Rights of Way Implementation Plan 2026 Consultation

Consultation response analysis report produced by the Consultation and Engagement Team – Dorset Council

Report produced October 2026

Consultation Response Report

What was the consultation about?	Dorset Council, as the Local Highway Authority, has a statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The ROWIP outlines this duty whilst aiming to set out 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. The ROWIP 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.
Over what period did the consultation run?	The consultation ran from 21/07/26 to 12/10/26.
What consultation methods were used?	This consultation was available through an online survey and a paper version of the survey.
How many responses were received overall?	507 responses were received.
How representative is the response to the wider population?	92.7% (470) of responses were from members of the public; 3.4% (17) were from the town or parish council. 0.8% (4) were from other, 0.6% (3) were from elected members, and 0.4% (2) were from businesses. 56.0% (275) of respondents were female, compared to 38.7% (190) that were male. 0.8% (4) of respondents were aged 24 and under, 22.2% (110) aged 25-49, 35.5% (176) aged 50-64, and 36.5% (181) were 65 plus. 10.9% (54) declared they had a disability.
Where will the results be published?	Results will be published on the council's website www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk and on Dorset Council's consultation platform
How will the results be used?	Results from this survey will be used to inform the next steps of the process.
Who has produced this report?	Consultation and Engagement Team, Dorset Council, October 2026

Background

Dorset Council is required to prepare and maintain a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP), setting out the strategic framework for managing, improving and promoting the Public Rights of Way network. Since the previous ROWIP was adopted, there have been significant changes in recreation, public health, active travel, climate change and access to the countryside. A refreshed plan is therefore needed to ensure the network continues to meet the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

The new ROWIP aims not only to maintain the network but also to maximise its wider social, environmental and economic benefits. This includes supporting active travel, improving access to nature, promoting healthier lifestyles, enhancing connectivity between communities, and contributing to Dorset Council's ambitions for climate action, biodiversity recovery and sustainable transport.

This report presents the findings of the public consultation on the draft ROWIP. It analyses feedback received from residents, user groups, landowners, local councils and other stakeholders, combining quantitative survey results with qualitative comments. The findings will help inform the final ROWIP and ensure it reflects the views, needs and priorities of those who use, manage and benefit from Dorset's public rights of way network.

The Consultation

The consultation survey was open to Dorset Council residents, organisations and other stakeholders with an interest in Dorset's Public Rights of Way network. It invited respondents to comment on the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026-2036, including the proposed vision and policy framework, and to identify priorities, challenges and opportunities for improving the network over the next ten years.

Analysis Method

Responses to closed questions were collated and summarised, with the number of respondents for each question shown in the report. All consultation questions and their results are included.

Open-ended responses were reviewed and analysed. Where a large number of comments were received, responses were coded and grouped into common themes to identify key issues raised by respondents. Where only a small number of comments were received, responses have been presented verbatim to accurately reflect respondents' views.

Demographic analysis was undertaken to identify whether views differed between respondent groups. Findings have been reported where notable differences were identified and were considered to add meaningful context to the interpretation of the results.

Note: Figures may not always total precisely due to rounding.

Executive Summary

Dorset Council consulted on its draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026-2036 between July and October 2026. A total of 507 responses were received, with the majority coming from members of the public (92.7%, 470). Respondents were more likely to be female and from older age groups. The findings demonstrate strong support for both the overall vision and the proposed policies, while also highlighting areas where respondents would like to see improvements to the Public Rights of Way (PROW) network.

- Respondent profile: Respondents were more likely to be female (56.0%, 275) than male (38.7%, 190), and 72.0% (357) were aged 50 or over, indicating that older residents were more strongly represented in the consultation.
- Respondents were regular users of the Public Rights of Way network, with 50.4% (255) using rights of way daily and a further 31.8% (161) using them a few times a week.
- There was strong support for the proposed vision, with 90.7% (459) agreeing or strongly agreeing that Dorset should have a modern, accessible and well-connected Public Rights of Way network. Only 3.4% (17) disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- All ten proposed policies received high levels of support, with agreement ranging from 80.9% (110) to 96.3% (105).

  The most strongly supported policies were:

  - Definitive Map and Legal Record: 96.3% (105) agreement.
  - Responsible Use and Landowners: 94.2% (128) agreement.
  - Empowering Communities: 93.8% (121) agreement.
  - Maintaining and Improving the Existing Network: 93.5% (303) agreement.
- When asked to identify priorities for the future network, respondents ranked maintaining and improving the existing network as the most important priority (ranking score 2.37), followed by improving accessibility (0.87) and promoting responsible use and respect for landowners (0.54).

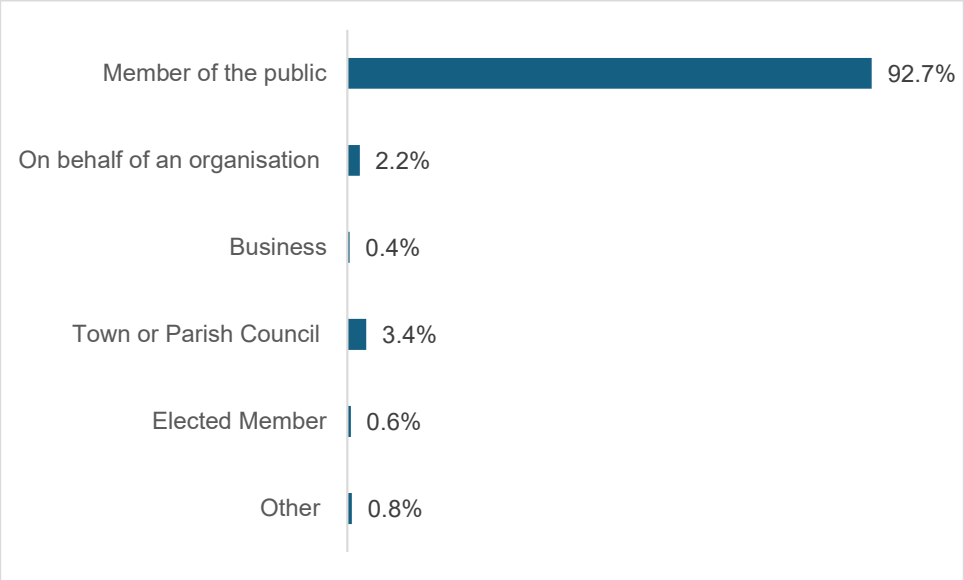
- Views on the current network were more mixed:
    - 35.9% (179) found rights of way easy or very easy to use.
    - 32.3% (161) found rights of way difficult or very difficult to use.
- Access to route information was also mixed:
    - 35.5% (177) found it easy or very easy to find information about routes.
    - 27.0% (135) found it difficult or very difficult.
- Most respondents were confident navigating the network, with 71.3% (357) reporting that they were fairly or very confident.
- Views on reporting problems on paths were mixed; 32.8% (164) of respondents found the process easy or very easy, while 25.2% (126) were not aware of how to report an issue.
- The most commonly reported barriers to using rights of way were:
    - Blocked or restricted access to paths: 70.3% (348).
    - Poor path condition: 62.8% (311).
    - Poor signage or information: 50.1% (248).
    - Accessibility barriers: 25.7% (127).
- Open-text responses highlighted consistent calls for:
    - Improved maintenance and vegetation management.
    - Better signage, mapping and route information.
    - Improved accessibility for all users.
    - Stronger action where paths are obstructed.
    - Better connectivity between communities and destinations.
- Overall, the consultation demonstrates strong support for the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan and its proposed policies, while highlighting a desire for continued investment in maintenance, accessibility, signage, connectivity and the removal of barriers across Dorset's Public Rights of Way network.

Data Analysis

Section 1: About You

Q1. I am responding as:

Base: n-507



Option	Total	Percent
Member of the public	470	92.7%
On behalf of an organisation - please specify below	11	2.2%
Business	2	0.4%
Town or Parish Council - please specify below	17	3.4%
Elected Member	3	0.6%
Other – please specify below	4	0.8%

Overall, the majority of respondents were members of the public, 92.7% (470), demonstrating strong engagement with local residents and individuals. Smaller responses were received from town and parish councils, 3.4% (17); respondents on behalf of an organisation, 2.2% (11); elected members, 0.6% (3); and 'Other ', 0.8% (4).

This distribution demonstrates that engagement with The Rights of Way Implementation Plan was predominantly driven by individual members of the public with some input from local organisations and representative bodies.

Other comments
I use to be a volunteef walk leader and I work for

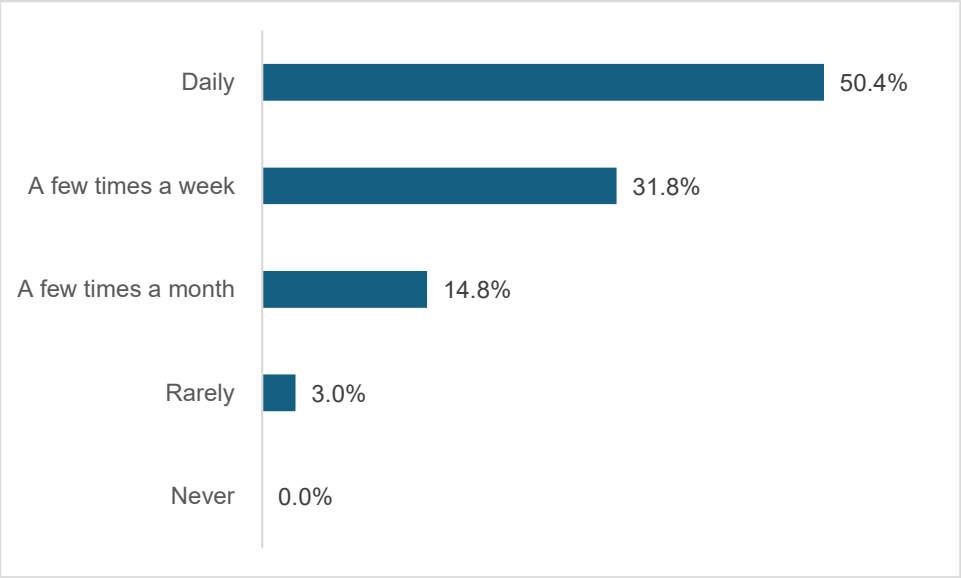
myself as a dog walker
Horse rider
I am a horse rider
Volunteer.. Friends of Breach Common
Shaftesbury Walking Group
I live at [redacted] and would be affected the most
Local
RoWLO for Trent Parish
Loders' Resident and Landowner
Chair of SuSAC
Loders Village Hall

Town/Parish council or an organisation
Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton PC
Murley's Mutts
Monitor for Monarch's Way
Portland
Use to volunteer for shaftesbury walking for health
Cerne valley parish council
Love Dogs West Dorset and the Environment
The British Horse Society
Bridport
I am a Parish Councillor but this response is by me as an individual and not on behalf of the PC
Shillingstone and District Riding Club (BHS)
Loders Transport Group
St Martin Parish Council
Cllr Mark Williams
studland parish council
Chideock
Loders, Bridport
Motcombe Parish Council/Chair White Hart Link
Bishops Caundle parish council
Marnhull Ramblers
The Loders Arms
Toller Porcorum Parish Council
Poole Harbour Trails
Iwerne Courtney and Stepleton parish council
Active Dorset
Loders Parish Council
Toller Porcorum Parish Council
Poole Harbour Trails
Iwerne Courtney and Stepleton parish council
Active Dorset

Loders Parish Council
Lytchett Minster and Upton
Netherbury Parish Council
Queen Thorn Parish Council
Sturminster Marshall Parish Council
Cllr Mark Williams, Portland TC, Tophill East
North Dorset Railway, Shillingstone
No Trailway Through The Village (A sizeable group of Loders residents)
Cheselbourne
Shaftesbury Town Council
Sustainable Shaftesbury Advisory Committee (SuSAC) to Shaftesbury Town Council
North Dorset Trailway Network
Verwood Town Council
Poole Harbour Trails Community Group
Stalbridge Town Council, ROWLO
Alderholt Parish Council

Q2: How often, if at all, do you use public rights of way in Dorset?

Base: n-506



Option	Total	Percent
Daily	255	50.4%
A few times a week	161	31.8%
A few times a month	75	14.9%
Rarely	15	3.0%
Never	0	0.0%

The findings show that respondents were regular users of public rights of way in Dorset, with 50.4% (255) reporting using them daily, and a further 31.80% (161) used public rights of way a few times a week. A smaller proportion of respondents reported that they use public rights of way a few times a month at 14.9% (75), while 3.0% (15) respondents reported that they rarely use public rights of way. No respondents indicated that they never use public rights of way.

Respondents with a disability were more likely to report using public rights of way rarely (16.7%, 9) than those without a disability (1.5%, 6). In contrast, respondents without a disability were more likely to use public rights of way a few times a week (33.8%, 136 compared with 20.4%, 11) or a few times a month (16.4%, 66 compared with 7.4%, 4). This suggests that, while many respondents with a disability are frequent users of public rights of way, a greater proportion use the network less regularly than respondents without a disability.

Female respondents were more likely to report using public rights of way daily (54.2%, 149) than male respondents (41.1%, 78). This indicates that female respondents were more frequent users of the Public Rights of Way network.

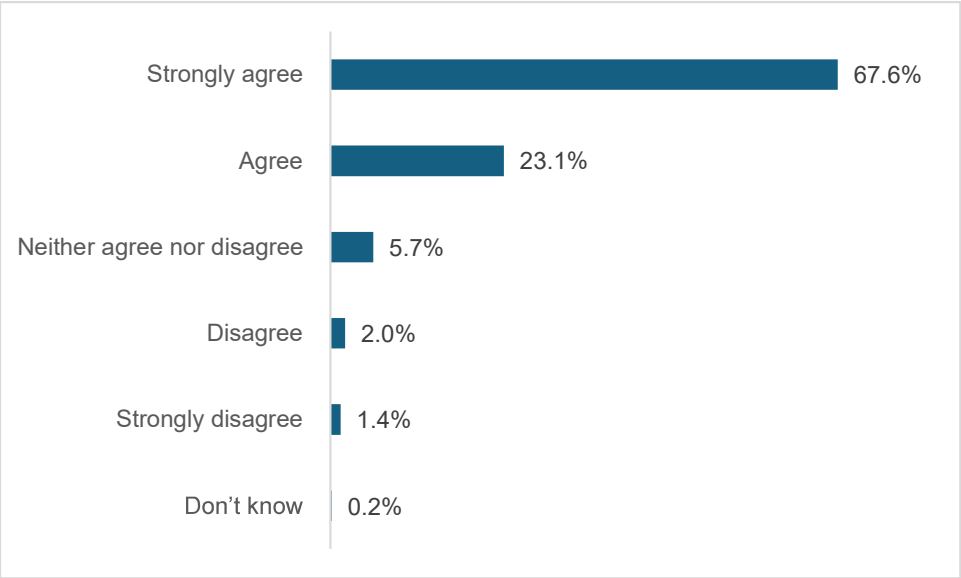
Respondents aged 49 and under were more likely to report using public rights of way daily (59.7%, 68) than respondents aged 50-64 (46.0%, 81) and those aged 65 and over (45.9%, 83). This suggests that younger respondents were more frequent users of the Public Rights of Way network.

Section 2: Vision

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this vision?

Base: n-506

The vision of the plan is to create a modern, accessible and well-connected rights of way network that supports health, communities, the economy and the environment.



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	342	67.6%
Agree	117	23.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	29	5.7%
Disagree	10	2.0%
Strongly disagree	7	1.4%
Don't know	1	0.2%

The findings show strong support for the vision of the plan. Over two-thirds of respondents, 67.6% (342), strongly agreed with the vision, while a further 23.1% (117) agreed, demonstrating broad support for the ambition to create a modern, accessible and well-connected rights of way network.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 5.7% (29), neither agreed nor disagreed with the vision. In contrast, 3.4% (17) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 0.2% (1) selected 'Don't know', indicating that very few respondents opposed the vision or were uncertain about it.

Q4. Do you have any other comments about the proposed vision?

Base: n-293

Responses centred on maintaining and improving the existing rights of way network, particularly through better maintenance, enhanced accessibility, improved connectivity, and increased provision for horse riders and cyclists.

