviour between walkers, cyclists, horse riders and others

Promoting the Countryside Code and improving understanding of land management will help reduce issues such as littering, dog control, damage to crops, disturbance to livestock, and anti-social behaviour. It will also support the long-term sustainability of the network by encouraging users to care for the environment they are enjoying.

Landowners play a vital role in maintaining Dorset's rights of way network. We will continue to work collaboratively with farmers and land managers to ensure routes remain open and usable, while recognising the operational needs of working landscapes. In some cases, this may include working with landowners who wish to divert routes to more suitable alignments that improve safety and reduce conflict.

At the same time, we will ensure that legal standards are met across the rights of way network. This includes keeping routes free from obstructions, such as fencing, buildings or other barriers, and ensuring vegetation is cut back to maintain appropriate clearances.

We will also uphold requirements relating to the ploughing and reinstatement of paths, ensuring routes are restored to a safe and usable condition within the required timescales. Where standards are not met, the Council will work with landowners to resolve issues and use education as the first tool but, where necessary, take proportionate enforcement to maintain access.

By combining education, partnership working and enforcement, Dorset will support a rights of way network that is respected, well used and valued by all.

Case Study 9: Managing Increased Use and Promoting Responsible Behaviour



Figure 22: Keeping dogs under close control around livestock is essential to protect animal welfare and support positive relationships between users and land managers.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in the use of local outdoor spaces, as more people sought opportunities for exercise and wellbeing close to home. In Dorset, this resulted in a notable rise in the number of people using the rights of way network. While this brought clear health and wellbeing benefits, it also highlighted a range of challenges, including anti-social behaviour, increased pressure on sensitive landscapes, and concerns from landowners.

Feedback from public consultation and engagement with land managers identified dog-related issues as a particular concern. These included dogs not being kept under close control, disturbance to and chasing of livestock, and dog fouling. These issues were compounded by an increase in dog ownership during the pandemic, resulting in more dogs being walked on the network. This can have serious consequences for farming operations, animal welfare, and the relationship between users and landowners.

In response to these challenges, Dorset Council has taken a proactive approach to promoting the Countryside Code and improving understanding of how people are expected to behave when using the network, alongside raising awareness of the role of landowners.

We will continue to work with local communities, schools and partner organisations to promote responsible behaviour. This includes developing accessible and engaging resources, such as the Council's Guidance for Rights of Way booklet, available in print and online. Social and digital media will also be used, including videos such as **Follow Doggy Do Code - Dorset Dogs** to communicate key messages in a clear and relatable way, particularly around responsible dog ownership.

Alongside public education, strong working relationships with landowners have been maintained and will continue to be strengthened. The Council provides guidance and support to farmers and land managers, helping them manage access across working landscapes while ensuring routes remain open and usable.

Where appropriate, Dorset Council has supported the diversion of routes away from working farmyards and other sensitive areas. These diversions improve the experience and safety for users, reduce conflict, and provide greater security for landowners, while ensuring suitable alternative routes are maintained to the required legal standard.

This combined approach of education, partnership working and practical network management has helped to reduce conflict and improve understanding. By promoting responsible behaviour and supporting land managers, Dorset Council is helping to create a safer, more respectful and more sustainable rights of way network for both residents and visitors.

Case Study 10: Supporting Landowner Responsibilities

Most landowners and occupiers play an active role in maintaining public rights of way that cross their land, including cutting back hedges and vegetation to keep routes clear and accessible. This work is essential to ensuring that paths remain safe and usable for the public.

Where issues arise, such as overgrown routes or obstructed paths, Dorset Council will first seek to engage with the landowner to resolve the matter informally. This includes providing advice and guidance to help landowners understand their responsibilities. In most cases, positive dialogue and support are sufficient to achieve a timely outcome.

However, where problems persist and routes remain obstructed, the council may take further action. This can include the use of formal notices and, where necessary, enforcement powers to ensure that legal responsibilities are met and public access is protected.

This approach balances support and partnership working with the need to uphold access rights, helping to maintain a well-managed and accessible rights of way network.



Figure 23: Well-maintained field-edge vegetation helps keep public rights of way clear, safe and accessible for all users.

Policy 7: Using new housing development and the Local Plan to enhance Public Rights of Way

New development presents opportunities to strengthen the rights of way network through the provision of green infrastructure, active travel corridors and new public access routes. Development should contribute positively to network connectivity and avoid placing additional pressure on existing routes without mitigation. Development proposals should demonstrate how existing public rights of way, bridleways and other access routes have been considered at an early stage and how opportunities have been taken to improve connectivity for walking, wheeling, cycling and horse riding.

New development should deliver direct, safe and attractive walking, wheeling and cycling links to neighbouring communities, schools, employment areas, public transport facilities, greenspace and the wider rights of way network. Opportunities to create strategic greenways and active travel corridors should be maximised through the development process. Where appropriate, it should contribute towards the delivery of the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** through the provision of green infrastructure, accessible natural green space and biodiversity enhancements alongside rights of way improvements.

New development should support the delivery of Local Transport Plan 4 by providing safe, attractive and direct walking, wheeling and cycling connections to existing rights of way, public transport services, schools, employment areas and local facilities.

Dorset will ensure that new development protects, enhances and contributes positively to the rights of way network. By embedding high-quality access and connectivity into the planning process, the Council will secure long-term improvements that support sustainable travel, healthy communities and access to the countryside. Relevant planning officers will work together with the Ranger team to maximise the opportunities of the Planning system.

We will:

- **protect existing public rights of way**, ensuring they are retained, safeguarded and appropriately integrated within development proposals, in accordance with Dorset Council's guidance **Public rights of way and new development: a guide for developers.**
- **seek opportunities** through development to secure contributions towards off-site rights of way improvements, strategic missing links and wider active travel networks where these will improve connectivity and deliver public benefit.
- **require a Public Rights of Way Management Plan** for developments above an agreed threshold, ensuring that access is considered at an early stage of design and not treated as an afterthought. The Management Plan will include:
    - existing definitive and permissive routes within and adjacent to the development site
    - quality and appropriate temporary diversions during construction
    - proposals to retain, improve or divert existing PRoW
    - minimise road severance and aim to resolve historic severance where possible
    - measures to ensure user safety where routes remain open during works
    - details of temporary route provision, including surfacing, signage and management
    - landscaping proposals affecting or enhancing PRoW
    - design and construction of new routes, including dedication of new public rights of way where appropriate
    - path width, surfacing and long-term maintenance standards
    - timescales for closures, diversions and legal processes
- **ensure developers understand that** planning permission does not grant rights to alter or obstruct public rights of way, and that separate legal processes are required for diversions or closures.
- **secure appropriate financial contributions (S106 / CIL)** to protect, improve and extend the rights of way network, ensuring investment is directed to routes that serve both the development and the wider community.
- **strategically important routes** should be created as public rights of way where appropriate and ensure that new development delivers safe and attractive non-motorised user connections between homes, services, employment and greenspace.
- **provide clear design standards and specifications**, ensuring routes delivered through development are fit for purpose, durable, accessible, designed for long-term use and made PRoW where appropriate. Development must enhance, not simply retain, public rights of way.
- ROWIP and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP)

- priorities should be embedded during site master-planning.
- **require strong connectivity**, ensuring new developments link directly to the existing rights of way network, local services, schools, employment areas and green spaces, supporting everyday walking, cycling and riding.
- **promote sustainable travel**, using the rights of way network to reduce reliance on private cars and support healthier, more active lifestyles.
- **use digital tools and mapping (as set out in Policy 2)** to help developers identify opportunities to connect into the wider network and understand local access priorities.
- **support the delivery of multifunctional green infrastructure**, ensuring that rights of way form an integral part of wider green infrastructure networks, delivering benefits for recreation, biodiversity, climate resilience and community wellbeing.
- **Heathland Mitigation programme and the Stour Valley Park project** can help PRoW where integrated delivery can maximise benefits for access, biodiversity, and community wellbeing
- **Seek opportunities** to deliver rights of way improvements alongside green infrastructure projects, biodiversity net gain initiatives and nature recovery schemes where these provide public benefit and are compatible with environmental and conservation objectives.

New development presents a significant opportunity to improve Dorset's rights of way network. With planned housing growth across the county, there is strong potential to embed high-quality walking, cycling and riding routes into new developments, connecting communities and creating lasting infrastructure.

Public Rights of Way are a key component of green infrastructure. They support accessible recreation, active travel and connections between places, while also contributing to climate change mitigation and environmental enhancement. Well-designed access networks can make developments more attractive, improve quality of life for residents and support long-term sustainability.

By ensuring that rights of way are considered from the earliest stages of development, Dorset will secure a network that is better connected, more accessible and aligned with the needs of both existing and future communities.

This policy contributes to the objectives of the **Dorset Housing Strategy** by helping to create sustainable communities with strong walking, wheeling and cycling connections to services, employment, schools, green infrastructure and the wider countryside.