Theme	Description	Total
Maintenance and upkeep	Calls for better upkeep of current footpaths, bridleways and rights of way; overgrowth, mud, fallen trees, broken infrastructure, mend signage.	62
Supports visions	Supports vision (add words, protect and maintain, resilient).	30
Requests for more bridleways etc	Requests for more bridleways/footpaths, better connectivity, horse-friendly maintenance and safer riding opportunities.	24
Dorset locations mentioned	Suggestions for named locations, villages or specific rights of way improvements. (Bradpole, Loders, Buckhorn Weston, Corfe Mullen, Portland, Monarchs Way, Brudport and Langdon Hill, North Chideock, Lytchett Matravers, Gillingham, Shaftesbury).	24
Connectivity of communities/towns/villages	Calls for routes to join up communities, destinations or existing rights of way.	20
Wider accessibility issues	Accessibility - wheelchair user footpaths/stiles difficulty, more access for disabled residents.	18
Requests for cycle routes	Requests for more cycle routes, safer cycling links, better-connected cycling network. More buses (greener policies).	17
Obstruction of PROW	Rights of way blocked by farm animals'/farmer land/landowners.	16
Safety concerns general	Safety concerns for drivers/pedestrians/cyclist.	16
Dog walking/facilities	References to dog walking, dog access, dog facilities. And horses, dog only zones.	15
Accessibility requests	Requests for wheelchair, mobility scooter, disabled access; replacement of stiles/kissing gates; accessible surfaces.	12
Positive comments/general	General positive comments supporting the vision and objectives.	12

Support for young families	Include access for pushchairs/supporting families with young kids.	11
Enhance footpaths	Upgrade footpaths to bridleway status, more paths.	8
Finances, implementation, execution of vision, and doubts	Doubts about implementation, resources, budgets and whether the vision will be achieved (disruption to traffic, parking).	8
Enforcements	Requests for stronger enforcement where paths are blocked, cropped over, fenced or neglected.	7
Facilities requested/lack of facilities	Parking, benches, bins, rest points and other supporting facilities, parking trailers.	7
Rural authenticity maintained	Maintain character/ against resurfacing.	6
Maps and navigation	Better wayfinding, digital maps, apps, route information and signage, Strava for runners' better connection.	6
Community	Communicate with communities.	5
Keep footpaths & maintain paths	Keep footpaths/ not widen paths.	5
Safety for off-road	Desire for safer off-road alternatives and safer crossings due to traffic dangers. (narrow roads)	5
Safety for horses	Safety of routes for animals (horses).	4
Motor vehicles and BOATS comments	Comments relating to off-road motorcycling, 4x4s and maintaining BOAT access.	4
Wildlife maintenance and safety	Protecting wildlife, habitats, natural materials and landscape character.	4
Does not support vision	Does not support vision (lack of bylaws, finances).	3
Active travel	Encourage people to use routes to get to work.	3
Modern language concerns	Concerns about surfacing, urbanisation, "modern" language, protecting countryside character.	3
Motor vehicles	Motorbikes damaging paths, dogs, cyclists, damaging.	3

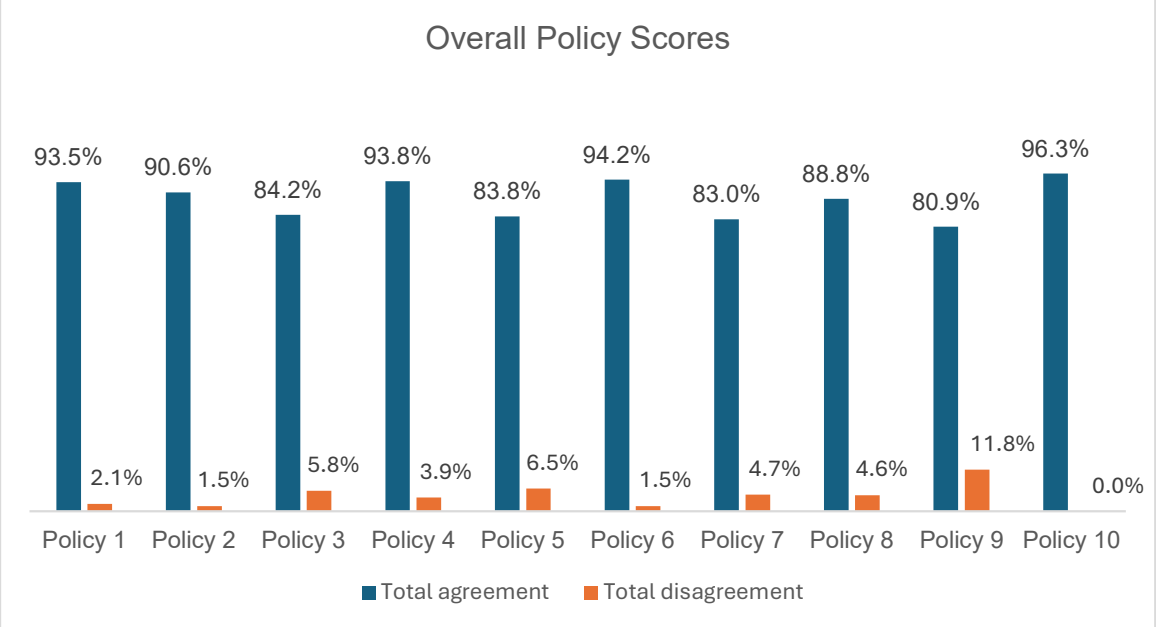
Education for responsible behaviour	Education for path users, responsible behaviour, rights and responsibilities.	3
Disapproval of vision/general	Passive comments on the vision.	2
Safe routes for pedestrians	Requests that walkers, cyclists, horse riders, disabled users and others are treated fairly.	2
Broader countryside PROW	Requests for broader countryside access beyond existing rights of way and communicating with farmers in the process.	2
Other comments	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	86

Section 3: Policies

Responses to the draft policies were generally positive, with most policies receiving high levels of agreement and relatively low levels of disagreement. While views varied across the individual policies, the results indicate broad support for the proposed approach set out in the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The following sections provide a detailed analysis of responses to each policy.

Base: Policy 1 (T2B n-303, B2B n-7), Policy 2 (T2B n-124, B2B n-2), Policy 3 (T2B n-160, B2B n-11), Policy 4 (T2B n-121, B2B n-5), Policy 5 (T2B n-78, B2B n-6), Policy 6 (T2B n-128, B2B n-2), Policy 7 (T2B n-88, B2B n-5), Policy 8 (T2B n-95, B2B n-5), Policy 9 (T2B n-110, B2B n-16) Policy 10 (T2B n-105, B2B n-0)*

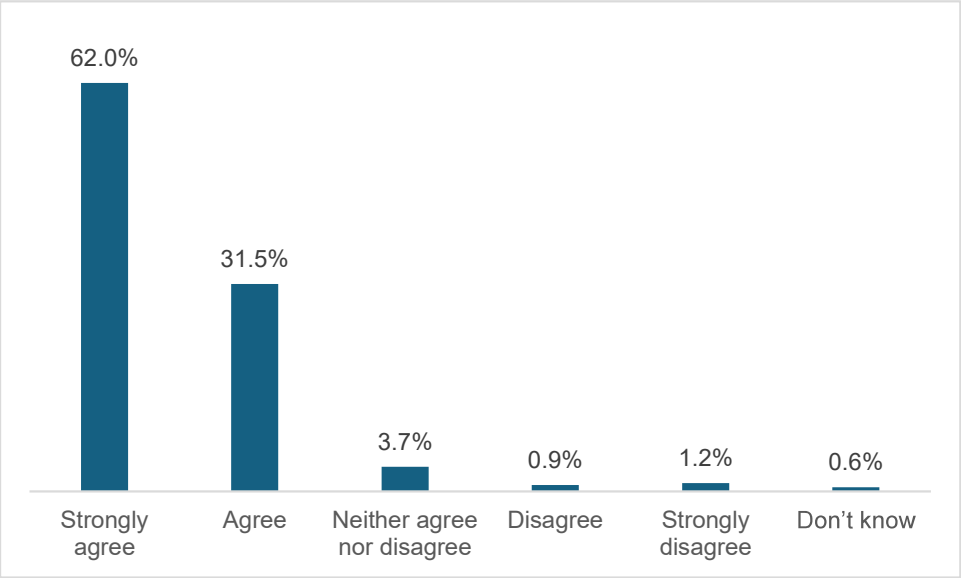
**Note: T2B refers to total agreement and B2B refers to total disagreement*



Policy 1 – Maintaining and improving the existing Public Rights of Way network

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-324



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	201	62.0%
Agree	102	31.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	12	3.7%
Disagree	3	0.9%
Strongly disagree	4	1.2%
Don't know	2	0.6%

Responses to this policy were overwhelmingly positive. Nearly two-thirds of respondents, 62.0% (201), strongly agreed with the policy, while a further 31.5% (102) agreed, indicating strong support for maintaining and improving the existing Public Rights of Way network.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 3.7% (12), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. In contrast, 2.2% (7) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 0.6% (2) selected 'Don't know', suggesting that opposition to the policy was limited.

Q6. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-203

Feedback focused primarily on the maintenance and condition of existing routes, particularly vegetation management, alongside improvements to bridleways, route connectivity, and the protection of existing rights of way.

Theme	Description	Total
Maintenance and Vegetation Management	Concerns about overgrown paths, brambles, nettles, fallen trees, drainage issues, poor surfaces, and general lack of maintenance and in accessibility.	59
Bridleway Quality and Horse Access	Requests for improvements to bridleways, horse-friendly gates, vegetation clearance, drainage, and safer off-road riding opportunities.	31
Route Connectivity and Network Expansion	Requests to create missing links, connect towns and villages, extend trailways and cycle routes, and improve active travel networks.	20
Protection of Existing Rights of Way	Concerns about path closures, diversions, loss of routes to development, and preserving existing access.	20
Positive Feedback / Support for Policy	General agreement with the policy or praise for existing staff, wardens, reporting tools, or improvements.	19
Infrastructure Improvements	Requests for bridges, gates, stiles, benches, crossings, fencing, surfacing, and other physical improvements.	19
Geographic/Location-Specific Issues	References to specific routes, villages, parishes, bridges, or named locations requiring attention.	19
Signage and Waymarking	Concerns regarding missing, inadequate, or inconsistent signage and route-marking.	18

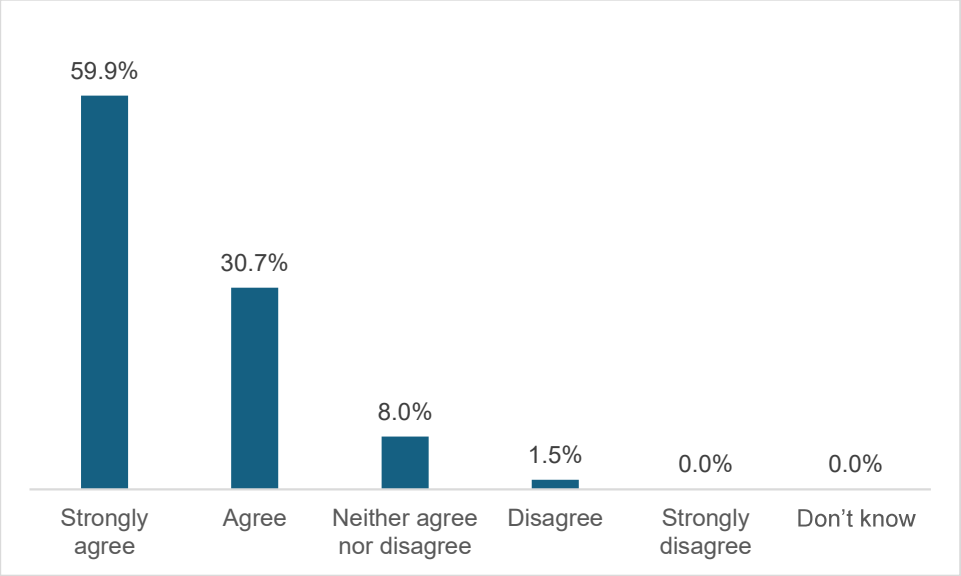
Funding and Resources	Doubts about funding availability, staffing levels, and Dorset Council's capacity to deliver improvements.	17
Reporting Systems and Response Times	Comments about awareness and use of problem-reporting tools, suggestions for improving reporting mechanisms, and concerns relating to response times, follow-up communication, and resolution of reported issues.	14
Landowner Responsibilities and Enforcement	Calls for stronger enforcement of landowners' legal duties to maintain rights of way and prevent obstructions.	12
Multi-user Conflicts	Concerns about conflicts between walkers, cyclists, horse riders, motorcyclists, 4x4 vehicles, and other user groups.	10
Prioritisation and Decision-Making	Questions about how routes will be prioritised and concerns and consultation suggestions, and clarification.	9
Safety Concerns	Comments relating to user safety, road crossings, livestock, visibility, dangerous routes, and lone walker safety.	9
Environmental and Landscape Concerns	Concerns about protecting countryside character, biodiversity, surfacing choices, and avoiding overdevelopment.	7
Accessibility and Inclusion	Requests for improved accessibility for disabled users, mobility scooter users, older people, and those with limited mobility. Including improving badly sited barriers, poorly maintained surfaces, etc.	6
Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) and Motor Vehicle Management	Views relating specifically to BOATs, green lanes, off-road vehicles, restrictions, or retention of vehicle access. Maintaining BOATs.	6

Cycling Infrastructure and Safety	Support for off-road cycling opportunities, cycle route improvements, and cyclist behaviour concerns.	5
Volunteer and Community Involvement	Suggestions for engaging local volunteers, parish councils, user groups, and communities in maintenance and monitoring. Listening to community needs.	5
Prioritisation and Decision-Making	Maintain less-used paths and routes.	5
Railway Line	Usage of old railway line.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	21

Policy 2 – Raise awareness of Public Rights of Way

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-137



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	82	59.9%
Agree	42	30.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	11	8.0%
Disagree	2	1.5%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Support for this policy was also high, with 59.9% (82) of respondents strongly agreeing and a further 30.7% (42) agreeing with the proposal. This reflects a positive response towards the proposed policy of raising awareness of Public Rights of Way.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 8.0% (11), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. Just 1.5% (2) of respondents disagreed, while no respondents strongly disagreed or selected 'Don't know', suggesting very limited opposition or uncertainty towards the policy.

Respondents with a disability were more likely to strongly agree with the policy (85.7%, 12) than those without a disability (64.7%, 66). All respondents with a disability either agreed or strongly agreed with the policy, indicating particularly strong support for measures to raise awareness and improve information about Public Rights of Way.

Q8. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-85

Key themes included improving signage and wayfinding, enhancing the accuracy of digital mapping tools, and increasing awareness of rights of way through wider promotion and information sharing.

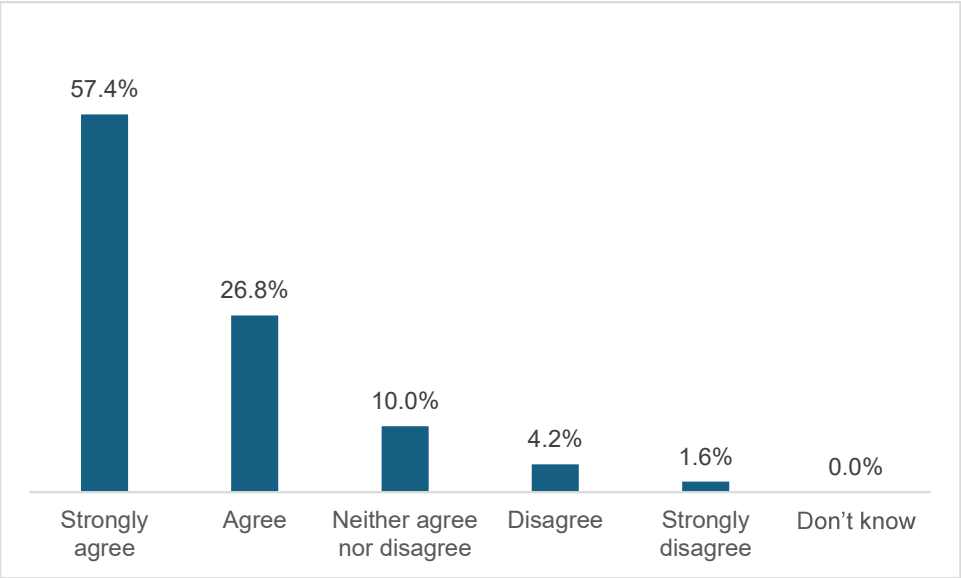
Theme	Description	Total
Improved signage and wayfinding	Update signs, update blue discs, repair stiles, named signage with destination locations, improved mapping.	27
Digital Mapping and Technology accuracy improvements	Hiking apps, Dorset Explorer, accurate maps, Google Maps, OpenStreetMap, create app that doesn't need Wi-Fi, highlight routes in colour.	23
Increased awareness and physical promotion of rights of way	Comms and parish councils, update key routes, QR codes on routes, libraries, village halls, local people use facilities, word-of-mouth.	16
Other- mental health benefits, young people	Countryside code, bylaws, respecting nature, dog walkers, cyclists.	14
Route Connectivity and Circular Routes, new practical routes	Connecting railways and bus routes for towns and villages, new practical routes, rural isolation of young people.	11
Awareness and Promotion	Feedback on routes, digital promotion.	9

Concerns	Rural isolation, areas that lack footpaths, accurate signage, focus on promotion should not be exclusively digital, concerns about finances.	7
Area mentioned	Loders and Bradpole, Gillingham, Cattistock.	7
Maintenance and Enforcement	Staff needed to enforce countryside code/help maintain the paths for safety etc.	5
Connectivity improvement	Improve coverage of networks (phone reception and Wi-Fi across).	4
Safety of routes	Dangerous roads, safe alternatives	4
Community and Volunteer Involvement	Bridport Banter, TIC, next door, parents/children, village shops.	4
Cyclist	Cyclist impacting residents, speed of cyclist around corners.	3
Animals mentioned, access	Dogs, horses.	3
Encourage not using cars	Against car usage.	2
Accessibility and Inclusion	Safety of kids.	2
User Information and Education	Education/information for residents/tourist.	2
Farmers/landowners blocking land/gates	Landowners/farmers obstructing paths and the effects of this.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	4

Policy 3 – Making our network more accessible

Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-190



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	109	57.4%
Agree	51	26.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	19	10.0%
Disagree	8	4.2%
Strongly disagree	3	1.6%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Support for this policy was strong, with 57.4% (109) of respondents strongly agreeing and a further 26.8% (51) agreeing with the proposal. These results suggest that respondents were generally supportive of efforts to make the Public Rights of Way network more accessible.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 10.0% (19), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. In contrast, 5.8% (11) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while no respondents selected 'Don't know', indicating that opposition and uncertainty towards the policy were relatively limited.

Respondents with a disability were more likely to strongly agree with the policy (71.4%, 20) than those without a disability (61.3%, 84). This suggests particularly strong support among respondents with a disability for measures aimed at improving accessibility across the Public Rights of Way network.

Q10. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-146

Feedback focused primarily on improving accessibility and inclusion, including the removal of physical barriers, enhanced access for disabled users, and better provision for horse riders, cyclists, and other network users.

Theme	Description	Total
Accessibility Improvements & Inclusion	General support for improving accessibility and inclusivity of the network.	60
Stiles, Gates & Physical Barriers	Replacing stiles, improving gates, removing kissing gates and other barriers.	36
Bridleways & Equestrian Access	More bridleways, upgrading footpaths, safer equestrian access and horse-rider needs.	36
Wheelchair, Mobility Scooter & Disability Access	Comments specifically relating to wheelchair users, mobility scooters, disabled users and accessibility aids.	31
Cycling Infrastructure & Route Development	More cycle routes, cycle commuting routes, trailways and cycling provision.	28
Road Safety & Off-Road Alternatives	Safer alternatives to busy roads for walking, cycling and riding.	26
Route Connectivity & Network Links	Joining up routes, linking communities and reducing network gaps.	24
Maintenance & Vegetation Management	Overgrown routes, cutting back vegetation, repairs and maintenance issues.	24
Women's, Children's & Vulnerable User Safety	Safety considerations for women, families, children and vulnerable users.	18
Support for Loders-Bradpole / Former Railway Route	Specific support for the proposed off-road route and railway alignment.	16
Surface Improvements	Requests for better surfaces, smoother routes and accessible surfacing.	13
Landowner Responsibilities & Cooperation	Comments regarding landowners maintaining routes and supporting improvements.	12

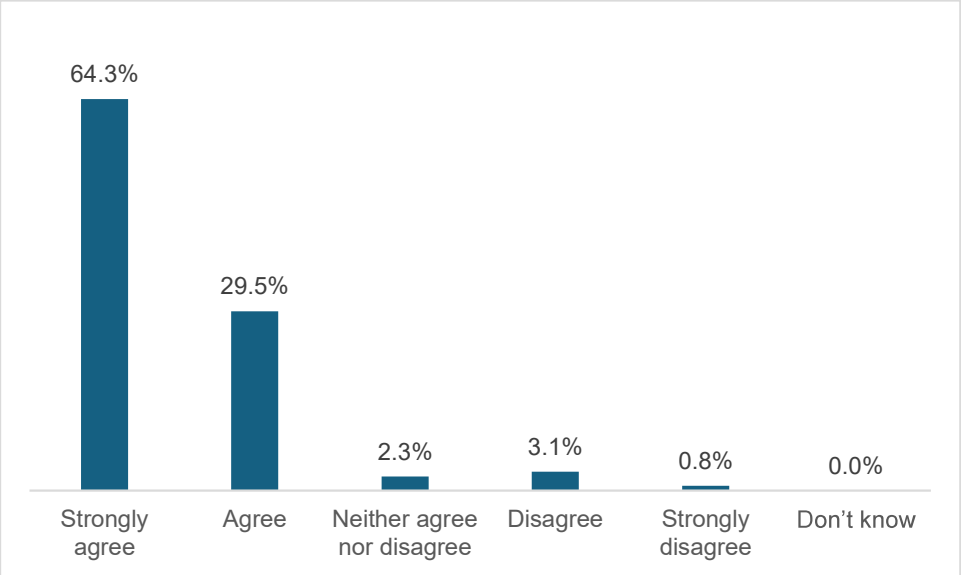
Signage, Mapping & Route Information	Better wayfinding, route maps, signposting and accessibility information.	11
Concerns About Cyclists / E-Bikes	Cyclist behaviour, speed, shared-use conflicts and e-bike concerns.	10
Concerns About Surfacing / Tarmacking	Concerns that upgrades may urbanise routes or make them unsuitable for horses.	10
Parking & Access to Routes	Lack of car parking and transport access barriers.	9
Horse-Friendly Gates & Infrastructure	Horse-accessible gates, infrastructure and British Horse Society standards.	8
Funding, Cost & Deliverability Concerns	Questions about funding, value for money and practicality.	8
Environmental & Rural Character Concerns	Protecting countryside character, wildlife and avoiding over-urbanisation.	7
Community, Health & Active Travel Benefits	Benefits for health, community connectivity, sustainable travel and independence.	7
Separate Routes for Different Users	Requests for dedicated routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.	6
Motor Vehicle Access Rights	Requests to retain or improve access for motorised users on BOATs/UCRs.	6
Seating & Rest Facilities	Requests for benches, resting places and facilities.	5
General Support / Positive Comment	General support without substantial additional comment.	5
Equality & Diversity Commentary	Comments relating to equality, inclusion or diversity rationale.	4

Opposition to Loders-Bradpole Route	Objections to routing proposals through Loders village.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	21

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

Q11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-129



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	83	64.3%
Agree	38	29.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	2.3%
Disagree	4	3.1%
Strongly disagree	1	0.8%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Respondents expressed high levels of support for this policy, with 64.3% (83) of respondents strongly agreeing and a further 29.5% (38) agreeing with the proposal. Responses suggest that respondents were positive about empowering communities to help improve their local Public Rights of Way network.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 2.3% (3), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. In contrast, 3.9% (5) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while no

respondents selected ‘Don’t know’, indicating that opposition and uncertainty towards the policy were minimal.

Respondents with a disability were more likely to strongly agree with the policy (78.6%, 11) than those without a disability (66.3%, 63). This suggests particularly strong support among respondents with a disability for greater community involvement in improving the Public Rights of Way network.

Q12. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-80

Respondents highlighted the importance of community involvement, partnership working, and the use of local knowledge in improving and managing the rights of way network.

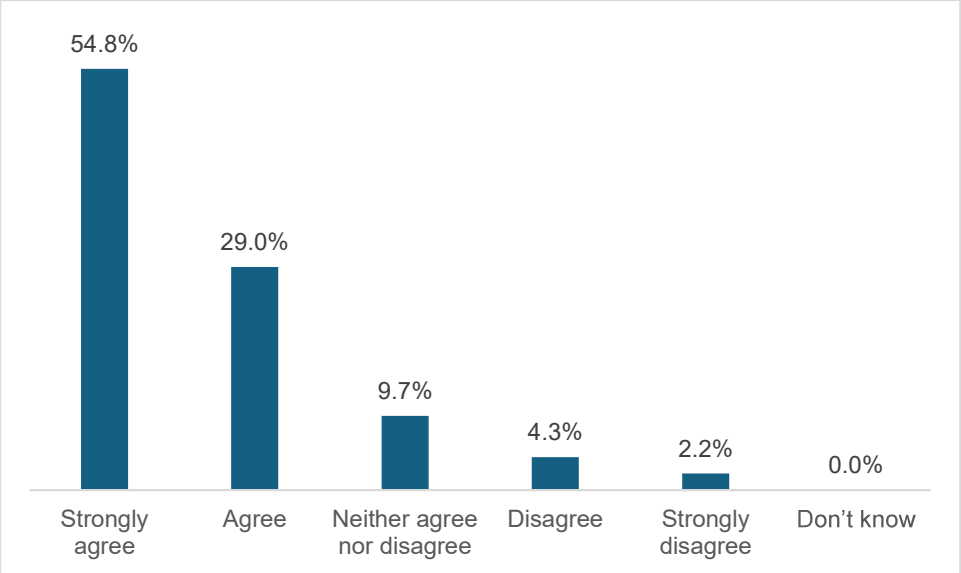
Theme	Description	Total
Community involvement and use of local knowledge	Local knowledge, community-led groups in villages/, listen to community concerns, riding club.	29
Partnership working with parish councils and local groups	Support community groups campaign, council must listen to communities, improve links to Parish councils, employ staff, volunteers for designated paths.	20
Volunteer recruitment, coordination and support	Action, growing network, volunteer initiatives, involving students, funding, encourage community to clean rights of way.	18
Funding, training and resources	Rewards for volunteers, lack of staff, flexible hours.	7
Maintenance and accessibility of rights of way	Signage and cleaning tasks.	6
Walking, cycling and bridleway connectivity, safe paths	Coombe Road, schools to advise parents on children’s health, safe paths.	6
Communication, engagement and reporting	Local advertising, awareness improvement.	5
Council leadership, responsiveness and accountability	Council to have more accountability and respond to matters within a business week.	5

Reducing barriers to volunteering	Reduce paperwork, designate an officer for bridleway.	3
Landowner obstruction and enforcement	Chiswell, Portland.	3
Join existing PROW	Join up routes for the benefit of the wider community.	2
Improve accuracy of maps	Reporting issues of maps/ paths that are obstructed.	2
Consultation question	Minority viewpoints etc.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	28

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

Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-93



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	51	54.8%
Agree	27	29.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	9	9.7%
Disagree	4	4.3%
Strongly disagree	2	2.2%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Views on this policy were generally positive, with 54.8% (51) of respondents strongly agreeing and a further 29.0% (27) agreeing with the proposal. Responses suggest

that respondents were supportive of using the Public Rights of Way network to help contribute to Dorset's economy.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 9.7% (9), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. In contrast, 6.5% (6) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while no respondents selected 'Don't know', indicating that opposition to the policy remained relatively low.

Q14. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-62

Key themes included the economic and tourism benefits of the rights of way network, together with improved connectivity and sustainable transport links.

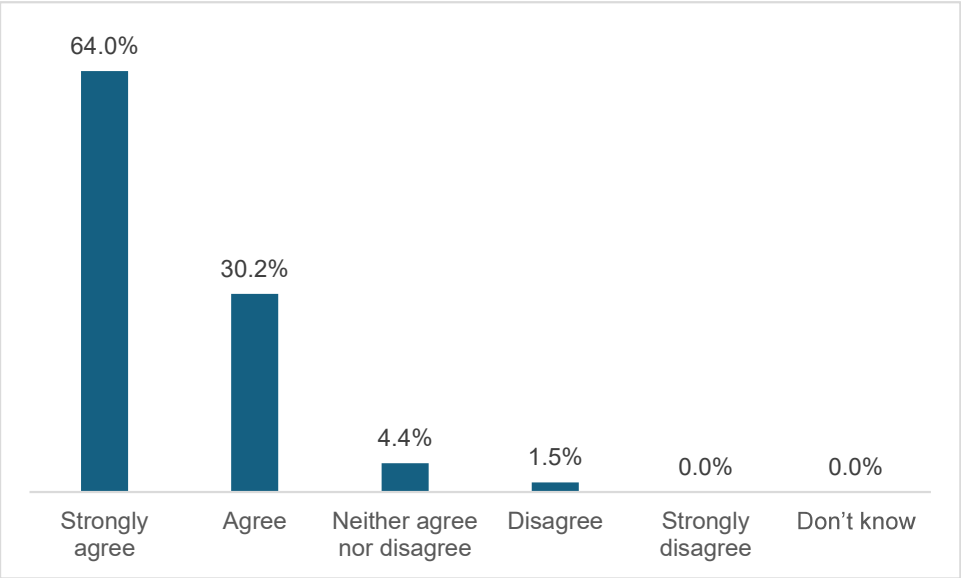
Theme	Description	Total
Local Economy & Business Benefits	References to supporting local businesses, pubs, cafés, shops, jobs, tourism enterprises and the wider rural economy.	12
Sustainable Transport & Connectivity	Better links between settlements, services, employment, schools and transport hubs.	11
Tourism Promotion & Visitor Economy	Support for encouraging tourism, extending the tourist season and promoting Dorset as a destination.	10
Concerns About Over-Tourism	Concerns that increased promotion could lead to overcrowding, erosion, environmental damage or loss of tranquillity.	7
Health, Wellness & Active Travel	Support for cycling as transport, commuting and reducing traffic. Encourage improving health by walking and cycling.	7
Community Benefits & Local Services	Benefits to schools, village halls, pubs and community facilities.	7
Rights of Way Network Improvements First	Improvements to the network should take priority before promotion or economic development.	6

Support for Former Railway / Long Distance Routes	Support for cycleways or routes along former railway alignments and strategic routes.	6
Parking & Public Transport Access	Need for parking provision and public transport to enable access to routes.	5
General Support / Positive Comment	General support without substantial additional detail.	5
Environmental Protection & Rural Character	Importance of protecting Dorset's natural environment, landscape and remoteness.	4
Loders-Bradpole / Bridport Route Support	Specific support for improved connectivity between Loders, Bradpole and Bridport.	3
Signposting & Promotion of Local Businesses	Better signposting to businesses and amenities near rights of way.	3
Definitive Map Process / Access Creation	Concerns regarding the process for adding routes to the network or reopening historical routes.	3
Tourism Growth Should Be Spatially Balanced	Support for tourism and economic benefits being distributed across all parts of Dorset.	3
Commuting & Everyday Travel Prioritisation	Support for routes and connections that enable daily travel to work, education, services and transport hubs.	3
Cycling Should Not Be Prioritised	Concerns that cyclists are prioritised over other users.	2
Bridleways & Equestrian Economy	Recognition of the economic contribution of horse riding and the need for a good bridleway network.	2
Path Maintenance & Quality	Well-maintained paths seen as essential to attracting users and visitors.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	8

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

Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-136



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	87	64.0%
Agree	41	30.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	6	4.4%
Disagree	2	1.5%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Respondents expressed high levels of agreement with this policy, with 64.0% (87) strongly agreeing and a further 30.2% (41) agreeing with the proposal. Feedback indicates that respondents were supportive of measures to encourage compliance with the Countryside Code and access legislation while respecting the interests of landowners.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 4.4% (6), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. Just 1.5% (2) of respondents disagreed, while no respondents strongly disagreed or selected 'Don't know', indicating very limited opposition or uncertainty towards the policy.

Q16. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-88

Comments most commonly related to landowner responsibilities, rights of way maintenance, enforcement, and responsible use of the network.

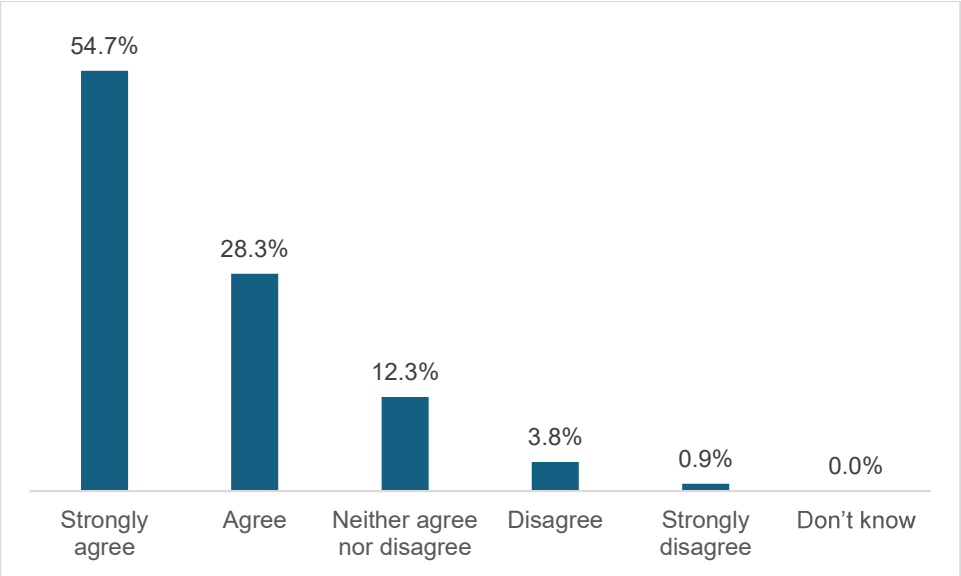
Theme	Description	Total
Landowners obstructing paths/relationship with landowners	Supporting collaborative approaches with landowners and farmers to maintain routes, improve access and develop solutions together; repeat offences of landowner violations.	31
Rights of Way Maintenance and Accessibility	Keeping footpaths, bridleways, gates, stiles and signage open, well-maintained, clearly marked and accessible year-round.	22
Stronger Enforcement and Accountability	Greater enforcement of responsibilities for both landowners and users, including action against obstructions, misuse and repeat offenders.	16
Wildlife, Livestock and Environmental Protection	Safeguarding wildlife, birds, livestock, habitats and the wider countryside through responsible access and behaviour.	16
Countryside code knowledge	Educating residents in countryside code knowledge; lack of knowledge.	15
Motorised Vehicle and E-bike Misuse	Tackling the impacts of off-road vehicles, illegal e-bikes and e-scooters on safety, route condition and user experience.	10
Location mentioned	Castleman Trailway, Clayford Estate, Redbridge, Whitecliff Park (Poole), Cranbourne Common, Wraxall Lane, Loders and Bradpole, Salwayash.	7
Mutual Respect Between Landowners and Users	Promoting a balanced, two-way relationship where both landowners and the public respect each other's rights and responsibilities.	7
Responsible Dog Ownership	Encouraging responsible behaviour around livestock, keeping dogs under control, and reducing dog fouling.	7
Respectful User Behaviour	Addressing issues such as littering, leaving gates open, straying from paths, disturbing livestock, failing to follow countryside guidance, and dog poo.	7
Communication and Information Sharing	Providing better information on route conditions, livestock presence, reporting issues, and clarifying responsibilities between councils and landowners.	7

Managing Conflicts Between Different User Groups	Improving shared use of routes between walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other users through courtesy, awareness and considerate behaviour.	5
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	24

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

Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-106



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	58	54.7%
Agree	30	28.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	13	12.3%
Disagree	4	3.8%
Strongly disagree	1	0.9%
Don't know	0	0.0%

The proposed policy received a positive response from respondents, with 54.7% (58) strongly agreeing and a further 28.3% (30) agreeing with the proposal. Responses suggest that respondents were generally supportive of using new housing development and the Local Plan to enhance the Public Rights of Way network.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 12.3% (13), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. In contrast, 4.7% (5) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while no respondents selected 'Don't know', indicating relatively low levels of opposition and uncertainty towards the policy.

Q18. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-74

Comments most commonly related to strengthening developer accountability, protecting existing rights of way, and ensuring development contributes to improved access and network connectivity. Respondents also highlighted the importance of integrating rights of way considerations into the planning process from an early stage.