Case Study 11: Planning contributions supporting the rights of way network



Figure 24: A new footpath connecting communities created through developer contributions secured via a Section 106 agreement.

New development can place additional pressure on the rights of way network, both where routes pass directly through sites and through increased levels of use. Dorset Council works to ensure that development contributes positively to the network by securing funding for improvements and future maintenance.

Planning applications in Stalbridge demonstrate how developer contributions can support delivery of new and improved routes. At Thornhill Road (Application 2/2017/1095/OUT), funding of £55,585 has been secured towards the delivery of new sections of the North Dorset Trailway, extending north towards Henstridge in Somerset and south towards Sturminster Newton. This funding will support a range of works, including legal processes, vegetation clearance, fencing, surfacing, and any necessary diversions. A further £11,970 has been secured to enhance public rights of way within the parish, including surfacing improvements, replacing stiles with gates, and improved signage.

At Lower Road (Application 2/2017/0741/OUT), £79,367 has been secured towards delivery of the North Dorset Trailway, along with £23,449 for improvements to public rights of way within the parish. These enhancements will improve accessibility and provide greater opportunities for people to explore the surrounding countryside.

The Dorset Council Local Plan consultation in 2025 identifies a number of potential housing allocations across the county. Many of these sites either include existing rights of way or are

likely to increase use of nearby routes. Securing appropriate developer contributions will help ensure that the network, including Trailways and public open spaces, is enhanced and maintained to meet future demand.

Policy 8: Maximise the PROW network's contribution to health and wellbeing

Regular access to nature and opportunities for physical activity are recognised as important contributors to physical and mental wellbeing. The rights of way network support healthy lifestyles by providing free opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding and other forms of outdoor recreation.

This policy directly supports the **Dorset Health and Wellbeing Strategy** by increasing opportunities for everyday physical activity, improving access to nature and helping to reduce health inequalities across Dorset.

Dorset will use its rights of way network to support healthier, more active communities. By improving access to high-quality routes, encouraging everyday movement and reducing barriers to use, the council will help people of all ages and abilities to be more active as part of daily life.

This approach aligns with Dorset's Physical Activity Strategy, *"***A Movement for Movement***"*, which aims to make movement easy, normal and accessible for everyone by creating environments where people naturally walk, cycle and use green spaces more often.

We recognise that increasing physical activity delivers wide-ranging benefits, including improved physical and mental health, reduced pressure on health services, stronger communities and a more productive local economy. Enabling more people to use and benefit from rights of way will contribute to the council's wider support for delivering the NHS 10 Year Plan objective to shift from treatment to prevention.



Figure 25: Dorchester Strollers - a volunteer-led group offering free guided walks with trained leaders to help people explore the local area.

We will:

- **improve access to high-quality routes and greenspaces**, ensuring the network is well maintained, clearly signposted and usable throughout the year
- **reduce barriers to participation**, prioritising improvements in areas with poor access to greenspace or higher levels of health inequality
- **promote everyday use of the network**, encouraging walking and cycling for journeys to school, work and local services.
- Work with other Council departments and partners to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits of the rights of way network supporting delivery of **Dorset's Physical Activity Strategy**.
- **support targeted engagement**, working with communities and partners to increase use of the network by all members of our community
- **embed the network within health and wellbeing initiatives**, including social prescribing and community-based activity programmes to reduce barriers and support residents to move more such as Dorset Councils **Health and Activity programme**
- **support community-led activities**, such as walking groups, wellbeing routes and local challenges that encourage regular use of the network
- **integrate with wider strategies**, including the Local Transport Plan, Active Travel Infrastructure Plan and public health programmes, to support a joined-up approach to increasing physical activity
- **improve access to information**, using digital mapping and tools to highlight routes suitable for everyday use and physical activity
- **work with schools and employers**, promoting the use of the rights of way network for active travel and daily movement
- **develop a better understanding of usage and barriers**, working with partners to gather data, improve monitoring and target interventions effectively
- **support social prescribing initiatives** by promoting suitable routes and

greenspaces.

- **encourage the development of circular routes,** health walks and community-led activities close to where people live.
- **improve the availability of seating** and rest points on priority recreational routes where appropriate.
- **focus on young people** the Council will support opportunities for children and young people to experience nature through, safe and accessible local routes to school. Plus, increase opportunities for outdoor learning, use of Dorset explorer and family-friendly recreational routes. Programmes and activities which encourage active lifestyles and engagement with the Rights of Way network, supporting the **Dorset Babies, Children, Young People and Families Plan**.

Dorset's Public Rights of Way network plays a vital role in supporting health and wellbeing. It provides access to nature, opportunities for exercise, and connections between communities, services and local facilities. These functions help prevent ill health, support people to live well, and contribute to reducing health inequalities across the county.

Physical activity is essential for maintaining good health. While many residents are active, a significant proportion of adults and children remain inactive, and increasing activity levels across all ages remains a key priority. The rights of way network provide a free, accessible and flexible way for people to incorporate movement into their daily lives through recreation and everyday journeys.

Contact with nature is also strongly linked to improved mental wellbeing. In Dorset, 51% of residents are estimated to have good access to nature within 300 metres walk of their home. In many parts of Dorset, particularly rural areas, the rights of way network provides the primary means of accessing nature. Increasing the accessibility and use of the network will help more people experience the mental health benefits associated with time spent outdoors.

The network also supports social connection by enabling people to meet, interact and take part in shared activities such as walking groups and volunteering, e.g. the **Dorset Health Walk programme.** These interactions help strengthen communities and improve overall wellbeing. However, access to these benefits is not equal. Some groups - including older people, those with poor health, and individuals from underrepresented communities are less likely to access natural spaces. Improving the accessibility, quality and connectivity of the network will help address these inequalities and ensure more people can benefit from Dorset's natural environment.

By improving infrastructure, promoting use, and working with partners to reduce barriers, Dorset will create a rights of way network that supports healthier, more active and more connected communities.

Case Study 12: Supporting Health and Activity Through the Rights of Way Network

Dorset Council's Health and Activity team promotes accessible, entry-level activities across the county, many of which make use of the rights of way network. These activities are designed primarily for people aged over 50 and those living with long-term health conditions, providing opportunities to become more active in a supportive and welcoming environment.

Activities are delivered close to local communities, offering an important first step into physical activity. Participants can then be supported to progress to further opportunities as their confidence and ability develop.

A key example is the "Get Back in the Saddle" cycling programme. Rides delivered in locations such as Shillingstone, Weymouth and Ferndown make use of the North Dorset Trailway, the Rodwell Trail and the Castleman Trailway. These well-maintained, traffic free routes provide a safe and accessible environment for participants to build confidence while exercising as part of a group.

Volunteer led health walks also make extensive use of the rights of way network across Dorset, from sections of the South West Coast Path to rural footpaths in North and West Dorset. These walks provide regular opportunities for people to improve their physical health while enjoying the natural environment.

In addition, a programme of Nordic walking sessions uses rights of way to support both physical and mental wellbeing. These sessions are inclusive, catering for a wide range of abilities, including individuals referred through healthcare services and those living with conditions such as Parkinson's. Being outdoors in a supportive, informal group setting helps to reduce barriers to participation and encourages more people to engage with the network.

Through these initiatives, the rights of way network play a vital role in supporting healthier communities, improving wellbeing, and enabling more people to access and enjoy Dorset's countryside.



Figure 26: Nordic walking sessions use Dorset's rights of way to support physical and mental wellbeing.

Policy 9: Maximise our PROW for Sustainable transport linking communities and active travel

Public Rights of Way make an important contribution to Dorset's wider active travel network. In addition to recreation, routes can provide access to schools, workplaces, shops, public transport and community facilities. Improving connectivity and reducing missing links will help increase everyday use of the network and support healthier travel choices.

Dorset will maximise the potential of its rights of way network to support sustainable and active travel. By aligning the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) with the **Active Travel Infrastructure Plan (ATIP)** and the **Local Transport Plan (LTP4),** the Council will create a more connected network that enables people to walk, cycle and ride for everyday journeys. This policy contributes to the objectives of the **Dorset Housing Strategy** by ensuring that existing and future communities are connected through safe, sustainable and accessible routes that reduce reliance on private car travel.

Public Rights of Way also support wider public and community transport networks. Many journeys involve a combination of walking, wheeling, cycling and public or community transport. By improving links between communities, bus stops, transport interchanges and local services, the rights of way network can help reduce transport disadvantage, particularly in rural areas where access to services can be more challenging. This supports Dorset Council's ambition to improve accessibility whilst reducing reliance on private car travel.



Figure 27: 'Get Back in the Saddle' group in Shillingstone using the connected Trailway network, supporting links to sustainable transport routes.

We will:

- **integrate the rights of way network with active travel routes**, linking footpaths, bridleways and trailways to walking and cycling corridors, including those delivered through programmes such as the Transforming Cities Fund, LTP4, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) and ATIP
- **work with transport, planning and active travel** partners to identify opportunities where rights of way can contribute to the delivery of Local Transport Plan 4 priorities and wider active travel objectives.
- **create continuous, safe and attractive routes**, connecting housing areas with schools, workplaces, town centres and public transport hubs
- **improve accessibility and connectivity**, upgrading surfaces, drainage and signage to support a range of users, ensuring routes are appropriate for their most frequent use
- **develop green corridors**, connecting rural and urban areas, reducing reliance on the private car and delivering wider benefits for biodiversity and climate resilience
- **promote sustainable travel**, encouraging more short journeys to be made on foot or by cycle through a well-maintained and connected network
- **support active travel to school and work**, embedding rights of way within school travel plans and commuter routes to reduce congestion and emissions
- **provide high-quality digital tools and mapping**, enabling users to identify routes that connect with cycle networks, public transport and key destinations, including accessibility information where available
- **align delivery with wider transport and climate strategies**, ensuring rights of way improvements contribute to reducing car use and supporting Dorset's environmental objectives
- **secure funding and partnerships**, making effective use of external funding opportunities such as Active Travel Fund and partnership working with health and transport organisations
- **work with communities and stakeholders**, supporting co-designed routes, encouraging local use and promoting walking and cycling initiatives to increase uptake
- **contribute to the delivery of Local Transport Plan 4 and Active Travel England objectives** by developing a connected network of routes that supports walking, wheeling and cycling.
- **support completion of strategic trailway projects** and other green transport corridors that improve walking, cycling and equestrian connectivity across Dorset.
- **secure funding and partnership opportunities**, supporting the delivery of strategic routes and network improvements
- **promote integration** of rights of way with public transport and community transport services wherever practical, helping people combine walking, wheeling and cycling with wider travel options.
- **explore opportunities** for Unclassified County Roads (UCR's) to help link the PRoW network where they can link communities.
- **work with Transport Planning and community transport providers** to identify and prioritise rights of way and active travel connections to bus stops, transport hubs, community transport pick-up points, healthcare facilities and other key destinations

The rights of way network plays an important role in Dorset's transport system. While traditionally used for recreation, it already provides valuable connections between communities and local services.

Strengthening these links will enable more people to choose active and sustainable modes

of travel, helping to reduce congestion, improve air quality and support healthier lifestyles. By improving connectivity, infrastructure and awareness, Dorset will create a network that supports both everyday movement and longer-distance journeys, contributing to more sustainable and resilient communities.

Case Study 13: The Castleman Trailway as a Commuter Route



Figure 28: Senior Ranger Sophie Isaacs on one of the many new recycled plastic bridges on the Castleman Trailway, helping future proof access for years to come.

The Castleman Trailway provides a strong example of how the rights of way network can support everyday journeys as well as recreation. Running between Poole and Ringwood, the Trailway follows a former railway line and offers a largely traffic-free, well-surfaced route connecting communities, employment areas and local services.

While popular for leisure use, the trailway is increasingly used for commuting and utility trips, enabling people to travel by foot or cycle between residential areas and nearby towns. Its alignment, consistent gradients and separation from traffic make it particularly suitable for regular journeys, offering a safe and attractive alternative to car travel.

Importantly, the trailway links into a wider network of cycle routes and active travel infrastructure across East Dorset, including on-road cycle routes and urban walking and cycling corridors. These connections help integrate the route with the highway network, allowing users to continue journeys into town centres, workplaces, schools and public transport hubs.

This demonstrates the wider potential of Dorset's trailways and rights of way network to form part of a connected, multi-functional transport system. By supporting both leisure and utility use, the Castleman Trailway contributes to increasing levels of active travel, reducing reliance on private vehicles, and delivering benefits for health, congestion and the environment.

Policy 10: To uphold the council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement which is accessible to the public

A complete and accurate Definitive Map and Statement underpins effective management of the rights of way network and provides certainty for the public and landowners. Dorset Council will seek to reduce the backlog of legal order applications and improve transparency around progress and priorities.

Dorset will uphold its legal duty to maintain and provide access to an up-to-date Definitive Map and Statement of public rights of way, in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
The Definitive Map and Statement form the legal record of public rights of way in Dorset. They are essential in protecting public access, providing certainty for landowners and supporting planning, development and land management decisions.

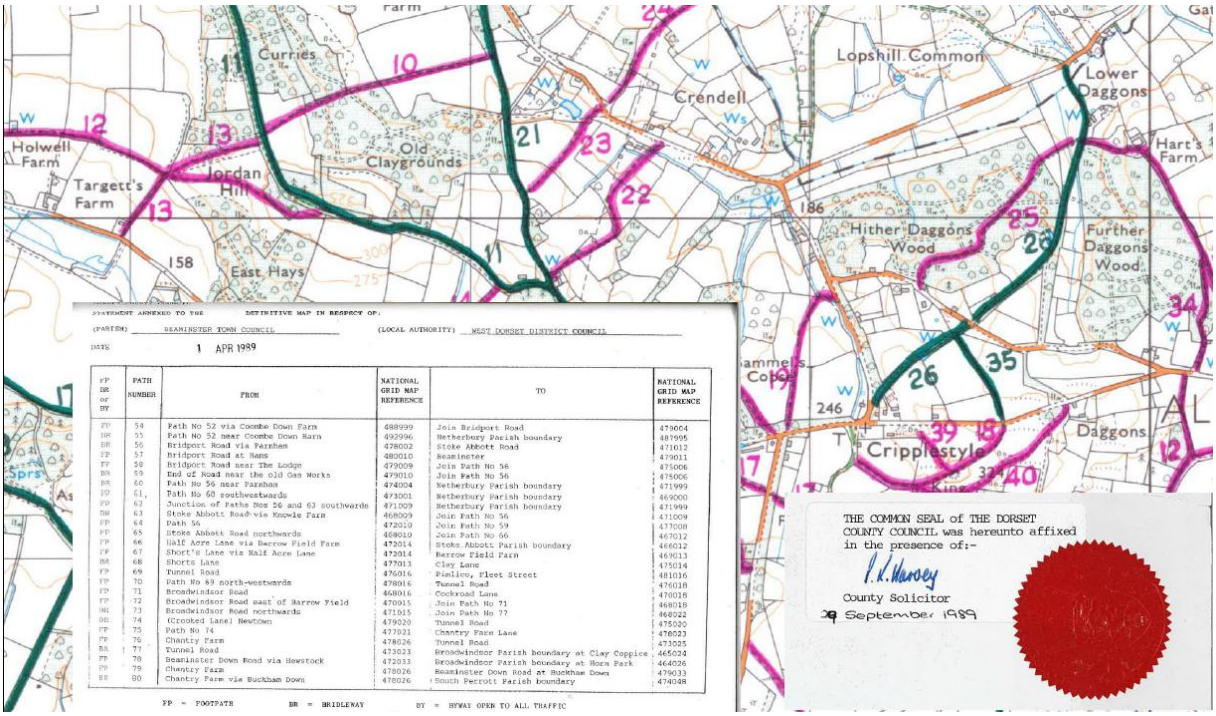


Figure 29: Extract from the definitive map.

We will:

- **maintain the Definitive Map and Statement as the legal record of public rights of way**, keeping it under continuous review and updating it through statutory processes
- **publish regular information on Definitive Map Modification Order progress**, priorities and performance as resources allow.
- **process Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs)** to record changes such as additions, deletions or amendments to the status of routes, based on user or documentary evidence and aim to reduce back log by increasing capacity within the

team where possible.

- **process Public Path Orders (PPOs)** to manage diversions, creations and extinguishments of routes where appropriate
- **ensure the Definitive Map and Statement are accessible to the public**, including:
    - Physical access at County Hall, Dorchester, by appointment
    - Digital access through Dorset Explorer, providing an up-to-date working copy for general use (not legally conclusive)
- **provide a transparent and accountable service**, publishing legal orders and decisions and maintaining a public register of applications
- **investigate applications and claims in accordance with statutory requirements**, ensuring a fair and evidence-based approach
- **provide clear guidance and support**, helping members of the public, applicants and landowners understand legal processes and their rights and responsibilities
- **consult with stakeholders and the public** on proposed changes to the network, ensuring appropriate engagement in decision-making
- **continue to improve digital access and usability**, making it easier for people to view and understand the rights of way network
- **work to manage applications efficiently**, recognising the importance of maintaining an accurate and up-to-date legal record
- **provide guidance to landowners on protecting their land from public rights of way claims**, including advice on legal mechanisms such as landowner deposits helping to ensure clarity and prevent unintended dedication of routes

The Definitive Map and Statement were sealed in 1989 and have been updated since through ongoing legal processes. Maintaining an accurate and accessible record is essential to ensuring that public rights are protected and that the network can continue to respond to changing use, evidence and development pressures.

By maintaining a clear, accurate and accessible legal record, Dorset will ensure that its rights of way network remain robust, transparent and fit for the future.