Theme	Description	Total
Stronger developer accountability and enforcement	Developers supporting the community. Community consent, on-site inspections, improved applications. Developers should be legally required to deliver agreed rights-of-way improvements. Planning conditions, Section 106 agreements and approved proposals must be enforced. Requests for penalties, inspections, stronger oversight and prevention of developers avoiding obligations.	38
Protection of existing rights of way	Strong concern about existing paths being built over, diverted, lost, severed or undermined by development. Calls to retain, protect and improve existing rights of way within and around development sites. Requests to prevent unnecessary path closures and ensure existing network continuity.	22
Expansion of the rights of way network and creation of new links	Calls for additional rights of way to accompany housing growth. Support for creating missing links and expanding local and strategic route networks. Suggestions for new routes between villages, towns and key destinations. (towns/villages).	14
Concerns about housing growth outpacing infrastructure provision	Concerns that housing growth is occurring before supporting infrastructure is delivered. References to pressures on healthcare, roads, drainage and wider services. Some comments prioritise wider infrastructure improvements alongside access improvements. East Dorset, North Dorset, Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Mosterton are mentioned.	12

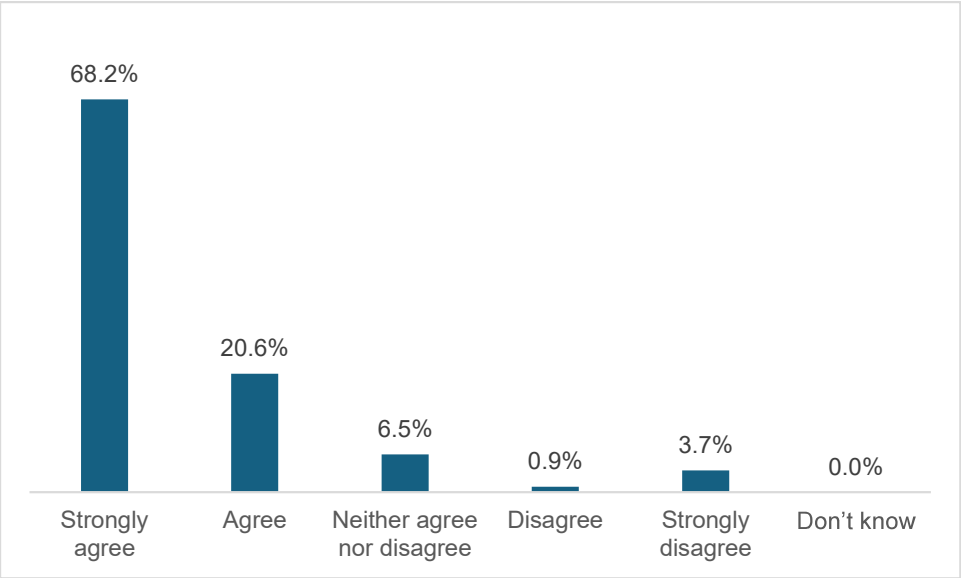
Improved walking, cycling and riding connectivity	Support for better links for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Calls to eliminate gaps, road sections and barriers within existing networks. Emphasis on creating safe off-road connections between communities and destinations.	8
Better maintenance, signage and long-term management of routes	Concerns about poor maintenance, overgrown paths, unclear routes and inadequate signage. Calls for ongoing management plans and dedicated funding for maintenance. Importance of wayfinding in and around new housing developments.	7
Direct links between new housing and local services, schools and public transport	New developments should provide direct walking and cycling connections to schools, shops, employment areas, medical facilities and public transport. Residents should have easy access to nearby rights of way and open spaces. Support for reducing the need for car journeys.	7
Use of Section 106, CIL and developer funding for access improvements	Strong support for using developer contributions to fund rights of way enhancements. Requests to allocate funding for maintenance, Trailways, strategic projects and local access improvements. Suggestions to explore additional funding sources where development contributions may be insufficient.	6
Completion of access routes early in the development process	New paths and access routes should be delivered at the beginning of construction rather than after completion (schools, medical centres expansion). Development-related closures should be minimised and alternative routes clearly provided.	5
Community and parish involvement in route planning	Requests for parish councils, local communities, user groups and Rights of Way Liaison Officers to be involved in planning (planning officers). Local knowledge is seen as important in shaping route design and priorities.	5
General positive comment	Positive comments about opportunities to improve access through development were done well.	4

Protection of green spaces, countryside access and wildlife corridors	Desire to retain green spaces and countryside access despite development pressures. Support for keeping paths as wildlife corridors and protecting natural environments. Concerns about loss of green routes and countryside character.	4
Need for stronger planning policies, monitoring and compliance measures	Reduce costs of diversion orders; need for planning officers and committees to give greater weight to rights of way considerations.	4
Early consideration of rights of way in planning and design	Rights of way and active travel routes should be embedded from the earliest stages of development planning. Access requirements should be clear and mandatory before planning approval is granted. Developers should plan around existing and future route networks at the design stage.	3
Support for trailways and strategic active travel corridors	Strong support for the North Dorset Trailway and former railway corridors. Requests for better access to Trailways from new developments. Support for long-distance, strategic walking and cycling routes linking communities.	2
Resolving historic severance and reconnecting communities	Requests to address long-standing disconnections caused by roads, development and historic route changes.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	19

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

Q19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-107



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	73	68.2%
Agree	22	20.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	7	6.5%
Disagree	1	0.9%
Strongly disagree	4	3.7%
Don't know	0	0.0%

High levels of agreement were recorded for this policy, with 68.2% (73) of respondents strongly agreeing and a further 20.6% (22) agreeing. Responses suggest that respondents recognised the important role that the Public Rights of Way network can play in supporting health and wellbeing.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 6.5% (7), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. In contrast, 4.6% (5) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while no respondents selected 'Don't know', indicating limited opposition or uncertainty towards the policy.

Support for the policy was higher among male respondents, with all male respondents (100.0%, 35) either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the policy, compared with 82.0% (50) of female respondents. Despite this difference, support for the policy remained high among both groups.

Q20. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-72

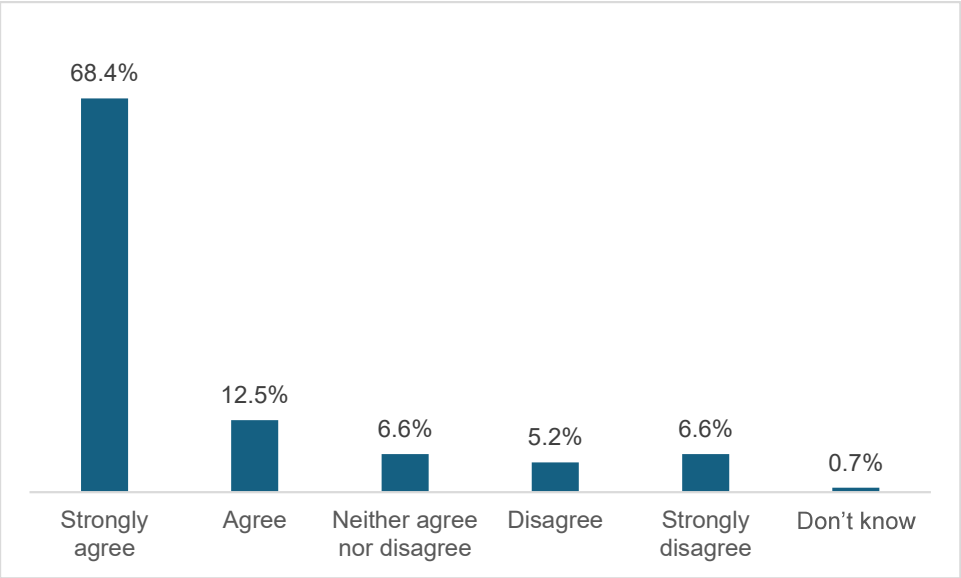
Comments most commonly related to the health and wellbeing benefits of access to the countryside, alongside the importance of active travel, connectivity, safety improvements, and maintaining accessible rights of way.

Theme	Description	Total
Health and wellbeing benefits	Countryside access, outdoor recreation and physical activity improve health for children; dust from traffic.	28
Active travel and connectivity	Walking, cycling and wheeling routes linking communities, schools, workplaces and services.	18
Location mentioned	Nether Compton, Sherborne, A30, Puddletown, Wareham, Little Coll, Great Coll, Winterborne Kingston, Charisworth, Marrowbone Lane, Bothenhampton.	17
Safety and infrastructure improvements	Everyday journeys, particularly for children and vulnerable users, Traffic.	17
Maintenance and accessibility of rights of way	Surfacing, vegetation clearance, usability and year-round access.	12
Car dependency versus active travel	Mixed views on reducing car use in a rural county.	9
Inclusive access for all users	People with disabilities, horse riders, and motorised users.	8
Investment, promotion and long-term delivery	Funding, signage, mapping, maintenance and community engagement.	6
Access to paths	Obstructed paths, bridleways, footpaths and the difficulties this can have.	3
Countryside and environmental protection	Balancing access improvements with preserving rural character.	2
Managing competing user needs and conflicts	Between different groups using the network.	2
Support for specific route improvements	The proposed Loders–Bradpole and A35 corridor links.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	17

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

Q21. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-136



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	93	68.4%
Agree	17	12.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	9	6.6%
Disagree	7	5.2%
Strongly disagree	9	6.6%
Don't know	1	0.7%

Support for the proposed policy was strong overall, with 68.4% (93) of respondents strongly agreeing and a further 12.5% (17) agreeing with the proposal. These findings suggest broad backing for the policy among respondents, with more than four in five expressing a positive view.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 6.6% (9), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. In contrast, 11.8% (16) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 0.7% (1) selected 'Don't know'. Although support for the policy remained substantially higher than opposition, this policy recorded the highest level of disagreement across all of the proposed policies.

Support for the policy was higher among male respondents, with 91.3% (42) either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the policy, compared with 79.5% (58) of female respondents. Female respondents were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the policy (15.1%, 11) than male respondents (2.2%, 1).

Respondents aged 50-64 were less likely to agree or strongly agree with the policy (76.7%, 33) than respondents aged 49 and under (90.0%, 27) and those aged 65 and over (87.2%, 41). Respondents aged 50-64 were also more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the policy (16.3%, 7) than the other age groups.

Q22. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-102

Comments covered a range of issues, most commonly relating to safer active travel routes, improved connectivity, and enhancements to the rights of way network.

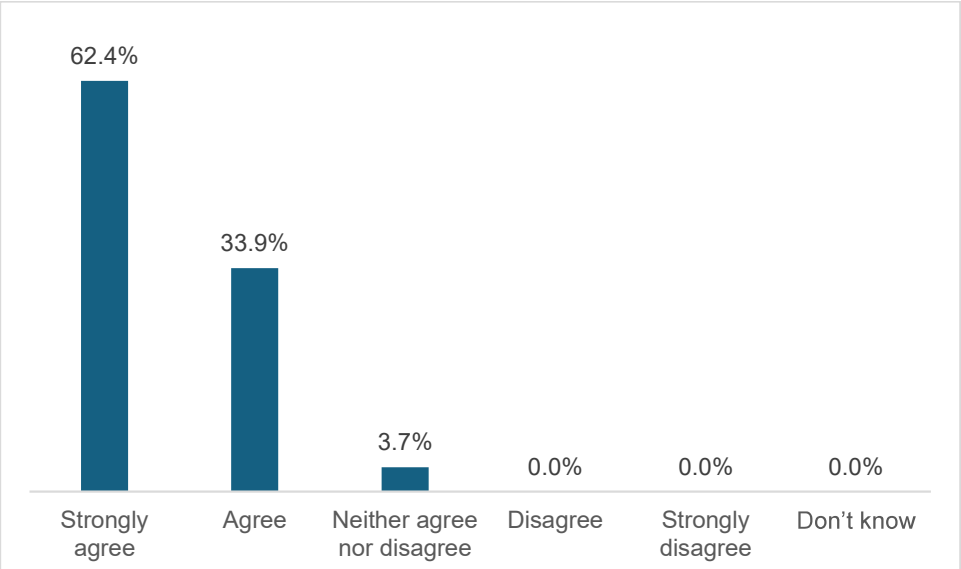
Theme	Description	Total
Safer walking, cycling and wheeling routes, particularly on rural roads	Dangerous rural roads, Safe routes for children and school travel, Safety for vulnerable users and mobility aid users, Women's safety, lighting and visibility.	46
Connectivity and Access	Linking villages, towns and communities, Access to schools, employment, healthcare and leisure facilities, better access to rail stations and bus services, reducing rural isolation.	24
Public Rights of Way (PROW) and Network Enhancement	Better use of PROWs, bridleways and UCRs, linking existing routes together, closing gaps in the network, improving everyday journey opportunities.	16
Concerns About Trailway Impacts	Increased parking and congestion, Impacts on villages and local residents, Effects on wildlife and rural character, Concerns about visitor numbers and tourism pressures.	9
Support vs Opposition to Active Travel Proposals	Strong support for active travel expansion, Conditional support subject to safeguards, Opposition to specific routes or locations, Concerns about impacts outweighing benefits in some areas.	7
Infrastructure Quality and Accessibility	High-quality surfaces and route standards, Accessibility for all users, Maintenance, drainage and flooding issues, Integration with new housing developments.	6
Funding, Delivery and Prioritisation	Project costs and funding availability, Need for clear route proposals and implementation plans, Long-term maintenance and resources, Prioritisation of schemes and investment.	5

Support for active travel to reduce car use, carbon emissions and improve health	Reducing car dependency, lowering carbon emissions and pollution, improving physical and mental health, supporting sustainable tourism.	4
Trailways and Former Railway Routes	Support for converting former railway lines, extending and completing trailway networks, creating traffic-free routes, Support for specific schemes (e.g. Loders-Bradpole, Maiden Newton-Bridport).	2
Community Consultation and Local Support	Engagement with affected communities, Local agreement on route alignments, Consideration of site-specific issues, balancing benefits and impacts.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	23

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

Q23. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed policy?

Base: n-109



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	68	62.4%
Agree	37	33.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	4	3.7%
Disagree	0	0.0%

Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Views on this policy were overwhelmingly positive, with 62.4% (68) of respondents strongly agreeing and a further 33.9% (37) agreeing with the proposal. Responses indicate strong support for the council maintaining an up-to-date definitive map and statement that is accessible to the public, with almost all respondents expressing agreement.

A small proportion of respondents, 3.7% (4), neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy. Notably, no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal, and no respondents selected 'Don't know'. This policy received the highest overall level of agreement across all proposed policies, highlighting particularly strong consensus among respondents.

Q24. Do you have any other comments about this proposed policy?

Base: n-54

Comments covered a range of themes, with the most frequently mentioned relating to accurate and up-to-date mapping and access information.

Theme	Description	Total
Up-to-date access all the time/ Accurate and up-to-date mapping	Maintaining and updating the Definitive Map, maps available in library/community areas.	24
Enforcement/legal protection requested	Ensuring landowners abide by the rules/law; more staff needed to enforce.	8
Accessibility improvement	Maps helpful for disabled residents, horse riders, residents with no cars, etc.	7
Maintaining and updating the Definitive Map.	Maps that are user-friendly, widely available, and easy to navigate.	5
Improved wayfinding and signage on the ground,	Rural areas where routes can be difficult to follow.	5

Engagement with local communities and parish councils	Improve awareness, accuracy, and understanding of rights of way.	5
Enhanced digital tools and reporting systems	Simple ways to report issues, track progress, and receive updates.	4
General support for maintaining and improving the current mapping service	Maps not up to date.	4
Maintenance of routes alongside mapping improvements	Ensuring mapped routes remain clear, accessible, and passable.	2
Promotion and awareness of Dorset Explorer and mapping resources	Respondents were unaware of available tools.	2
Need for adequate resourcing and staffing	Backlogs, process changes, and maintaining mapping accuracy.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	19

Section 4: Priorities

Q25. Which of the following are most important to you? (Rank up to 3)

Item	Ranking
Maintaining and improving the existing Public Rights of Way network	2.37
Making our network more accessible	0.87
Ensuring the Countryside Code and access legislation is followed, and Landowners are respected	0.54
Raise awareness of Public Rights of Way	0.49
Maximise our PROW for Sustainable transport linking communities and active travel	0.41
Empowering Communities to help improve their Public Rights of Way Network	0.37
To uphold the council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement which is accessible to the public	0.29

Maximise the PROW network's contribution to health and wellbeing	0.21
Using new housing development and the Local Plan to enhance Public Rights of Way	0.14
Building the Dorset Economy through our Public Rights of Way Network	0.11

Respondents identified 'maintaining and improving the existing Public Rights of Way network' as the highest priority, achieving a ranking score of 2.37. This was substantially higher than any other priority, indicating a clear preference for investment in the maintenance and improvement of the existing network.

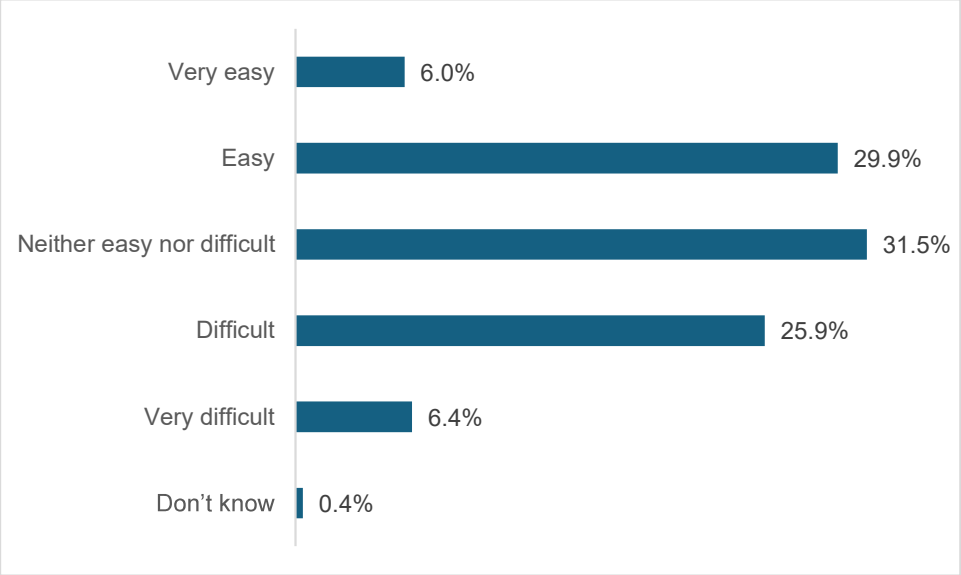
'Making our network more accessible' (0.87) was the second-highest ranked priority, followed by 'ensuring the Countryside Code and access legislation is followed, and landowners are respected' (0.54) and 'raising awareness of Public Rights of Way' (0.49).