5. ROWIP Implementation and investment Plan 2026 to 2036

This implementation plan sets out how the ROWIP will be delivered over the period 2026 to 2036. It provides a clear and flexible framework for improving Dorset's public rights of way network, ensuring it meets the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.
The programme will support access to the countryside, healthier lifestyles, stronger connections between communities, and increased opportunities for sustainable and active travel.

Delivery Approach

Dorset Council will develop and maintain a Delivery Plan to support implementation of the ROWIP. Progress against key actions, targets and performance measures will be monitored and reported periodically, enabling the plan to respond to changing priorities, funding opportunities and emerging challenges.

Delivery of the ROWIP will be ongoing and responsive, reflecting local priorities, available funding and partnership opportunities. We will focus on:

- maintaining and improving the condition of the existing network
- addressing priority maintenance and accessibility issues
- delivering infrastructure improvements, including bridges, surfaces, signage and access points
- strengthening connections between communities, services and transport links
- progressing strategic projects, including Trailways and key connectivity routes
- supporting increased use of the network for everyday journeys as well as recreation

A pipeline of projects will be developed and progressed as opportunities arise, including schemes supported through external funding and new development.

Local Priorities

Delivery will reflect the differing characteristics, pressures and opportunities across Dorset. While all policy objectives apply across the county, the following areas highlight where particular emphasis is likely to be placed:

- **West Dorset**: Managing high visitor use and improving coastal access, including delivery of the King Charles III England Coast Path, alongside infrastructure and resilience improvements
- **Central Dorset**: Improving access around key settlements, supporting everyday use such as travel to school, and enhancing links to green spaces
- **North Dorset and Purbeck**: Strengthening rural connectivity, extending the North Dorset Trailway, and improving links between communities and local services
- **East Dorset**: Integrating rights of way with urban walking and cycling networks, supporting commuter routes, and managing higher levels of use and development pressures

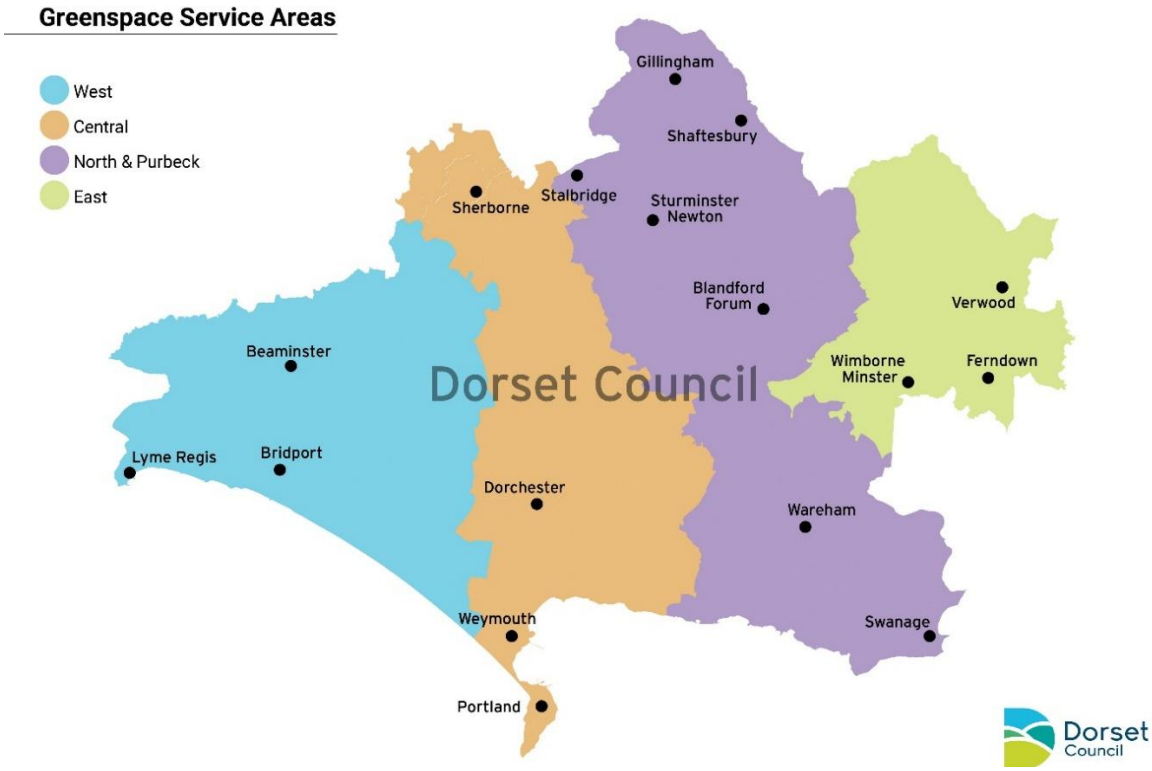


Figure 30: Dorset Greenspace team areas.

Funding and Resources

Delivery will require sustained investment and strong partnership working. Funding will be secured through a combination of:

- Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding
- Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions
- DEFRA and Natural England programmes, including coastal access funding
- external grants and partnership funding

Over £2 million is expected to be invested in the first five years, with ongoing annual Local Transport Plan funding anticipated to exceed £300,000 per annum, supplemented by additional external funding.
The Dorset Council Ranger service plays a central role in delivery, providing day-to-day management and maintenance of the network and working closely with landowners, communities and stakeholders to keep routes open, safe and accessible.

Monitoring and Review

Progress will be monitored to ensure the ROWIP delivers measurable improvements. Indicators will include:

- condition of the network
- infrastructure improvements delivered
- accessibility improvements (for example, replacing stiles with gates)
- usage levels where data is available
- customer feedback and reported issues
- PC/TC engagement
- Contribution to Local Transport Plan 4 outcomes including active travel participation, connectivity improvements and access to sustainable transport networks.

The plan will be reviewed every five years to ensure it remains responsive to changing needs, funding opportunities and Council priorities.

Investment Programme (Year 1: 2026/27)

Initial priorities include:

- Bridleway bridges: £250,000
- Footpath bridges: £180,000
- Surfacing improvements: £100,000
- South West Coast Path capital investment: £517,000
- Natural England maintenance funding: £40,000

Further detail is provided in Appendix 7.3 and will be updated as delivery progresses.

6: Conclusion

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2026-2036 sets out a clear vision for a high quality, well maintained, climate resilient and accessible rights of way network that supports the needs of residents, businesses and visitors across Dorset. Building on the strong foundations established by the previous ROWIP, the plan recognises that public rights of way are not simply recreational routes, but an essential part of Dorset's green infrastructure, supporting sustainable travel, healthier lifestyles, thriving communities, environmental stewardship and economic prosperity.

The previous ROWIP's greatest achievement was in shifting the focus from managing individual paths to recognising the wider contribution that the network makes to quality of life. The 2026-2036 ROWIP takes this vision further by responding to contemporary challenges including climate change, biodiversity recovery, changing demographics, accessibility expectations and the growing importance of active travel. It strengthens links with the Dorset Council Plan, Local Transport Plan 4, the Active Travel Infrastructure Plan for Dorset, public health priorities and the Council's climate and ecological objectives and identifies these as potential sources for investment for improved PROW.

The plan places renewed emphasis on creating better connected networks that enable people to travel safely and sustainably between homes, schools, workplaces, services, open spaces and the wider countryside. By improving accessibility, addressing barriers such as road severance, maintaining existing assets and enhancing connections between communities, the network can play a larger role in reducing car dependency, supporting active travel and improving physical and mental wellbeing.

Successful delivery will depend on continued partnership working with local communities, landowners, volunteers, user groups, public bodies and other stakeholders. Through targeted investment, evidence-led decision making and ongoing engagement, Dorset Council will continue to meet its statutory duties as Highway Authority while adopting a proactive approach to improving, promoting and protecting the network.

By maintaining and enhancing Dorset's rights of way and strengthening the connections between people, places and nature, this ROWIP will help create a network that is fit for the future. It will support healthier and more active communities, contribute to the local economy, improve resilience to climate change and ensure that current and future generations can continue to enjoy and benefit from Dorset's outstanding landscapes and natural spaces. This plan represents not only an investment in access, but an investment in Dorset's environmental, social and economic wellbeing for the decade ahead.

7. Appendices

7.1 Pre-Draft Consultation and Evidence Gathering

Prior to preparing the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026-2036, Dorset Council undertook a programme of engagement and evidence gathering to understand the needs, priorities and challenges associated with Dorset's rights of way network.

This engagement informed the development of the draft ROWIP and helped identify the key issues that the Plan should address. The findings reflected the views of network users, landowners, local communities, partner organisations and other stakeholders, together with evidence gathered through service experience and network analysis.

The key findings from this pre-draft consultation are summarised below. Each finding informed the development of one or more policies within the draft ROWIP and continues to provide an important part of the evidence base for this Plan.

Finding 1: Maintaining the existing network is the highest priority

Across all user groups, maintaining the existing network was identified as the top priority. The most common issues raised were vegetation overgrowth, poor path surfacing, deep mud, and the condition of structures such as gates and stiles.

Overgrown vegetation was consistently identified as the biggest barrier, preventing access particularly for those with lower mobility. Poor waymarking and missing signs were also widely reported, making routes difficult to follow and reducing user confidence. The network is also used frequently, with many respondents accessing it daily or several times per week, highlighting the importance of keeping routes open and usable at all times.

These findings demonstrate that improving the quality and usability of the existing network will deliver the greatest immediate benefit to the largest number of users.

This finding is addressed through Policy 1 and Policy 2.

Actions to deliver this:

- target maintenance activity on routes with the highest user demand and greatest reported issues
- work with town and parish councils to develop Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to improve service delivery for priority routes
- continue to replace and improve the condition and specification of path infrastructure, including gates, bridges and surfaces
- improve the usability and responsiveness of reporting systems to ensure issues are addressed more efficiently
- work with parish and town councils, landowners and volunteers to support maintenance activities
- work with landowners to improve understanding of their responsibilities for path maintenance, particularly in relation to vegetation management such as hedges and trees

Finding 2: Not everyone is able to access or benefit equally from the network

The consultation identified clear differences in how people access and benefit from Dorset's rights of way network. People with disabilities, those with mobility impairments, and some groups within the community were less likely to use the network. The proportion of respondents identifying as having a disability or from ethnic minority backgrounds was significantly lower than the wider Dorset population, suggesting that these groups may face barriers to access and participation.

Barriers identified included poor path surfacing, vegetation overgrowth, lack of accessible infrastructure, and limited links to local facilities. Older users and those with mobility challenges also highlighted difficulties with stiles and uneven surfaces.

These findings indicate that while Dorset has an extensive network, it is not equally accessible to all users, and targeted improvements are required to create a more inclusive network.

This finding is addressed through Policy 3 and Policy 8**.**

Actions to deliver this:

- identify and prioritise routes where accessibility improvements will deliver the greatest benefit to users with mobility needs
- continue the programme of replacing stiles with gaps or gates to improve accessibility
- improve path surfacing where appropriate to support a wider range of users
- work with partners in public health and community organisations to promote inclusive access and increase participation

Finding 3: Connectivity and road safety are key barriers to use

The consultation highlighted road severance as a barrier to using the network. Many users identified that routes are disconnected, with unsafe or difficult crossings preventing continued journeys.

This affects all user groups but is particularly significant for vulnerable users such as walkers, cyclists and horse riders, who are at greater risk when interacting with traffic. A lack of safe connections between routes also limits the ability to use the network for everyday journeys, such as travelling to school, work or local services, despite a significant proportion of users already relying on the network to access these destinations.

Improving connectivity and reducing the impact of road severance is important to unlocking the full potential of the network.

This finding is addressed through Policy 3, Policy 7, and Policy 9.

Actions to deliver this:

- identify and prioritise locations where improved crossings and connections will address the greatest need
- develop traffic-free and safer routes to connect communities and improve access to existing safe road crossings.
- work with National Highways and Dorset Highways teams to improve integration between the rights of way network and the wider transport network
- support the development of routes that enable sustainable travel and reduce reliance on private vehicles
- work with developers to address road severance and integrate safe crossings and route connections within new developments

Finding 4: Demand exists for new and improved routes

The consultation identified demand for improvements to the network, including new routes, better connections, and enhancements to existing paths. Over 300 suggestions for improvements were submitted, with a strong emphasis on connecting routes, reducing road use and improving accessibility.

Users expressed a desire for more circular routes, better connections between communities, and routes that link to key destinations and services.

This demonstrates that, alongside maintaining the existing network, there is a clear opportunity to enhance and expand it in a targeted and strategic way.

This finding is addressed through Policy 1 and Policy 3, supported by Policy 5 and Policy 7.

Actions to deliver this:

- prioritise improvements that create better connections between existing routes
- develop circular and multi-user routes that meet a range of user needs
- align network improvements with wider transport, planning and green infrastructure strategies
- use external funding and developer contributions to deliver larger-scale improvements
- work with developers to ensure there is a net gain in access provision at a local level

Finding 5: Responsible use and land management

Both landowners and users identified issues relating to behaviour on the network. Landowners reported concerns including dogs not being kept under control, disturbance and chasing of livestock, dog fouling on paths and agricultural land, gates being left open, littering, and other anti-social behaviours.

At the same time, users highlighted the importance of clear waymarking and information to help them stay on the correct routes and understand their responsibilities. These issues have become more pronounced following increased use of the network, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw a significant rise in people accessing the countryside.

Improving awareness and promoting responsible behaviour is essential to maintaining good relationships with landowners and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the network.

This finding is addressed through Policy 6, supported by Policy 4.

Actions to deliver this:

- promote the Countryside Code and responsible use of the network, with a particular focus on responsible dog ownership
- improve signage and waymarking to reduce confusion and unintentional misuse/trespass
- work closely with landowners to manage routes effectively and reduce conflict
- support appropriate diversions where they improve safety and reduce impacts on land management
- work with partners, including the Police, to address anti-social behaviour where necessary
- make greater use of social media and communications campaigns to promote responsible use of the network.

Finding 6: Information, signage, and awareness.

The consultation identified that many users lack confidence in navigating the network. Issues included unclear or missing signage, lack of waymarking, and limited awareness of how to report problems or access information.

There is also a shift in how different groups access information, with younger users more likely to rely on digital tools, while older users tend to use traditional maps and local knowledge. This highlights the need to provide information in a range of accessible formats.

Improving the availability, quality and accessibility of information will help users to better understand and use the network.

This finding is addressed through Policy 2, supported by Policy 4 and Policy 6.

Actions to deliver this:

- improve waymarking and signage across the network, particularly at key locations such as path intersections and from the metalled highway
- enhance digital information, including mapping and route planning tools, and promote their use through the Dorset Council website and social media
- provide information through non-digital channels, including printed materials, to reach those with limited digital access
- improve awareness and usability of reporting systems
- promote the network through targeted communications and campaigns, including engagement with schools and younger users
- work with parish and town councils, partners, and volunteers to support local knowledge and promotion

Finding 7: Access to the Definitive Map and legal records is not well understood

The consultation found that many users were unaware of how to access or use key legal information such as the Definitive Map and Statement. Only a limited proportion of respondents felt that these records were well publicised or easy to use.

This lack of awareness limits the ability of users to understand their rights and responsibilities and reduces engagement with the legal record of public rights of way. Improving access to and understanding of the Definitive Map and Statement will support better use of the network and more effective long-term management.

This finding is addressed through Policy 10, supported by Policy 4.

Actions to deliver this:

- improve information and understanding of the Definitive Map and Statement through the Dorset Council website
- promote Dorset Explorer as a publicly accessible digital mapping tool showing the rights of way network

- improve communication and awareness of the purpose and value of the Definitive Map and Statement

Finding 8: Improve awareness of the online reporting system

The consultation identified that many users were unaware of how to report problems on the rights of way network. A significant proportion of respondents did not know how to use the Council's online reporting system, and those who had used it indicated that feedback and resolution times could be unclear.

This reduces the effectiveness of the reporting process and can lead to unresolved issues, reduces user confidence, and missed opportunities to address problems quickly and efficiently.

Improving the usability, accessibility and responsiveness of reporting systems will support better maintenance of the network and improve the overall user experience.

This finding is addressed through Policy 1 and Policy 2, supported by Policy 4.

Actions to deliver this:

- improve awareness and promotion of the reporting system for rights of way issues
- enhance the usability and accessibility of the online reporting tool
- improve communication and feedback to users on the status of reported issues
- use reporting data to better inform maintenance priorities and decision-making

7.2 Consultation on the DRAFT Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Dorset Council undertook public consultation on the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026-2036 between 21 July and 12 October 2026. A total of 507 responses were received, of which 92.7% were from members of the public. Respondents were predominantly regular users of the Public Rights of Way network, with over 82% using rights of way daily or several times each week.

The consultation demonstrated strong support for the proposed vision of creating a modern, accessible and well-connected rights of way network that supports health, communities, the economy and the environment. Overall, 90.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the vision, while all ten proposed policies received majority support, ranging from 80.9% to 96.3% agreement. The highest levels of support were recorded for maintaining an up-to-date Definitive Map and Statement, supporting responsible use and respect for landowners, empowering communities, and maintaining and improving the existing network.

When asked to rank priorities, respondents clearly identified maintenance and improvement of the existing network as the most important issues. Accessibility was the second highest priority, followed by ensuring the Countryside Code and access legislation are followed and that landowners are respected. Building the Dorset economy through the rights of way

network ranked lowest, indicating a strong preference for investment in core network quality and accessibility before wider economic or promotional objectives.

Consultation responses highlighted a number of consistent themes. The most frequently raised concerns related to overgrown vegetation, poor path surfaces, inadequate maintenance, blocked or obstructed routes, poor signage and waymarking, and gaps in network connectivity. Respondents also called for improved accessibility, the removal of unnecessary barriers such as stiles, safer routes for walking, cycling and horse riding, and stronger action where rights of way are obstructed or poorly maintained.