Priorities relating to 'health and wellbeing' (0.21) and 'housing development' (0.14) received lower scores, while 'building the Dorset economy through our Public Rights of Way network' ranked lowest overall (0.11).

Section 5: Your experience of the network

Q26a. How easy or difficult is it to use rights of way in Dorset?

Base: n-499



Option	Total	Percent

Very easy	30	6.0%
Easy	149	29.9%
Neither easy nor difficult	157	31.5%
Difficult	129	25.9%
Very difficult	32	6.4%
Don't know	2	0.4%

Responses were mixed regarding how easy or difficult it is to use rights of way in Dorset. Around a third of respondents, 29.9% (149), reported that they find rights of way easy to use, while 6.0% (30) said they are very easy to use.

A similar proportion, 31.5% (157), felt that rights of way were neither easy nor difficult to use, indicating that many respondents did not perceive the network as either particularly simple or particularly challenging to use.

In contrast, 25.9% (129) of respondents reported that rights of way are difficult to use and 6.4% (32) said they are very difficult to use. Just 0.4% (2) selected 'Don't know', indicating that almost all respondents were able to provide a view on this issue.

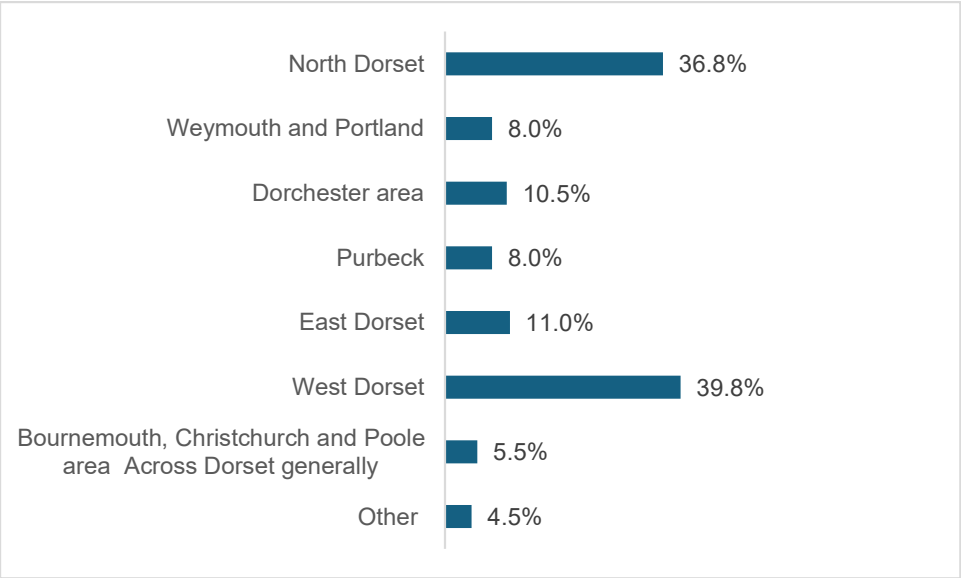
Respondents with a disability were more likely to report that rights of way are difficult or very difficult to use (47.2%, 25) than respondents without a disability (30.7%, 123). This suggests that respondents with a disability were more likely to experience challenges when using the Public Rights of Way network

Female respondents were more likely to report that rights of way are difficult or very difficult to use (36.9%, 101) than male respondents (25.0%, 47). This suggests that female respondents were more likely to experience challenges when using the Public Rights of Way network.

Respondents aged 49 and under were more likely to report that rights of way are difficult or very difficult to use (41.2%, 47) than respondents aged 50-64 (29.1%, 51) and those aged 65 and over (30.3%, 54), indicating lower perceived ease of use among younger respondents.

Q26b. If you answered "Difficult" or "Very difficult" above, which area(s) of Dorset were you thinking about?

Base: n-201



Option	Total	Percent
North Dorset	74	36.8%
Weymouth and Portland	16	8.0%
Dorchester area	21	10.5%
Purbeck	16	8.0%
East Dorset	22	11.0%
West Dorset	80	39.8%
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) area /across Dorset generally	11	5.5%
Other (please specify)	9	4.5%

Respondents who reported that rights of way were difficult or very difficult to use were most likely to identify West Dorset (39.8%, 80) and North Dorset (36.8%, 74) as areas where they experienced challenges using the network.

Smaller proportions of respondents identified East Dorset (11.0%, 22), the Dorchester area (10.5%, 21), Weymouth and Portland (8.0%, 16) and Purbeck (8.0%, 16). A further 5.5% (11) of respondents referred to the BCP area or Dorset generally, while 4.5% (9) selected ‘Other’.

These findings indicate that concerns about the ease of using rights of way were reported across Dorset, although respondents were most likely to identify West Dorset and North Dorset when reflecting on their experiences.

Other comments:

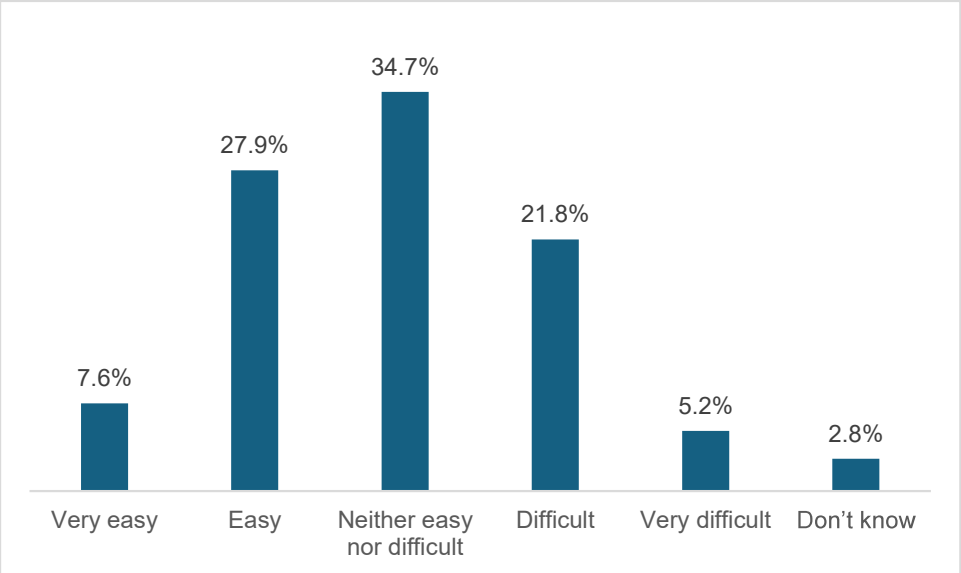
Due to the small sample size, comments are presented verbatim.

Other comments:
South West
It's easy if you understand maps and understand the deffinitve map & statement.

all round
Lytchett Matravers area
A public footpath close to me ([redacted]) is used daly by walkers. When it is dry in the summer, there are no problems. In the winter and during wet weather abuse of the footpath by horses makes it impassable on many occasions.
Un maintained bridleways
erosion of cliff/coastal paths
Previous question for rating of 1, 2, or 3 failed to work!
Netherbury Parish and Salwayash and Dottery area
West Dorset, Dorchester area is the worse maintained.
Areas around Alderholt
Osmington area
Personally I am concerned that many more years will pass by before anything is done to make the loders Bradpole railway link complete.
Some are easy, some not. Depends on the soil type, vegetation, sun, rain etc etc.
Due to lack parking
Out of Poundbury only.
E54/31

Q27. How easy or difficult is it to find information about routes?

Base: n-499



Option	Total	Percent
Very easy	38	7.6%
Easy	139	27.9%
Neither easy nor difficult	173	34.7%
Difficult	109	21.8%
Very difficult	26	5.2%

Don’t know	14	2.8%

Responses were mixed regarding how easy or difficult it is to find information about routes. Around a third of respondents, 27.9% (139), reported that finding route information is easy, while 7.6% (38) said it is very easy.

The most common response was neither easy nor difficult, selected by 34.7% (173) of respondents, indicating that many did not perceive finding information about routes as either particularly simple or particularly challenging.

In contrast, 21.8% (109) of respondents reported that finding route information is difficult and 5.2% (26) said it is very difficult. A further 2.8% (14) selected ‘Don’t know’, suggesting a small proportion of respondents were unsure or had not sought route information.

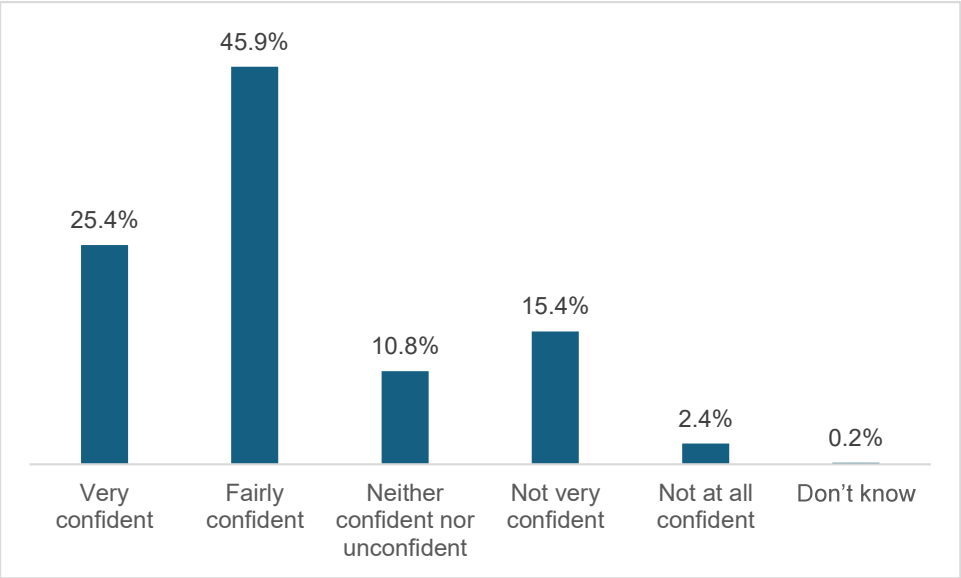
Respondents with a disability were more likely to report that finding information about routes is difficult or very difficult (35.9%, 19) than respondents without a disability (25.9%, 104). This suggests that respondents with a disability may experience greater challenges accessing information about Public Rights of Way routes.

Female respondents were more likely to report that finding information about routes is difficult or very difficult (31.1%, 85) than male respondents (21.7%, 41). This suggests that female respondents experienced greater difficulty accessing information about Public Rights of Way routes.

Respondents aged 49 and under were more likely to report that finding information about routes is difficult or very difficult (33.3%, 38) than respondents aged 65 and over (24.2%, 43). This indicates that younger respondents were less positive about the ease of finding route information.

Q28. What is your level of confidence when navigating public paths and routes?

Base: n-501



Option	Total	Percent
Very confident	127	25.4%
Fairly confident	230	45.9%
Neither confident nor unconfident	54	10.8%
Not very confident	77	15.4%
Not at all confident	12	2.4%
Don't know	1	0.2%

Respondents were generally confident when navigating public paths and routes. Nearly half of respondents, 45.9% (230), reported being fairly confident, while a further 25.4% (127) said they were very confident.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 10.8% (54), reported being neither confident nor unconfident, indicating that they did not hold a particularly strong view about their ability to navigate public paths and routes.

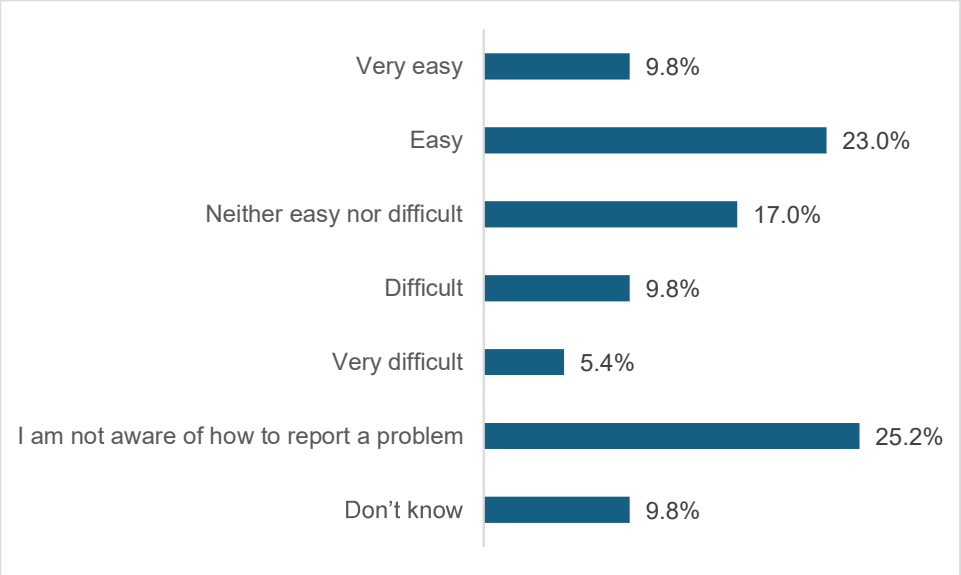
In contrast, 15.4% (77) of respondents reported that they were not very confident and 2.4% (12) said they were not at all confident. Just 0.2% (1) selected 'Don't know', suggesting that almost all respondents were able to provide a view on their confidence when navigating the network.

Respondents with a disability were more likely to report being not very confident or not at all confident when navigating public paths and routes (22.6%, 12) than respondents without a disability (16.9%, 68). This suggests that respondents with a disability were less confident when navigating the Public Rights of Way network.

Female respondents were more likely to report being not very confident or not at all confident when navigating public paths and routes (21.5%, 59) than male respondents (12.7%, 24). This suggests that female respondents were less confident when navigating the Public Rights of Way network.

Q29. How easy or difficult is it to report a problem on a path?

Base: n-500



Option	Total	Percent
Very easy	49	9.8%
Easy	115	23.0%
Neither easy nor difficult	85	17.0%
Difficult	49	9.8%
Very difficult	27	5.4%
I am not aware of how to report a problem	126	25.2%
Don't know	49	9.8%

Respondents expressed a range of views on how easy or difficult it is to report a problem on a path. Around a third of respondents, 23.0% (115), reported that reporting a problem is easy, while 9.8% (49) said it is very easy.

A further 17.0% (85) of respondents reported that reporting a problem is neither easy nor difficult, indicating that they did not perceive the process as either particularly simple or particularly challenging.

In contrast, 9.8% (49) of respondents reported that reporting a problem is difficult and 5.4% (27) said it is very difficult. A notable proportion of respondents, 25.2% (126), indicated that they were not aware of how to report a problem, while a further 9.8% (49) selected 'Don't know'. This suggests that a considerable proportion of respondents were unable to assess the process for reporting problems, highlighting a potential gap in awareness of the available reporting mechanisms.

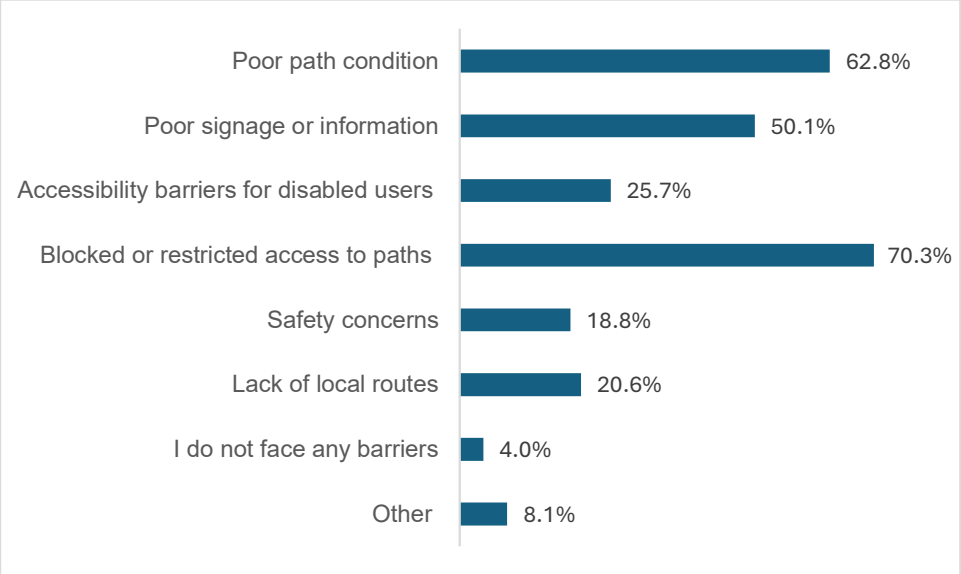
Consistent with this finding, respondents with a disability were more likely to indicate that they were not aware of how to report a problem on a path (32.1%, 17) than

respondents without a disability (23.9%, 96), suggesting lower awareness of the process for reporting Public Rights of Way issues among respondents with a disability.

Respondents aged 49 and under were more likely to indicate that they were not aware of how to report a problem on a path (31.6%, 36) than respondents aged 50-64 (26.3%, 46) and those aged 65 and over (19.7%, 35). While perceptions of the reporting process were broadly similar across the age groups, awareness of how to report a problem was lower among younger respondents.

Q30. What barriers, if any, do you experience when using rights of way in Dorset?

Base: n-495



Option	Total	Percent
Poor path condition	311	62.8%
Poor signage or information	248	50.1%
Accessibility barriers for disabled users (for example: stiles, rough or uneven surfaces, steep slopes)	127	25.7%
Blocked or restricted access to paths (for example: locked gates, closed paths, overgrown routes)	348	70.3%
Safety concerns	93	18.8%
Lack of local routes	102	20.6%
I do not face any barriers	20	4.0%
Other (please specify)	40	8.1%

Other comments

The other barrier comments focused largely on the maintenance and accessibility of the rights of way network, particularly vegetation management, access infrastructure, and route connectivity.

Theme	Description	Total
Vegetation and Path Maintenance	Overgrown paths, brambles, nettles and vegetation, Fallen trees and blocked routes, Muddy, boggy and waterlogged paths, General lack of maintenance of footpaths, bridleways and green lanes.	25
Access Infrastructure Issues	Broken or poorly maintained stiles, Broken bridges and footbridges, Difficult, poorly designed or poorly maintained gates, Lack of dog gates and dog-friendly access features.	23
Poor Connectivity and Fragmented Networks	Routes that do not link together, Bridleways and footpaths ending abruptly, Lack of circular routes, Missing links between sections of the network.	13
Livestock and Safety Concerns	Cattle, bulls and livestock causing intimidation, Safety concerns when crossing fields with animals, Livestock restricting access to routes, Path damage caused by livestock and horses.	11
Road Safety and Hazardous Connections	Need to use busy roads to connect rights of way, Dangerous Road crossings, Lack of safe off-road alternatives, Narrow roads with limited verges.	9
Cycling Infrastructure Gaps	Lack of off-road cycling routes, disconnected cycle networks, cycle lanes ending at unsafe locations, Limited safe cycling routes for commuting and school travel.	8
Signage, Mapping and Route Information	Poor or missing signage, Difficulty identifying routes in unfamiliar areas, Reliance on maps rather than waymarking, Concerns about inaccuracies in the Definitive Map.	8

Environmental and Nuisance Issues	Dog fouling, Vegetation obstructing views, Poor-quality surfacing materials and debris, Noise and disturbance from increased traffic and development.	8
Parking and Access to Routes	Insufficient parking provision, Lack of parking near popular routes, Dependence on cars to access the network, Limited access points to trails and routes.	7
Accessibility and Inclusion	Poor access for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs, Stiles creating barriers for users with dogs, Lack of resting places and seating, Accessibility issues during wet weather.	5
Landowner, Enforcement and Closures	Obstructed or diverted paths, Landowners failing to keep routes clear, Long-term route closures, Slow resolution of reported issues, Concerns about extinguishment of rights of way.	5
Seasonal and Surface Condition Issues	Winter inaccessibility, Flooding and storm damage, agricultural crops obstructing routes, Surface deterioration from vehicle and horse use.	2
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	4

Respondents identified a range of barriers when using rights of way in Dorset. The most commonly reported barrier was blocked or restricted access to paths, selected by 70.3% (348) of respondents. This was followed by poor path condition (62.8%, 311) and poor signage or information (50.1%, 248).

Around a quarter of respondents, 25.7% (127), identified accessibility barriers for disabled users, while 20.6% (102) cited a lack of local routes and 18.8% (93) reported safety concerns.

Only 4.0% (20) of respondents indicated that they did not face any barriers when using rights of way in Dorset, suggesting that barriers are experienced by the vast majority of respondents. A further 8.1% (40) selected ‘Other’, providing additional comments on barriers not captured by the listed response options.

Respondents with a disability were more likely to identify accessibility barriers for disabled users, such as stiles, rough or uneven surfaces, and steep slopes (49.1%, 26) than respondents without a disability (21.5%, 85). This suggests that physical accessibility remains a more prominent issue for respondents with a disability when using the Public Rights of Way network.

Female respondents were more likely to identify blocked or restricted access to paths (73.8%, 200 compared with 66.7%, 124) and safety concerns (21.0%, 57 compared with 13.4%, 25) as barriers when using rights of way in Dorset, suggesting that these issues were of greater concern to female respondents.

Respondents aged 49 and under were more likely to identify a lack of local routes as a barrier when using rights of way in Dorset (34.5%, 39) than respondents aged 50-64 (16.9%, 29) and those aged 65 and over (16.5%, 29). In contrast, respondents aged 65 and over were more likely to identify accessibility barriers, such as stiles, rough or uneven surfaces, and steep slopes (34.1%, 60), than younger age groups (20.4%, 23 and 20.4%, 35 respectively).

Section 6: Final comments

Q31. Do you have any comments Dorset Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)?

Base: n-237

Comments covered a range of issues, most commonly relating to route maintenance, connectivity, safety, and accessibility.

Theme	Description	Total
Maintenance of Existing Routes	Overgrown vegetation on footpaths and bridleways, Poor path surfaces, mud, drainage and boggy routes, Broken stiles, gates, bridges and access infrastructure, calls to prioritise maintenance before creating new routes, Perception that reported issues are not resolved quickly.	44

Route Connectivity and Missing Links	Routes that end abruptly or do not connect, need to reduce reliance on busy roads between paths, Support for linking communities through traffic-free routes, Requests for strategic county-wide connections.	32
Safety on Roads and Crossings	Dangerous road crossings and road links between routes, Need for traffic-free alternatives, Concerns about routes ending on fast or busy roads, Requests for crossings, warning signs and safer connections.	31
Accessibility and Inclusion	Better access for wheelchair users, mobility scooter users and pushchairs, Removal of unnecessary barriers and restrictive infrastructure, more resting places and seating, Improved accessibility information for users, need to balance accessibility improvements with preserving natural character.	30
Bridleways and Horse Rider Access	Need for more connected bridleway networks Overgrown and impassable bridleways, difficult gates requiring riders to dismount, dangerous road sections between bridleways, Requests to upgrade some footpaths to bridleways, Calls for safer road crossings and horse-friendly infrastructure.	24
Funding and Delivery	Concerns about whether sufficient funding is available, Requests for clear implementation plans and measurable targets, Desire for faster delivery and visible outcomes, concerns that plans may remain aspirational without resources.	20

Cycling Infrastructure and Connectivity	Demand for more off-road cycle routes, Safer routes connecting towns and villages, Improved commuting and school travel routes, Requests for conversion of former railway lines into cycleways, need for better integration with active travel networks.	18
Consultation and Governance	Positive feedback on the ambition of the ROWIP, Requests for clearer, shorter consultation documents, Concerns about consultation accessibility and engagement, Requests for stronger collaboration with neighbouring authorities and local councils.	17
Landowner Responsibilities and Enforcement	Overgrown, blocked or inaccessible paths on private land, Farmers not maintaining stiles, gates and path corridors, Locked gates, narrowed paths and obstructions, need for stronger enforcement and compliance.	14
Shared Use and User Conflicts	Tensions between walkers, cyclists, horse riders and motorised users, Concerns about e-bikes and speeding cyclists, Desire for balanced access for all user groups, Differing views on shared-use paths versus separate provision.	13
Environment and Countryside Character	Importance of preserving the rural character of Dorset, Concerns about over-development or urbanisation of routes, need to balance access improvements with environmental protection, Consideration of biodiversity and wildlife impacts.	13

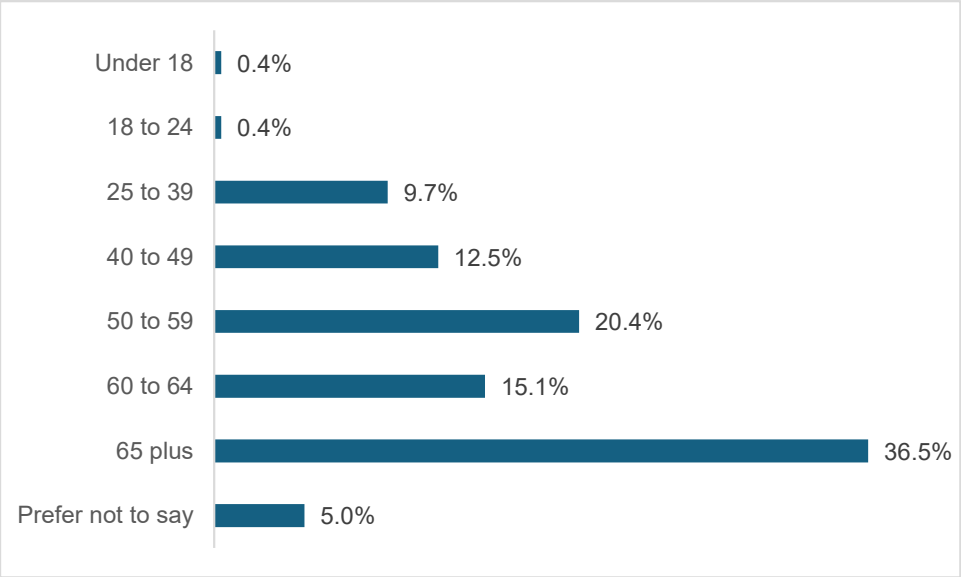
Monitoring, Reporting and Response	Frustration that reported issues remain unresolved, Desire for better tracking of maintenance requests, Calls for regular route inspections, Requests for greater accountability and progress monitoring.	12
Rural Access and Community Links	Desire for better connections between villages, Safer routes to schools, shops and local services, Reduced dependency on cars, Support for active travel in rural areas.	12
Signage, Mapping and Information	Better waymarking and route information, improved online mapping and route condition information, more public awareness of rights of way, Suggestions for QR codes and digital information.	11
Volunteer and Community Involvement	Support for volunteers, rangers and parish councils, Suggestions for local route champions and monitoring groups, Desire for stronger engagement with local communities.	11
Livestock and User Safety	Concerns about cattle, bulls and horses on routes, need for safer management of livestock near public access routes, Requests for fencing, warning signs and designated safe routes.	6
Parking and Supporting Infrastructure	Need for parking at popular route access points, better integration with public transport, Consideration of toilets and visitor facilities for larger schemes.	6
Motorised Vehicle Access	Requests to retain access to byways and unsurfaced roads, Concerns about restrictions on motorised users, Calls for clearer information on legal vehicle access.	4

Former Railway and Trailway Projects	Strong support for North Dorset Trailway extensions, Significant support for the Loders-Bradpole former railway route, Support for Maiden Newton-West Bay connections, Some local objections regarding route alignments, safety and impact on communities.	3
Other	Unique comments not fitting the main themes.	69

Section 7: Demographics

Q32. Please select your age group.

Base: n-496



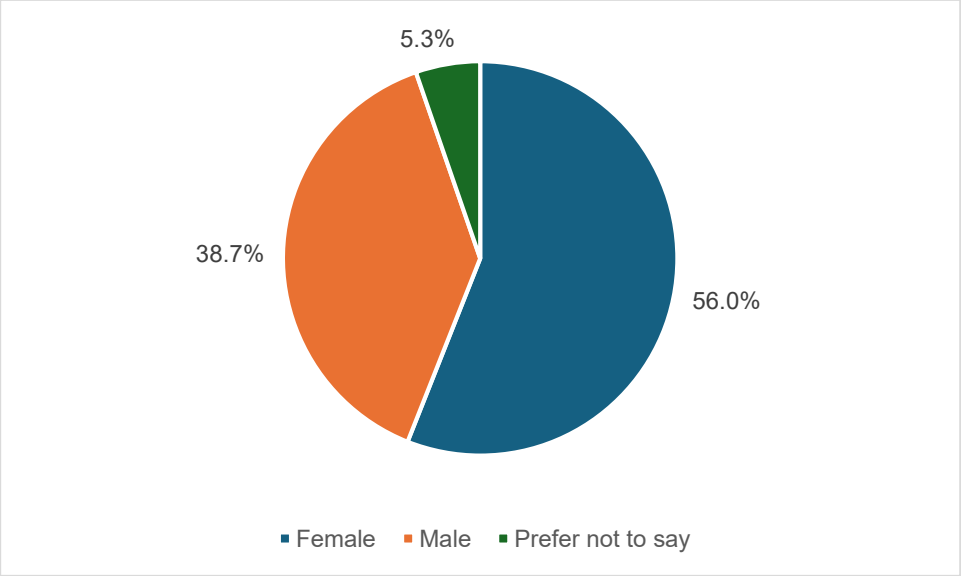
Option	Total	Percent
Under 18	2	0.4%
18 to 24	2	0.4%
25 to 39	48	9.7%
40 to 49	62	12.5%
50 to 59	101	20.4%
60 to 64	75	15.1%
65 plus	181	36.5%
Prefer not to say	25	5.0%

Respondents were predominantly older adults aged 50 to 65 plus in age. Respondents aged 49 and under accounted for 23% (114) of responses;

respondents aged 50 to 64 accounted for 35.5% (176), and those aged 65 plus accounted for 36.5% (181).

Q33. What is your sex?

Base: n-491



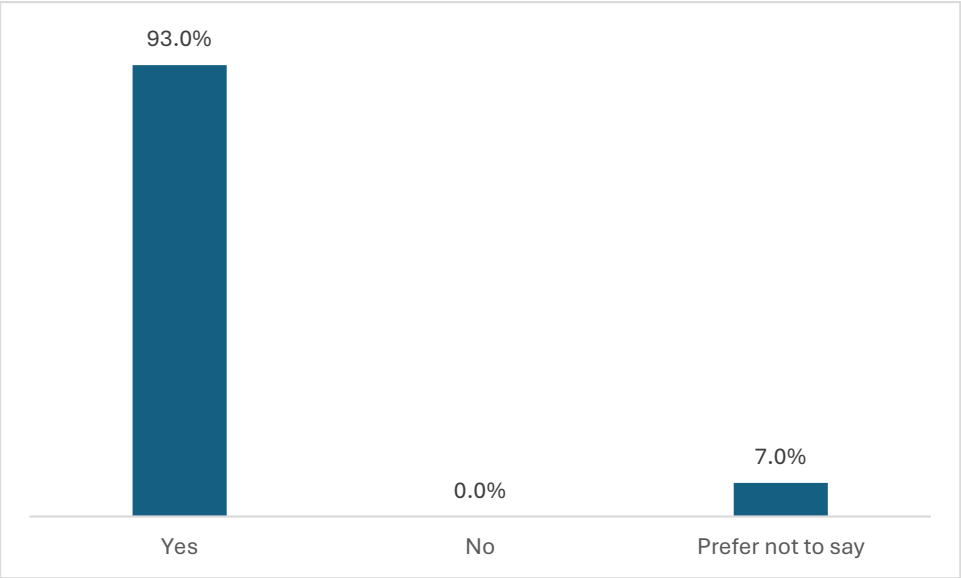
Option	Total	Percent
Female	275	56.0%
Male	190	38.7%
Prefer not to say	26	5.3%

The majority of responses were female at 56.0% (275) compared to male responses at 38.7% (190).

This shows that two-thirds of the survey responses were accounted for by females compared to male responses, indicating a higher participation rate among female respondents than male respondents.

Q34. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

Base: n-488



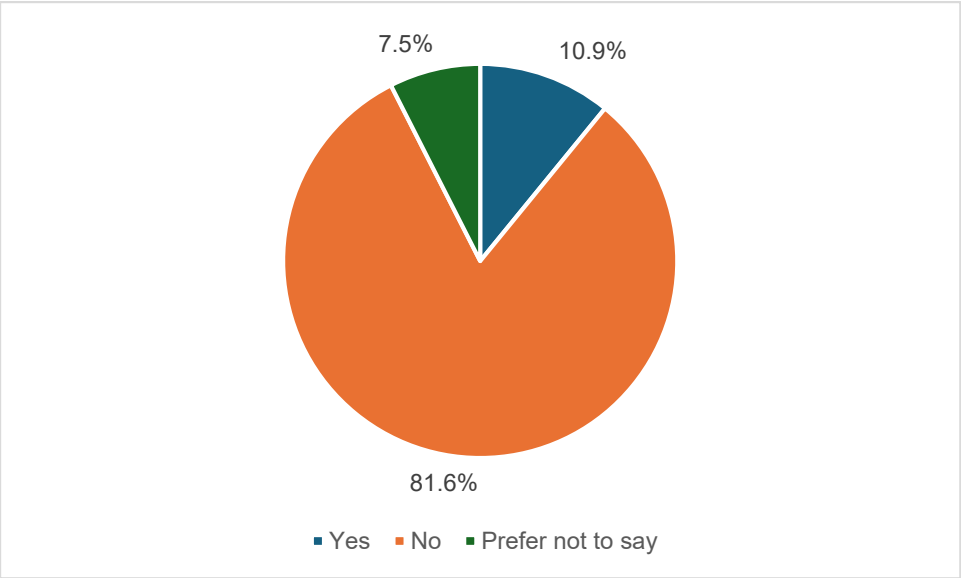
Option	Total	Percent
Yes	454	93.0%
No	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	34	7.0%

The vast majority of respondents indicated that the gender they identify with as the same sex registered at birth at 93.0% (454). A further 7.0% (34) preferred not to say.

Q35. The Equality Act 2010 describes a person as disabled if they have a longstanding physical or mental condition that has lasted or is likely to last 12 months; and this condition has a substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. People with some conditions (cancer, multiple sclerosis and HIV/AIDS for example) are considered to be disabled from the point that they are diagnosed.

Do you consider yourself to be disabled as set out in the Equality Act 2010?