Experience of the existing network was more mixed. While 35.9% of respondents considered rights of way easy or very easy to use, 32.3% found them difficult or very difficult to use. Similar findings were recorded regarding access to information about routes. Most respondents were confident navigating the network, but more than one quarter were unaware of how to report problems on paths, highlighting the need for improved communication and public awareness.

The most commonly reported barriers to using rights of way were blocked or restricted access to paths (70.3%), poor path condition (62.8%), poor signage or information (50.1%), accessibility barriers (25.7%) and a lack of local routes (20.6%). These responses demonstrate the importance users place on routes being open, well maintained, clearly signed and well connected to communities, services and destinations.

Detailed responses from stakeholder organisations, including the Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Joint Local Access Forum, Ramblers, Dorset Greenways Alliance, public health representatives, parish councils and individual respondents, broadly supported the direction of the draft ROWIP. Stakeholders also identified opportunities to strengthen the Plan through greater emphasis on climate resilience, improved connectivity between communities, enhanced accessibility, clearer monitoring and performance measures, stronger support for Rights of Way Liaison Officers and volunteers, increased use of planning and developer contributions, promotion of active travel, and delivery of strategic trailway and greenway projects.

Overall, the consultation demonstrated strong public and stakeholder support for the draft ROWIP and its vision. The findings reinforced the importance of maintaining and improving the existing network, increasing accessibility, enhancing connectivity, supporting health and wellbeing, strengthening community involvement, and ensuring Dorset's rights of way continue to meet the needs of residents, visitors and businesses over the next decade. The consultation also provided valuable feedback on the draft Plan and identified areas where respondents wished to see greater emphasis, clarification or additional action. This feedback has been carefully considered in preparing the final ROWIP and has informed refinements to policies, supporting text, delivery actions and the implementation framework where appropriate.

The findings presented above relate specifically to consultation on the draft ROWIP. They should be considered alongside the earlier evidence gathering and pre-draft engagement that informed the development of the draft Plan and provided the wider evidence base on which the ROWIP is founded.

7.3 Strategic Opportunities for Future Delivery

The projects described below represent a range of potential opportunities that may contribute towards delivery of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan over the lifetime of the strategy. Many are dependent on the level of capital funding that is available.

Inclusion within this list does not represent a commitment to deliver any individual scheme, nor does it imply that funding has been secured or that all necessary approvals have been obtained. All projects remain subject to public support and feasibility assessment, landowner agreement, statutory processes, consultation, environmental considerations and the availability of resources.

The list is not exhaustive and will continue to evolve throughout the life of the ROWIP as new opportunities emerge.

Linking Communities

Project	Lead and Partners
Portesham to Abbotsbury	Dorset Council, National Landscapes
Piddle Path	Dorset Council
ND Trailway Stalbridge to Henstridge (Somerset)	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
ND Trailway Stalbridge to Sturminster Newton	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
ND Trailway Spetisbury to Sturminster Marshall	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
ND Trailway Sturminster Marshall to Corfe Mullen	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
SWCP Lulworth to Kimmeridge (through the MOD Ranges)	Dorset Council. SWCPA and MOD
West Dorset Trailway – Completion of route from Maiden Newton to Bridport	Dorset Council and PC/TC and private landowners
Upton Trailway	Dorset Council and NDTN
Pimperne to Blandford (France Firs)	Dorset Council and private landowners

Creating (at least) 10 Accessible Routes

Project	Lead and Partners
Re-surface the South West Coast Path on the west coast of Portland to link communities to the coast and to facilities – such as Atlantic Academy	Dorset Council, South West Coast Path Association, Court Leet, Natural England
Linking Portesham to Abbotsbury	Dorset Council, National Landscapes
ND Trailway Stalbridge to Henstridge (Somerset)	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
ND Trailway Stalbridge to Sturminster Newton	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
ND Trailway Spetisbury to Sturminster Marshall	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
ND Trailway Sturminster Marshall to Corfe Mullen	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
Pimperne to Blandford (France Firs)	Dorset Council and private landowners
Purbeck Park to Corfe Castle	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners
Wareham River path	Dorset Council, EA and private landowners
NT RoW across Purbeck	DC-SWCP-NT

Improving and Investing in Bridleways and Trailways

Project	Lead and Partners
Bridleway Bridges being upgraded from softwood specification to long lasting GRP bridges.	Dorset Council
Improve access from Abbotsbury to the Coast via non-road route	Dorset Council
Horse box parking for ND Trailway	Dorset Council NDTN
Alners Gorse (Hazlebury Bryan)	Dorset Council and private landowners
Clay Lane (Bourton)	Dorset Council and private landowners
Gypseys Drove (Sturminster Newton)	Dorset Council
Dolmans Hill (Lytchett Matravers)	Dorset Council and private landowners
UCR's County wide	Dorset Council (Greenspace and Highways)

Many opportunities identified in this section originate from local communities, user groups, Parish Councils elected members and stakeholder organisations. Before any scheme progresses, Dorset Council will undertake appropriate feasibility work, engagement and consultation to ensure proposals are deliverable, environmentally appropriate and supported by those affected.

Monitoring Success

Progress will be monitored through a range of performance indicators, including:

- percentage of the rights of way network assessed as easy to use
- number of accessibility improvements delivered
- number of barriers replaced with less restrictive structures
- length of new or improved multi-user routes created
- progress against agreed strategic Trailway projects
- number of active volunteers and volunteer hours contributed
- progress in reducing the Definitive Map Modification Order backlog
- customer satisfaction levels and user feedback
- contribution towards Dorset Council and Local Transport Plan objectives.

7.4 Glossary and Definitions

Accessibility
The extent to which routes and facilities can be used by people with a wide range of abilities and needs. This may include improvements such as better surfaces, gates, gradients, signage and information.

Active Travel
Everyday journeys made by walking, wheeling, cycling or horse riding, either for recreation or to reach destinations such as schools, workplaces, shops and services.

Bridleway
A public path open to walkers, horse riders and cyclists. Motor vehicles are not permitted.

Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)
A highway over which the public has a right of way for all types of traffic, although it is mainly used for walking, cycling and horse riding. Many BOATs are rural tracks or lanes.

Definitive Map and Statement
The official legal record of public rights of way. It shows the location and status of footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic.

Footpath
A highway where the public has a legal right to walk. Footpaths may cross farmland, woodland, open countryside or urban areas.

Green Lane
An unsurfaced rural track or lane, often used for walking, cycling, horse riding and, in some cases, motor vehicle use.

Least Restrictive Access
A principle that seeks to provide the easiest and most accessible route possible while meeting land management, safety and legal requirements.

Multi-user Route
A route designed for use by more than one group of users, such as walkers, wheelers, cyclists and horse riders.

Open Access Land
Land where the public has a legal right to walk freely, as established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This includes mapped mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land.

Permissive Path
A route that a landowner allows the public to use but which is not a public right of way. Permission may be withdrawn by the landowner.

Public Path
A route available for public use. This may include public rights of way and other publicly accessible routes.

Public Rights of Way (PROW) sometimes shortened to ROW
Highways over which the public has a legal right to pass and repass. These include

footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic.

Restricted Byway
A route open to walkers, cyclists, horse riders and non-motorised vehicles, such as horse-drawn carriages. Motor vehicles are not allowed.

Rights of Way
A general term for paths and tracks over which the public has legal rights of access.

Stile or Gate
Structures that allow people to pass through or over boundaries while helping to control livestock. Where practicable, less restrictive options should be used to improve accessibility.

Trailway
A largely traffic-free route, often created from a former railway corridor, that provides opportunities for walking, wheeling, cycling and horse riding.

Waymarking
Signs, markers or symbols used to guide people along a route or trail.

Wheeling
A term used to describe journeys made using wheeled mobility aids or equipment, including wheelchairs, mobility scooters, adapted cycles, pushchairs and similar devices.

Dorset's Public Rights of Way network.

PRoW Type	For Use By	Symbol	Sign	Total Length	Number of Paths
Footpath	Walkers			1,745 miles (2,809 km)	4,951
Bridleway	Walkers, horse riders, and cyclists			1,090 miles (1,754 km)	1,754
Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)	Walkers, Horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn carriages, and motor vehicles			20 miles (48 km)	48
Restricted Byway	Walkers, horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn carriages			30 miles (48 km)	31

Figure 31: Summary table showing Dorset public rights of way types, permitted users, route lengths and number of paths.

Promoted Routes

Dorset has a wide range of promoted routes used by residents and visitors. These include local circular routes as well as longer-distance trails, many of which are managed by the Dorset Council Ranger team.

Key examples include:

- the 89 mile Dorset section of the South West Coast Path / King Charles III England Coast Path
- The Wessex Ridgeway (62 miles)
- The Stour Valley Way (64 miles)
- Dorset Walkabouts – locally developed circular routes
- The Jubilee Trail

These routes help promote the network, support tourism and encourage wider use.