Base: n-494

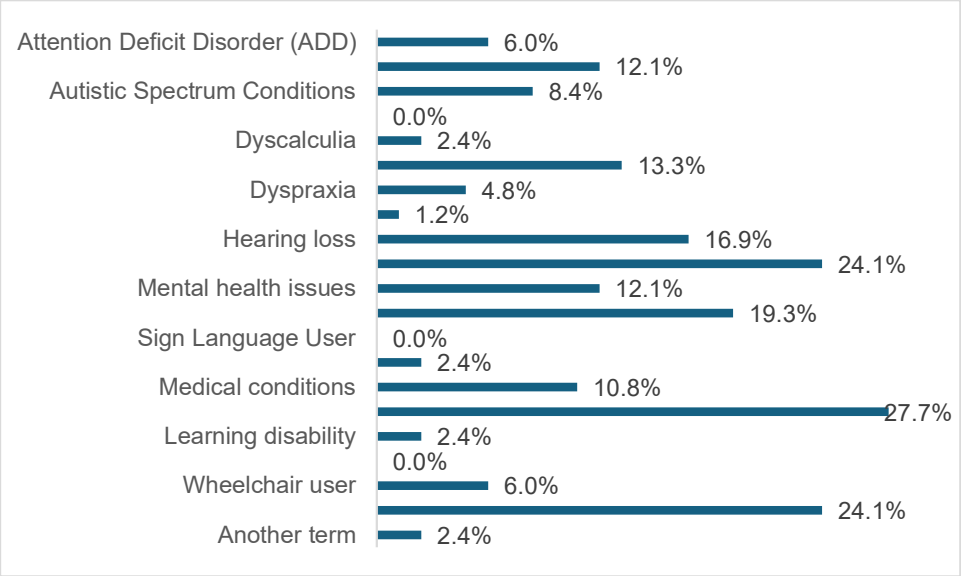


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	54	10.9%
No	403	81.6%
Prefer not to say	37	7.5%

Overall, 10.9% (54) of respondents identified as disabled under the Equality Act 2010, whilst 81.6% (403) indicated that they were not disabled.

Q36. If at the previous question you stated you consider yourself to have a disability, please state the type of disability which applies to you.

Base: n-83



Option	Total	Percent
Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)	5	6.0%
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	10	12.1%

Autistic Spectrum Conditions	7	8.4%
Blind	0	0.0%
Dyscalculia	2	2.4%
Dyslexia	11	13.3%
Dyspraxia	4	4.8%
Deaf	1	1.2%
Hearing loss	14	16.9%
Long term health condition	20	24.1%
Mental health issues	10	12.1%
Physical impairment	16	19.3%
Sign Language User	0	0.0%
Visually impaired	2	2.4%
Medical conditions	9	10.8%
Mobility issues	23	27.7%
Learning disability	2	2.4%
Specific learning differences	0	0.0%
Wheelchair user	5	6.0%
Prefer not to say	20	24.1%
If you prefer to use another term, please write in the box below	2	2.4%

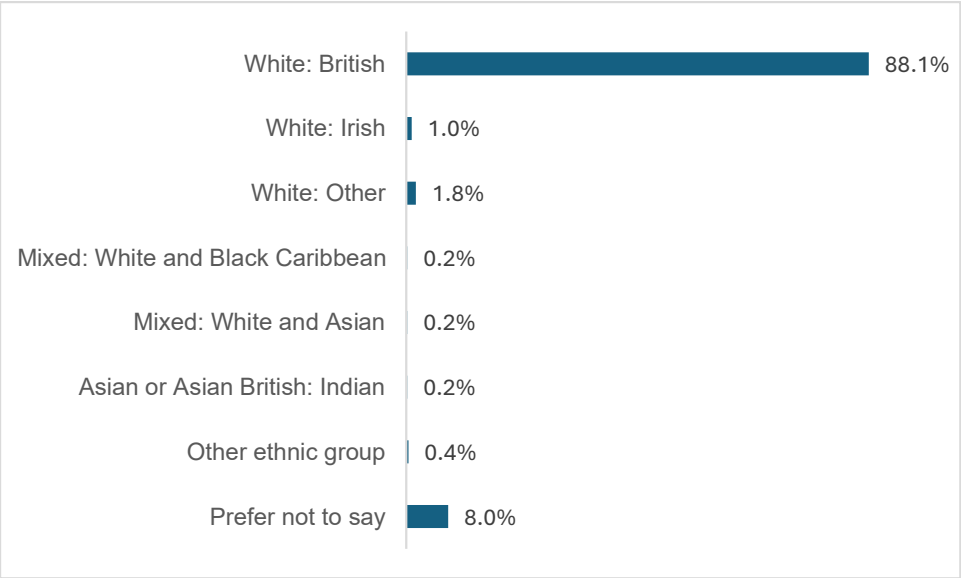
Amongst residents who do indicate as disabled under the Equality Act 2010, a few of the most reported disability types were mobility issues 27.7% (23), long-term health conditions 24.1% (20), physical impairment 19.3% (16) and hearing loss 16.9% (14).

Autistic spectrum conditions, mental health issues, medical conditions and other conditions were also reported.

Other – disability type
Cancer
A visual problem which stops me driving
Reduced mobility and balance due to age. Prone to tripping and falling.
My daughter is autistic and we live right where the proposal is and I have a bad back I was born deformed down my spine and do not want a slippery horrible path in the winter
i also have a heart condition and POTS
CFS
Old age

Q37. What is your ethnic group?

Base: n-489



Option	Total	Percent
White: British	431	88.1%
White: Irish	5	1.0%
White: Gypsy	0	0.0%
White: Irish Traveller	0	0.0%
White: Other	9	1.8%
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	1	0.2%
Mixed: White and Black African	0	0.0%
Mixed: White and Asian	1	0.2%
Mixed: Other	0	0.0%
Asian or Asian British: Indian	1	0.2%
Asian or Asian British: Pakistan	0	0.0%
Asian or Asian British: Chinese	0	0.0%
Asian or Asian British: Other	0	0.0%
Black or Black British:	0	0.0%
Arab	0	0.0%
Other ethnic group	2	0.4%
Prefer not to say	39	8.0%

The overall respondent population identified as White British at 88.1% (431), with White Other following at 1.8% (9) and White Irish at 1.0% (5). Other ethnic groups accounted for less than 0.5%.

Ethnicity – other
Dual nationality (uk and eu)
English
white english
english

white English
Responding as Alderholt Parish Council

Appendix

Appendix A, Dorset Greenways Alliance response –

Dorset Greenways Alliance

Response to Dorset Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan Consultation

Dorset Greenways Alliance was formed in January 2026 to connect groups which are working to create, maintain and extend traffic-free greenways across Dorset; to raise awareness of the benefits of a connected and inclusive network; to share knowledge and experience; and to advocate for the creation, connection and enhancement of greenway infrastructure throughout Dorset.

As we represent a number of organisations, we are submitting this detailed written response rather than completing the online consultation form and it is from the specific perspective of these organisations representing ‘shared-use’ routes.

Dorset Greenways Alliance strongly agrees with the plan's vision to create a modern, accessible and well-connected rights of way network that supports health, communities, the economy and the environment.

Proposed Policies

Policy 1 – Maintaining/Improving the Existing Network

Strongly Agree

We strongly agree with Policy 1 to maintain and improve the existing network. For this to be meaningful, it must include complete routes. A number of trailways throughout Dorset are partially complete or not yet started, including the North Dorset Trailway, the Maiden Newton to Bridport Trailway, the Loders to Bradpole Greenway, and the Chideock to Bridport Path. These are either routes to nowhere or have significant gaps that force people onto dangerous roads.

The Chideock to Bridport Path is highlighted as a case study in the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan. What has been created is a wonderful example of a community project. Unfortunately, this route stops at the top of the A35, with one landowner preventing it from connecting on to Bridport. What could be a safe, inclusive active travel link between Chideock and Bridport currently requires people

either to travel on the A35 directly to Bridport, to cross the A35 and take a longer, indirect route to Bridport via quieter lanes, or to follow Quarr Lane, which leads to a hollow way, impassable for those with limited mobility. It is a route to nowhere for its most vulnerable users. This is an example of a route with the potential to be transformative once complete, but progress has stalled indefinitely.

At present, routes are built on a section-by-section basis, with gaps left where landowner agreement has not been reached. Dorset Greenways Alliance is calling for Dorset Council to commit that, once a route has been approved as infrastructure providing significant public benefit, the Council will complete the full route within an agreed timescale – using path creation orders, or compulsory purchase orders as a last resort, where negotiation has failed. This would ensure that Dorset has a meaningful network of rural active travel infrastructure that maximises public health, environmental and economic benefits, built within a reasonable timeframe and importantly meets the needs of users.

Policy 2 – Raise Awareness

Agree

While we support this policy, the priority **must** be a fully connected, inclusive network of routes ahead of raising awareness. Fully completed routes will encourage more people to use the network for active travel and recreation.

Policy 3 – Making the Network More Accessible

Strongly Agree

Dorset Greenways Alliance encourages Dorset Council to adopt Wheels for Wellbeing's principle of mobility justice: targeting resources to create or improve journey-making options for those who currently have the least access to transport and mobility, redressing existing inequalities by prioritising those who are currently excluded. The routes being promoted by the members of the Alliance are prime examples of these.

Policy 4 – Empowering Communities

Strongly Agree

Trailway community groups are often the starting point for identifying the need for new greenways or extensions to existing routes. These volunteer groups contribute hundreds of hours researching, raising awareness and campaigning for these networks, and once routes are in place they provide a vital resource that helps maintain and promote them. After over a decade of austerity and reduced council budgets, these voluntary groups play an increasingly important role in maintaining and promoting the rights of way network.

However, volunteers can become disheartened when projects stall for years or even decades, which risks losing their vital contribution. A council commitment to completing routes within a defined timescale would sustain volunteer motivation and reduce the risk of disengagement due to lack of progress. Seeing a genuine commitment to completing entire routes will inspire and reinforce volunteers' continued involvement in these projects.

Policy 5 – Building the Dorset Economy

Agree

There is a growing evidence base that active travel networks benefit the local economy. The existing, incomplete network of trailways already brings economic benefit, but this would be significantly greater if the partial routes were completed to create a genuinely connected trailway network that facilitates active travel.

Policy 6 – Countryside Code / Landowners

Agree

We support working collaboratively with landowners, this collaboration is essential for our greenway network. Trailway groups already promote the Countryside Code at events, on their websites and through social media, and are an important resource for encouraging responsible behaviour. Trailway groups also organise volunteers to help support the Dorset Council Rangers maintain the routes.

Policy 7 – Housing Development and the Local Plan

Agree

Section 106 funding from housing developments has been used to fund and maintain trailway development in Dorset. Dorset Greenways Alliance supports Active Travel England's Rural Design Guide, which states:

> *"Walking, wheeling and cycling networks, both on and off-site, should enable and encourage people living in and travelling to and from new developments in rural areas to make everyday journeys by walking, wheeling and cycling including as part of longer journeys using public transport, such as commuting, education, retail, leisure and recreational trips… Developments in rural areas should also enable people, including existing communities, to reach the wider countryside for recreation. Often the countryside is inaccessible for walking, wheeling and cycling from a built-up area, and new developments on the edge of the settlement can open up new paths for leisure and recreation. By providing good off-site networks and supporting facilities for active travel, the health, social and environmental impacts of increased levels of traffic from developments will be reduced."*

The precise nature and function of the contribution should be clearly stated in the planning documents.

Policy 8 – Health and Wellbeing

Strongly Agree

Dorset Greenways Alliance strongly agrees with the health and wellbeing benefits set out in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. A network of complete trailways will provide both physical and mental health benefits and help avoid social isolation. Connecting rural and urban communities will enabling people to incorporate active travel into their everyday journeys.

Policy 9 – Sustainable Transport and Active Travel

Strongly Agree

We strongly support the intention to integrate the rights of way network with active travel routes. Creating inclusive, continuous routes is key to building an effective active travel network that promotes sustainable travel and encourages short journeys to be made by walking, wheeling or cycling. A primary barrier to active travel is the lack of safe, direct and connected routes. An integrated greenway network would support rural active travel for school, work and recreation.

Policy 10 – Definitive Map Duties

Agree

Dorset Greenways Alliance acknowledges that the Definitive Map is essential in protecting public access, providing certainty for landowners, and supporting planning, development and land management decisions. We support the aim to reduce the backlog by increasing capacity within the team where possible.

Further Points

In addition to the ten policies set out in the consultation, Dorset Greenways Alliance encourages Dorset Council to aim to improve its Active Travel Capability rating from Level 1 to Level 2 which will increase Dorset's active travel funding.

We also note the absence of a monitoring framework within the plan. Without a clear mechanism for tracking delivery against the plan's own policies – for example, measuring progress on completing partial routes under Policy 1, or on improving accessibility under Policy 3 – neither the Council nor the public will be able to assess whether the plan's aims are being achieved. We recommend that a monitoring framework, with clear indicators and regular reporting, be built into the final plan. In preparation for this, we suggest an evaluation of the outcomes of the 'Themes' and their objectives from ROWIP 1.

Summary

In summary, Dorset Greenways Alliance asks Dorset Council to:

- Commit to completing approved routes in full within an agreed timescale, using compulsory purchase orders as a last resort where landowner negotiation fails
- Adopt Wheels for Wellbeing's mobility justice principle in prioritising resources
- Aim to improve Dorset's Active Travel Capability rating from Level 1 to Level 2
- Introduce a monitoring framework to track delivery against the plan's policies

Dorset Greenways Alliance
9 October 2026

Appendix B, Dorset Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Joint Local Access Forum (DLAF) response –

Response of the Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Joint Local Access Forum (DLAF) to Dorset Council's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026 to 2036

Introduction

1. This is the formal response of the Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Joint Local Access Forum (DLAF) to the draft ROWIP. The DLAF is a statutory body established under section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 with a remit to advise its appointing authorities, Dorset Council and BCP Council, and other statutory bodies, as to the improvement of public access to the countryside for the purposes of open-air recreation, the enjoyment of the area, and sustainable transport. By virtue of section 61 of the CRoW Act a LAF is a statutory consultee during the assessment made in preparation for writing a ROWIP and because of our statutory role and the detailed comments we wish to make on the draft plan we have produced this document rather than completing the online survey.

Sections 1, 2, and 3 (Executive Summary, Vision for ROWIP2 and Scope of ROWIP2 2026 to 2036

There is much repetition in these sections and they should be edited so that they are more focused.

On p.6 Dorset Council's strategic priorities are set out but without context or explanation of their relevance to the ROWIP..

The aspiration to make Dorset "one of the nation's premier walking counties" is buried in Section 2 and not carried through consistently. A sharper, repeatable vision statement would give the document a stronger identity.

There is no mention of climate change in the vision section (p.8): the potential impact of climate change on the network should be mentioned here.

In section 3 (Scope of ROWIP2 from 2026 to 2026), the 5th bullet point should be amended to read:

- Open Access Land, Registered Common Land and Coastal Access Land This is

because Registered Common Land is different to open access land.

Also within the Scope section we suggest an amended wording to the paragraph about the Equality Act:

"We will ensure that we comply with our duty under the equality Act 2010, recognising the needs of all users, especially those with mobility or visual impairment challenges, and of children and young people in accordance with Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR).."

The wording of the policies as set out in the contents list on p,3 isn't consistent with the wording on p.6.

Section 2 (p.8) should say more about the consultation process and refer to the appendix where the findings are set out.

Policy 1: Maintaining and improving the existing PRoW network

For a plan running to 2036, adaptation to climate change (flooding, coastal erosion and surface damage from wetter winters) is underdeveloped. Surrey's ROWIP (see here: Surrey Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025 to 2035) explicitly commits to identifying climate-vulnerable structures and working with a dedicated flood and climate resilience team. A specific climate vulnerability commitment would strengthen Policy 1.

There is no specific mention of the widespread issue of users having to use country roads with no footways to move between unconnected rights of way. Could this be mentioned in the 8th bullet point?

There is no recognition in this policy that most walks for daily activity and exercise are taken close to home and that therefore greenspaces and routes in towns and villages are of paramount importance in supporting healthier lifestyles, stronger communities and a more sustainable future. Natural England carries out the Nature and People survey which provides evidence of this activity (see here: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-people-and-nature-surveys-forhttps://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-people-and-nature-surveys-for-england-data-tables-and-publications-from-adults-survey-year-6-april-2025-march-2026england-data-tables-and-publications-from-adults-survey-year-6-april-2025-marchhttps://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-people-and-nature-surveys-for-

england-data-tables-and-publications-from-adults-survey-year-6-april-2025-march-20262026).

We therefore suggest that the second paragraph under Policy 1 be amended to read:

" … focusing investment on the routes and greenspaces that matter most to local communities, close to where they live, and where they can make the most difference to everyday use."

P.15, Figure 6 is a useful reminder of the scarcity of bridleways in parts of the county: Is there a way the ROWIP could set a framework for some targeted upgrading of footpaths to bridleways, subject to surface conditions being upgraded where necessary? This would be of value to cyclists as much as equestrians and would meet the demand expressed in Finding 4 (p. 52) for new and improved routes.

Policy 2: Raise awareness of Public Rights of Way

The initiatives set out under this policy heading are welcome, although we do not consider that developing 'virtual walks' should be given any priority when there is so much to be done.

P. 22-23 (Case Study 5) What is described here is very commendable, but it raises the question of how cyclists can identify those routes which can be used by a bike with fairly standard tyres rather than needing a heavy-duty mountain bike to tackle them. Is there any option to create a layer on Dorset Explorer to identify reasonably well surfaced routes? (Clearly they would need to be identified on the ground in the first instance.)

Policy 3: Making our network more accessible

We suggest that specific reference be made to supporting those who are visually impaired. Guidance has been produced by the Sensory Trust on this and related issues (see here: Advice and guidance – Sensory Trust Guides). P.19, 2nd bullet point:

We suggest amending this to read:

- *improve physical accessibility by removing or reducing barriers where possible, including removing or replacing stiles with accessible gates, improving bridge access, and addressing restrictive infrastructure*

We have added the words 'removing or' because BS5709 (the British Standard for Gaps, Gates and Stiles) makes it clear that a gap is preferable to any structure (and is also cheaper).