Trailways

Trailways are routes developed from former railway lines and represent a significant opportunity to provide high-quality, multi-user access across Dorset. Their gentle gradients, durable surfaces and separation from traffic make them particularly suitable for walking, cycling and horse riding, supporting both everyday use and recreation.

As well as providing accessible routes, Trailways help to preserve and celebrate Dorset's industrial and transport heritage. Former railway features such as bridges, stations and signage can be retained and enhanced, contributing to the character of the route and creating a distinctive user experience.

Where former railway alignments remain intact, they offer valuable opportunities to connect communities, services and visitor destinations. In many locations, however, routes are fragmented. Ongoing work with landowners and partners is therefore essential to secure permissive or permanent access, and to identify alternative alignments where gaps exist.

Trailway development also provides opportunities for wider benefits, including links to local businesses, visitor facilities such as cafés and cycle hire, and improved access to green

space. As such, they form a key component of Dorset's long-term access and sustainable transport network.

Access Land

Access Land was introduced under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and provides a right of access on foot for open-air recreation. It includes areas of "open country", such as heath, moor, downland, and registered common land.

Unlike public rights of way, access is not restricted to defined paths, allowing people to move more freely across the landscape, subject to certain restrictions and land management considerations. This is sometimes referred to as a "right to roam", although access is controlled and not unrestricted.
In Dorset, Access Land covers over 9,000 hectares, much of it associated with heathland and downland landscapes. These areas provide important opportunities for informal recreation and connection with nature.

There is ongoing potential to improve access to, and awareness of, Access Land, particularly in areas close to towns and larger settlements, where it can support health and wellbeing and reduce pressure on more heavily used routes.

Coastal Access

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 introduced a long-term programme to improve public access to, and enjoyment of, the English coastline. This is being delivered through the creation of the King Charles III England Coast Path, providing clear and consistent public rights along the coast for walking and other forms of open-air recreation on foot.
The programme secures and enhances existing coastal access while also creating new routes in locations where access did not previously exist. It includes the ability to realign routes inland where coastal erosion occurs, ensuring a continuous and resilient route over time.
In Dorset, one of the first sections to be established was the 'Weymouth Bay' stretch, between Portland and Lulworth, completed in time for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic sailing events. This created approximately 30 km of coastal path, together with associated access land.
Over time, coastal access rights will be extended to cover the full Dorset coastline, creating a continuous route around the county. This approach ensures long-term access along a dynamic and evolving coastline, allowing routes to adapt where necessary while maintaining public access.

ROWLO

Rights of way Liaison Officer – a parish or town council volunteer with a particular remit for PROW in their area and liaison with the DC ranger team and landowners.

Cycling

Cycling access in Dorset is provided through a combination of dedicated cycle routes, shared-use paths and public rights of way, particularly bridleways. While some areas (especially in the south east of the county) have more developed infrastructure, provision across the county is generally fragmented.

Not all bridleways are suitable for cycling due to surface condition, gradient or drainage, which can limit usability for some users. Improving the quality and connectivity of routes is therefore an important opportunity to support cycling as both a recreational activity and a form of everyday travel.

Better integration between rights of way, Trailways and local transport networks will help create more coherent and accessible cycling opportunities for people of all ages and abilities.

Unclassified County Roads (UCRs)

Unclassified County Roads (UCRs) are highways that are not designated as A, B or C roads. They are recorded on the highway authority's "List of Streets" and may be surfaced or unsurfaced, ranging from tarmac to gravel, grass or natural surfaces.

UCRs are highways maintainable at public expense; however, the exact public rights associated with them are not always formally recorded. In practice, many UCRs are used by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and motor vehicles, but the level of public access can vary depending on the legal status of each route.

In Dorset, UCRs often function as important links between public rights of way, helping to extend off-road access and improve connectivity across the wider network. The condition and usability of UCRs varies considerably depending on surface type, levels of use and available maintenance resources. As a result, they present both an opportunity to enhance network connectivity and a challenge in terms of long-term management and maintenance.

Countryside Code

The Countryside Code provides guidance for everyone enjoying the outdoors in England and Wales. It promotes responsible access to the countryside and helps balance the interests of visitors, local communities, landowners and the natural environment.

The Code is based on three simple principles:

Respect everyone
Users should be considerate of people living and working in the countryside, leave gates and property as they find them, follow local signage and share routes responsibly with other users.

Protect the environment
Visitors should leave no trace of their visit by taking litter home, keeping dogs under effective control, disposing of dog waste responsibly, avoiding disturbance to wildlife and livestock, and helping to protect Dorset's landscapes and habitats.

Enjoy the outdoors
People should plan ahead, follow local safety advice, take responsibility for their own actions and enjoy the countryside responsibly so that it remains welcoming and accessible for everyone.
These principles support Dorset Council's aim of promoting responsible use of the public rights of way network and maintaining positive relationships between users, communities and landowners.

A simple way to remember the Countryside Code is:
Respect everyone, Protect the environment, Enjoy the outdoors.

7.5 Review of Previous Rights of Way Improvement Plan

The previous Dorset ROWIP was a strong document for its time. Rather than focusing solely on statutory rights of way maintenance, it successfully repositioned the network as a key contributor to transport, health, the local economy, climate change mitigation, community wellbeing and green infrastructure. That strategic approach remains one of its greatest strengths and is highly relevant to the new draft ROWIP.

Biggest Successes of the 2011-2021 ROWIP

1. Moving Rights of Way Beyond a Maintenance Function
The most significant achievement was establishing rights of way as part of Dorset's wider social, environmental and economic infrastructure, rather than simply a highway maintenance responsibility. The plan clearly linked access improvements with:

- Public health and wellbeing
- Sustainable transport
- Climate change objectives
- Tourism and economic growth
- Green infrastructure
- Community development
- Equality and accessibility

A particularly strong theme was the links between transport, tourism, health, climate change, and community development.
In 2011, ROWIP1, was based upon what people told us were the most important issues and priorities for the ROWIP network in the future. The objectives of ROWIP1 were designed to be aspirational and conveyed the optimism and ambitions of that time. It helped raise the profile of our ROW work, secure funding for improvements, encourage partnership-working and generate a greater appreciation of the network.

The successes of ROWIP1 can be found below.

Partnership Working

The last fifteen years have seen strong partnerships help deliver important projects and improvements to the PROW network across the County. Partnerships include, Dorset, and Cranborne Chase - National Landscape teams, Ramblers Society, British Horse Society, Natural England, South West Coast Path Association, (SWCPA), and housing developers. Dorset Council Sustainable Transport Team and Parish and Town councils.

PRoW and New Development

The Ranger Team have begun securing Section 106 & Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for new and improved paths as part of new planning applications. The Team is now fully integrated into the development management and design process and when new developments are being designed, they are much more likely to respect existing or new PROW routes in housing developments. In addition, policies in the Dorset Plan and its supporting documents (including Policy 7 in this ROWIP) place requirements on developers to ensure PROW are prioritised in new developments. This has enabled the Team to take a more proactive approach to planning applications.

PRoW Infrastructure repair and maintenance

The Greenspace team through restructuring and combining similar teams, now rectify 1,000's more maintenance issues per year than happened in 2011 when there was a more focused but much smaller ROW team. Therefore, the teams output and productivity have been much improved. The team have created new Trailways, replaced hundreds of signs, changed stiles to gates and increased accessible surfacing in locations across Dorset, improving access to the countryside. A good example of a project in which this occurred was at Child Okeford where a network of stiles was replaced with more accessible gates. In Child Okeford and elsewhere across the County, negotiating with landowners was a key part of the process which enabled a satisfactory outcome for all users. This has ensured the PROW network is accessible for a wider range of users. Policy 3 of this Plan seeks to continue to improve accessibility for a wider range of users by creating 10 accessible routes in 10 years.

The new ROWIP will reflect the successful elements of the previous council ROWIP but will reflect a long-term strategic vision by reflecting the current and future needs of stakeholders and local communities. The new ROWIP strengthens the value of Dorset's rights of way to many areas of Dorset council and makes ROW more central in the delivering better outcomes across all areas of society. Whilst preparing the first draft, we have carried out extensive external stakeholder engagement to ensure that the new ROWIP is a plan for the people of Dorset.

7.6 Relevant strategies

Local Strategies

ROWIP2 supports a range of Dorset Council strategies and local partnerships, contributing to wider objectives including public health, sustainable travel, environmental management and economic growth.

Babies, Children, Young People and Families Plan

The Babies, Children, Young People and Families Plan aims to improve outcomes for children and young people by supporting health, wellbeing, education, safety and opportunities to thrive. ROWIP2 contributes by improving safe access to outdoor spaces, supporting active travel to school, promoting outdoor learning opportunities and encouraging children and young people to experience and enjoy Dorset's natural environment.

Dorset Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy

The council has declared a climate and ecological emergency and is working to reduce carbon emissions and enhance biodiversity. ROWIP2 supports these objectives by encouraging sustainable travel, improving access to green infrastructure and promoting responsible use of the natural environment.

Dorset Council Plan

The Council Plan sets out Dorset Council's overall vision and priorities, including creating stronger, healthier communities and protecting the natural environment. ROWIP2 contributes by improving access to green space, supporting active lifestyles, and helping connect

communities to services and opportunities.

Dorset Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Dorset Health and Wellbeing Strategy focuses on improving physical and mental health, reducing inequalities and enabling people to live healthy, independent lives. ROWIP2 contributes by providing free and accessible opportunities for physical activity, supporting access to nature, promoting social connection and helping to reduce health inequalities through improved access to high-quality outdoor spaces.

Dorset Housing Strategy

The Dorset Housing Strategy seeks to create sustainable communities with access to services, employment, recreation and green infrastructure. ROWIP2 supports these objectives by ensuring that new housing developments are connected to high-quality walking, wheeling, cycling and riding routes, helping residents access services, open spaces and the wider countryside while reducing reliance on private vehicles.

Dorset Local Plan

The Local Plan sets out the framework for future development, including housing growth and infrastructure provision. ROWIP2 supports this by ensuring that high-quality rights of way infrastructure is designed into new developments, improving connectivity and integrating new communities with the wider network.

Dorset Local Visitor Economy Plan - Destination Management Plan

The Destination Management Plan establishes Dorset as a leading visitor destination, with an ambition to become a flagship area for access to the outdoors and a premier walking destination. ROWIP2 plays a key role in delivering this ambition by improving access to key destinations, promoting high-quality routes and supporting local businesses and the visitor economy.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy promotes fairness, inclusion and equal access to opportunities and services for all residents. ROWIP2 supports these objectives by seeking to reduce barriers to access, improving accessibility across the rights of way network, engaging with underrepresented groups and ensuring that people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can benefit from Dorset's countryside and green spaces.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies priorities and opportunities for restoring and enhancing habitats, increasing biodiversity and improving ecological connectivity across Dorset. ROWIP2 supports these aims by improving responsible access to nature, connecting communities with natural spaces, promoting biodiversity awareness and, where appropriate, helping to deliver habitat and nature recovery projects through integrated access and environmental improvements.

Local Transport Plan (LTP4)

The Local Transport Plan promotes sustainable and integrated transport, with a focus on walking, cycling and reducing reliance on private vehicles. ROWIP2 supports these objectives by improving connectivity between settlements, enhancing access to services and enabling more journeys to be made on foot, by bike or on horseback.

Physical Activity Strategy (Movement for Movement)

Movement for Movement is Dorset's place-based approach to increasing physical activity, focusing on making it easier for people to move more in their everyday lives and addressing health inequalities. ROWIP2 directly supports this approach by providing free, accessible opportunities for walking and outdoor activity, particularly close to where people live, and by reducing barriers to participation through improved infrastructure and information.

Public Health Policies and Strategies

Dorset Council's Public Health policies and strategies focus on increasing physical activity, reducing health inequalities, improving wellbeing and supporting healthier lifestyles. ROWIP2 contributes by providing free, accessible opportunities for everyday physical activity, particularly close to where people live, helping to address inactivity and improve wellbeing.

National Strategies

ROWIP2 supports a range of national strategies and policy frameworks that promote physical activity, sustainable travel, improved access to nature and public health outcomes.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act)

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a duty on local highway authorities to prepare and review a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. ROWIP2 has been produced in accordance with these requirements and seeks to identify how Dorset's rights of way network can better meet the present and future needs of the public.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) – 25 Year Environment Plan

The 25 Year Environment Plan sets out a commitment to connect people with the natural environment to improve health and wellbeing, while protecting and enhancing landscapes and biodiversity. ROWIP2 plays a key role by enabling access to Dorset's natural environment in a managed and sustainable way.

Department for Transport – Gear Change

Gear Change sets out the Government's vision for making walking and cycling the natural first choice for short journeys. ROWIP2 contributes by improving connectivity between communities, services and green spaces, helping to support safer and more convenient

active travel routes.

Natural England – Coastal Access

Coastal Access aims to improve public access to England's coastline through the establishment and maintenance of the King Charles III England Coast Path and associated coastal access rights. ROWIP2 supports these objectives by improving access to Dorset's coastline, helping residents and visitors enjoy the coast safely and sustainably whilst supporting recreation, health and wellbeing, tourism and the local economy.

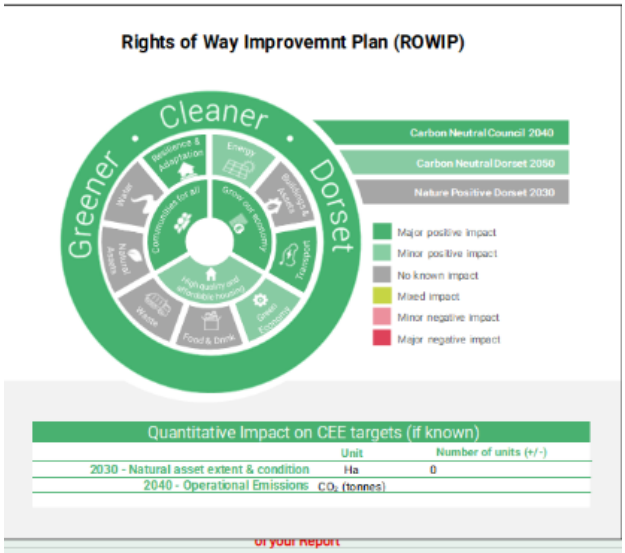
Office for Health Improvement and Disparities - Everybody Active, Every Day

This national framework sets out an evidence-based approach to increasing physical activity levels through creating environments that make it easier for people to move more in their daily lives. ROWIP2 supports this by improving local access to green space, enabling people to be active close to where they live, and reducing barriers to participation.

Sport England - Uniting the Movement

Sport England's 10-year strategy aims to transform lives and strengthen communities through increased participation in sport and physical activity, with a focus on tackling inequalities. ROWIP2 contributes to this vision by improving access to safe, attractive and accessible routes that support everyday physical activity, particularly walking and cycling.

Dorset Council - Climate Emergency colour Wheel – positive impact



of your report

ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	minor positive impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	major positive impact
Green Economy	minor positive impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	major positive impact
Corporate Plan Aims	**Impact**
Grow our economy	strongly supports it
High-quality and affordable housing	minor positive impact
Communities for all	strongly supports it

7.7 Front cover of the Sturminster Newton Walkabout Leaflet.

POINTS OF INTEREST

The area around **Gotts Corner** was occupied by Flemish refugees, who established the textile industry here, having been driven from their homeland by religious persecution.



At the top of the field, before turning to cross Bath Road, there is a **splendid panorama** of the river and its valley.



With such a variety of **bird and insect life** here, occasionally you may see a Kestrel, Buzzard or Heron flying overhead.



The **Butts Pond Meadows** were given to the Town in 2004, and are now managed as a Nature Reserve and amenity area.



The low-lying area is home to all **three species of British newt** – including the protected Great Crested Newt.



The path from the Meadows back to the car park, which passes the site of the **Old Creamery**, is the 'Jubilee Path', created as a traffic-free route for walkers and cyclists.



Photo credits: Helen Baggott, John Lewis, Giles Nicholson, Sturminster Newton Museum, Jan Wardell, Wildstock

STURMINSTER NEWTON WALKABOUTS

WALKABOUT 1
Gotts Corner / Honeymead Lane / Butts Pond Meadows

A varied walk with features of interest in Sturminster Newton, both past and present (approx. 1.5 miles).

This is one of a series of circular walks from Sturminster Newton which take in the surrounding area of the Blackmore Vale. They are mainly on Public Rights of Way, with some on paths with access permitted by the landowners.

These walks are intended to encourage exploration and appreciation of the variety and beauty of the countryside in this locality, on foot. Cyclists are not permitted to ride on public footpaths and by law must give way to walkers and horseriders on bridleways.

When walking, please remember the Countryside Code, particularly:

- respect the local community, farmland and others enjoying the countryside
- leave gates and property as you find them
- leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- keep dogs under effective control
- keep to the marked paths and cause no damage to crops, livestock or wildlife

Appropriate footwear is recommended, since wet or muddy conditions can be encountered at any time.

The Sturminster Newton Walkabouts have been developed by the Sturminster Newton Town Council in association with Dorset County Council and are available from Sturquest Community Office, Sturminster Library, the Museum and Sturminster Mill or can be downloaded from **www.dorsetforyou.com/walkabouts**

Further information can be obtained from the Town Council on 01258 475136.

Sturminster Newton Town Council

Dorset County Council

WALKABOUT 1 APPROX. 1.5 MILES

STURMINSTER NEWTON WALKABOUTS

Gotts Corner / Honeymead Lane / Butts Pond Meadows



Back cover of the Sturminster Newton Walkabout Leaflet.