P. 20, 6th bullet point:

The mention of improving access to open access land is welcome. The ROWIP should set a target of achieving access to a specific number of sites. The research for this has already been done by DLAF, identifying nine priority routes.

Suggested form of words:

- **Improve access to Open Access land and Registered Common Land** by working with the Local Access Forum to identify and create at least nine paths to provide access to inaccessible areas of Open Access land.

However, we query whether this is the most appropriate Policy heading for this work. Possibly it would sit more comfortably under Policy 1.

The first bullet point under Policy 3 commits to just 10 accessible routes in 10 years across 2,855 miles of public rights of way. Given the consultation finding that disabled and ethnic minority users are underrepresented, this target could be more ambitious and should be accompanied by a commitment to engage those communities in co-designing routes.

We applaud the profile given to accessibility both for those who access the countryside by means of trampers or trikes and those who accompany them, those pushing buggies, and those with all kinds on mobility problems. Added together these groups make up a large proportion of the population.

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

We welcome the commitment expressed here of reinvigorating the Rights of Way Liaison Officer (ROWLO) network. This is something which the DLAF has been advocating for some time.

P. 25 We suggest that there should be some form of target to increase the proportion of parishes with a trained ROWLO to x% by 2031 and to y% by 2036? (We don't know the present coverage and so are unable to suggest figures.)

P. 25 We also recommend that there be a specific mention of training for RoWLOs, in addition to the more general training mentioned at bullet point nine. Rather than a county-wide gathering, this should be organised in sectors, bringing together neighbouring councils and the relevant senior ranger

P. 25 We suggest that part of the training, guidance and support for parish/town councils should be a dedicated page on the DC website, setting out the powers which parish and town councils have in respect of public rights of way. Experience indicates that some parish and town councillors and clerks have little working knowledge and understanding of rights of way law and practice, yet the state of the rights of way network is a key element of community wellbeing.

P. 25 We suggest that parish and town councils be encouraged to produce their own "mini-ROWIPS". This would encourage those councils to budget for some

works. We recommend that you consider the approach advocated in the North Somerset Council ROWIP (see here: North Somerset Council Rights of way improvement plan 2022-32, then Appendix A). Here parish and town councils have been invited to nominate routes for improvement, providing a direct mechanism for local input and scaling down of the plan to the parish/town council level. Those parish and town councils which have Neighbourhood Plans in place would be able to draw on the information already in those plans when producing their mini-ROWIPs, or nominating routes for improvement.

P.25 Service Level Agreements should be explained.

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

The DLAF recommends that the ROWIP includes reference to promoting public transport as a means of accessing rights of way network. Policy 5 might be the place for this to be mentioned. We are aware of at least two services which specifically provide such access: the Purbeck Shuttle takes people from Wareham Station to the RSPB reserve at Arne and the West Bay Shuttle takes people from Bridport to West Bay. Both services are run by Dorset Community Transport.

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

The first paragraph should mention landowners as well as users. So something along the following lines should be added to that paragraph: "Dorset Council will also promote good practice and an understanding of the law amongst landowners and land managers."

Ploughing and cropping should be specifically mentioned in the first bullet point at the top of p.33.

Case Study 9 (p.34) could usefully make reference to the work of Dorset Dogs (which produces the Doggy Do code): Dorset Dogs …Love Dogs…Love Nature, and explain that the initiative is supported by Dorset Council.

Case Study 10 (p.38), isn't a case study, it's just further text. An example of a success or of good practice would be helpful.

Policy 7: using new housing developments and the Local Plan to enhance Public Rights of Way

The DLAF is particularly pleased to see this policy which complements the new advice on rights of way for developers which has recently been produced. Although not something for inclusion in the ROWIP, we strongly recommend that this be moved to the planning pages of the website as it's very unlikely that developers will be looking at the rights of way pages. The information would then also be more readily available to planning officers.

Would it be possible for the proposed Public Rights of Way Management Plan, mentioned at bullet point 2 on p.36 to be one of the documents which planning officers require applicants to produce (in effect making it mandatory)?

P. 37: Could there be some mention of avoiding non-motorised users having to use roads with no footways when new developments are built on the outskirts of villages and towns.

P. 37 Could there be a statement to the effect that where new non-motor vehicle access routes are created within housing developments the default assumption is that they will be dedicated as public rights of way?

Policy 7 is probably the appropriate place to mention SANGS. The concept of SANGS is understandable but their value is degraded if it is necessary for those who are expected to use them to have to use cars to reach them. They need to be easily accessible. We suggest an additional bullet point:

- Ensure that all new green spaces created under the Heathland Mitigation Programme (SANGs) are accessible for use all year round.

We are suggesting this because we are aware that some SANGs are prone to flooding which renders them unusable.

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

We suggest that in either policy 7 or policy 8 there be a commitment to prioritising circular routes close to where people live which would provide opportunity for exercising for health.

The first bullet point could be amended to read:

- *improve access to high-quality circular routes and greenspaces, ensuring the network is well maintained, clearly signposted and usable throughout the year, providing seating where appropriate and avoiding the use of stiles as far as possible.*

The second bullet point (p.40) could be amended to read:

- *support community-led activities, such as walking and cycling groups, wellbeing routes and local challenges that encourage regular use of the network*

The text for Policy 8 could usefully include reference to the Dorset Health cycle Rides: Get Back in the Saddle - Dorset Council.

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

We suggest that under this heading mention could be made of the Active Travel England Capability Rating. Dorset has held a Level 1 rating in 2023, 2024, and 2025, while neighbouring BCP Council has already reached Level 3. Level 2 requires

demonstrating strong local leadership, clear network plans forming the basis of an emerging network, and a track record of delivery. The ROWIP already contains much of the evidence needed. The key gap is framing this as a coherent planned network rather than individual projects. The "Linking Communities" implementation table on p.56 is well-placed to do this if explicitly framed in those terms. Oxfordshire County Council moved from Level 2 to Level 3 in 2025 by explicitly tying their Active Travel England rating to their corporate strategic plan. Several other rural county councils also improved their ratings in the 2025 cycle for the first time.

We therefore suggest an additional Policy 9 bullet point:

- **We will work towards achieving an Active Travel England Capability Rating of Level 2**, demonstrating strong local leadership, clear network plans and a track record of delivery across the county.

It would strengthen the ROWIP if an explanation was included, wherever the primary discussion of trailways is set out within the ROWIP (Policy 1 or Policy 9), of the powers which are available to the council for path creation where negotiation fails. There are several trailways across Dorset where landowners have blocked progress on this vital infrastructure for decades. We therefore suggest that the following wording be considered:

- **Support delivery of trailways** that provide safe, direct, attractive corridors for active travel ; the council is aware of cases which are stalled because agreement with landowners cannot be reached. Where negotiation with landowners fails to deliver strategically important trailway links and where significant public benefit is being withheld, Dorset Council will consider the use of powers such as those provided by section 26 of the Highways Act 1980 to expedite matters where appropriate.

A further matter for consideration, possibly under this policy heading, is the introduction of slower speed limits on roads which are likely to be recreational routes. This was a concept advocated by the Countryside Commission/Countryside Agency; other counties have introduced their own interpretation of this idea and CPRE has its own guidance on the subject (see About quiet lanes | Oxfordshire County Council; Quiet Lanes Suffolk | What is a Quiet Lane? and quiet_lanes_1.pdf. Such routes are particularly useful to cycling groups.

Finally under the Policy 9 heading, we suggest amending the fourth bullet point to read:

- Develop green corridors as laid out in the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework 2023, connecting rural and urban areas, reducing reliance on the private car and delivering wider benefits for biodiversity and climate resilience

The word ‘green’ is used by some to describe places which are covered with grass and surrounded by trees but it is also used to describe activities which do not burn

fossil fuels. Encouraging active travel is much easier where it is a pleasant experience along shaded tree-lined routes, rather than along concrete or tarmac routes.

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

P. 45 We welcome the mention in bullet point 2 of the "aim to reduce back log by increasing capacity within the team where possible" but we think, at the very least, there should be an indication of the target turnaround times for DMMO applications.

Without any measurable outcomes or indicators, the bullet points for Policy 10 are little more than a list of what Dorset Council is required to do by law.

5. ROWIP Implementation and investment Plan 2026 to 2036

We question whether this section of the ROWIP is sufficiently robust, in particular, the section on Monitoring and Review. Current indicators such as "condition of the network" and "usage levels where data is available", are too vague to support a meaningful five-year review. We therefore recommend reviewing the approaches taken by Leicestershire County Council (see here: Rights Of Way Improvement Plan 2025-2035 Action Plan) and Surrey County Council (see here: Surrey Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025 to 2035), both strong recent examples. Leicestershire separates its Action Plan into a standalone appendix with named leads and trackable statuses, and explicitly names operational data already collected (e.g. number of signposts provided) as formal indicators. Surrey established measurable baselines through a major public survey (4,273 responses), meaning they can demonstrate change at review.

Dorset Council could:

- treat the current consultation responses as a baseline measurement – recording, for example, what percentage of respondents rated the network as satisfactory or had used Dorset Explorer.
- create a stand-alone Action Plan document with Red/Amber/Green status columns.
- commit to publishing a monitoring framework (although this should not impose more work on officers). A simple annual report capturing named indicators, drawn from the data rangers already collect: stile replacements, bridge works, outstanding maintenance report volumes, number of routes created (access to access land routes, and lengths of trailway created, number of new SLAs set up, etc) presented to the LAF and to the Place and Resources Committee.

- The Greenspace Team will already have a work plan, a list of future projects and an ongoing planned maintenance programme which could be incorporated into an action plan for the ROWIP along with any monitoring suggestions from the LAF.

It should be noted that s.60(1)(b) of the CRoW Act does specify that the ROWIP should include "a statement of the action they [the authority] propose to take for the management of local rights of way, and for securing an improved network of local rights of way, with particular regard to the matters dealt with in the assessment".

7. Appendices

There are several different appendices within this section: they need numbering.

Consultation Findings and Strategic Responses

There is a list of actions under each finding and there is reference to which policy is intended to address which finding. However, the "actions" described under each finding and the "we will" lists under each policy do not match up and the actions are lost in the Findings appendix. It is difficult for a reader to distinguish between what seem to be aspirational "we will" lists and the "actions". This is why a specific standalone Action Plan is needed.

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

The first bullet point here is:

- identify and prioritise locations where improved crossings and connections will address the greatest need

The last bullet point is:

- work with developers to address road severance and integrate safe crossings and road connections within each new development

The draft ROWIP says that the Finding 3 issues are addressed through Policy 3 and Policy 7 but the issue of, in particular, bridleway road severance is not listed in either of these policies. This is something the DLAF has frequently discussed. We suggest that it should be specifically mentioned and that it would make a lot more impact if it was accompanied by a list of the more notorious severance cases. We suspect that this would show that most of these cases are well away from any likely development sites, so the funding needed to tackle them is unlikely to come from the developer community.

Rights of Way Implementation Plan

At the top of p.56, it says "Below Is an extract from the implementation and delivery plan". The Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities in England on ROWIPs states that the improvement plan should specify where detailed plans will be set out and how progress will be monitored.

Would it be possible to mention the missing links in the Maiden Newton to Bradpole Trailway? In Maiden Newton it links with the SUSTRANS Route 26 and so could provide a safe and level route for cyclists from Dorchester to Bridport (as well as pedestrians and equestrians).

Another potential route for Trailway status is that between Portesham and Broadway (part of the old Weymouth to Abbotsbury route). This already exists between Portesham and Abbotsbury where is part of the Hardy Way.

Issues which are not addressed which need consideration within the ROWIP

- Other than mention of access-to-access land under policy 3, there is little discussion of the opportunities provided by access to open country or green spaces in our towns and how rights of way provide links between them.
- Unclassified county roads (UCRs) and BOATS There should be discussion of the value of the UCR network as adjunct to the rights of way network, possibly by adding them to the list of different types of routes and land with which the plan covers. The LAF did some work on this back in 2018 and there is documentation on the project available. At the moment the only reference to UCRs is in the definitions section at the back of the document where it is somewhat lost. Appendices frequently go unread.
- Additionally, while various forms of signage are discussed throughout the draft, there should be specific signage on BOATS and dual status routes, informing non-motorised users that they may encounter motorised users along these pathways. This would help enhance safety and reduce conflict for everyone using the routes.
- There is nothing in the plan for motorised users of public rights of way. The network for them is disjointed and the smaller it gets, the more likely for conflict to arise through illegal use.
- We suggest that the Dorset Nature Recovery Strategy 2025 should be on the "Other relevant strategies list" on p. 64-66. Nature connection is one of the priorities in that document which says "Nature recovery needs to be at the heart of every community, with collective action bringing the biggest gains. More people knowing, loving, appreciating and doing something for nature will lead to more nature positive behaviours. A thriving nature-based local economy can also help boost local employment and incomes. Each person, business, organisation, landowner, farmer, school, group is part of the solution to make nature more abundant, connected and resilient in Dorset." Rights of way clearly support that connection.

Definitions (pages 59 – 62)

The definitions should be in alphabetical order and need rationalising. For example, do you need to have **Rights of Way** and **Public Rights of Way**? This only serves to confuse the reader. And there is reference to **Open Access Land** on page 59 and then **Access Land** on p.61.

Page 63 Partnership Working correction needed: this should read Ramblers' Association (or just Ramblers), not Society.

Other relevant strategies

Add:

Green Infrafstructure Framework 2023 (Natural England)

The NPPF defines green infrastructure as “A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity." The Green Infrastructure Framework has been created by Natural England (with input from policy makers, local authorities, academics, industry experts, and business) to provide clear guidance to support the greening of England's towns and cities, and developments.

Finally, there is some inconsistency is how the phrase “public rights of way” is written. Sometimes it’s abbreviated to PRoW but sometimes it’s written out in full and sometimes it starts with upper case letters and sometimes not. Upper case isn’t necessary.

Appendix C, Ramblers Dorset response –

RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN VERSION 2

(ROWIP2)

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Dorset Council’s Draft ROWIP2. We have decided not to respond on-line, but instead in this way, which we trust will be acceptable and our comments helpful and constructive. As this ROWIP is intended to cover at least 10 years, it is important that it should be ‘fit for purpose’.

Our submission is divided into two sections, the first being feedback relating to the general presentation of ROWIP2, errors (typing etc) and layout, and the second concentrating on the content itself.

LAYOUT, PRESENTATION AND ERRORS

1 Overall we feel that the presentation of the document is heavily biased towards Dorset Council 'Corporate' Message, rather than focussing on the purpose of a ROWIP, as defined in the statutory guidance from DEFRA[1]. (See also Content)

2 A general comment in respect of the first pages (1 through to 11) is that there is a considerable amount of extraneous material and repetition, and a lack of focus. There needs to be a relevant concise Introduction, which includes briefly what the document is for, as for example in the first ROWIP[2] (page 9 of the print version).

3 Following on from this, we suggest that the Glossary should be edited, presented in alphabetical order, and brought to the beginning of the document, together with a summary of the outcomes/lessons learnt from ROWIP(1) which would then lead in to ROWIP2.

4 Typos/corrections: we have identified the following (highlighted):

a. P.5: about 1/3rd of the way down the page. Should read: "Dorset's public rights of way network delivers benefits far beyond recreation"

b. P.8: final paragraph: should read "Through this plan, Dorset Council will ensure that the rights of way network remains accessible, relevant and resilient …"

c. P.11: first full paragraph should read "It has been informed by the first round of public and stakeholder consultation …".

d. P 58: last line of table, just above Glossary, should read UCRs (No apostrophe)

e. P.63: Partnership working: Correction needed: our organisation is the Ramblers (or more formally the Ramblers' Association). Please remove 'Society'.

f. General: there is inconsistency throughout the document about how the phrase "public rights of way" is written. Sometimes it is abbreviated to PRoW and sometimes it is written with the initial letter in upper case and sometimes not.

5 We have identified what we believe to be potentially an error in the description on page 38, under Fig 24, which states: "A new footpath connecting communities created through developer contributions secured via

[1] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-authority-rights-of-way-improvement-plans

[2] https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/dorset-rights-of-way-improvement-plan-rowip-2011-2021

a Section 106 agreement" The path shown is part of the North Dorset Trailway route through Stourpaine, where the route has to divert from the old trackbed. The path was originally a footpath (E18/6 but in 2015, following a consultation in respect of a slight diversion it was subsequently dedicated as a bridleway, to enable the path to become a multi-user path, which included resurfacing. The surfacing carried out is also shown on page 24, Figure 14: Before and after pictures of a path where contractors used compacted stone surfacing to improve the network for all users.

6 Finally, a general comment on some of the photographs, which appear to be very dated. The first ROWIP used those generated by a photographic competition: would it be possible to use some of those?

CONTENT

As stated above, we feel the emphasis of the document to be on the 'Corporate Message', rather than focussing on the purpose of a ROWIP, as defined in the statutory guidance from DEFRA and the underpinning legislation, sections 60 and 61 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CROW Act). The front page of ROWIP2 promotes "*Working together – ambitious for Dorse*t" which is continued as the tagline throughout the document. But this could apply to any topic, whereas the first ROWIP's tagline was *"…on foot, with paw, on hoof, by wheel …".* We submit that a ROWIP should *support* the Corporate Message but not be governed by it.

We will address each Policy in turn, but wish to make a general comment as follows: each policy has a "We will …" list which whilst being commendable, is in some cases vague e.g. under Policy 6 "*promote responsible dog ownership encouraging users to keep dogs under effective close control*" but there is no indication as to how this will be achieved, and how is it different from promoting the Countryside Code? The main point being, is that many of the bullet points in the "We will" lists could be rationalised as they cover very similar issues and some topics appear in more than one list. In addition, in the first Appendix which covers the Consultation Findings and Strategic Responses, there are further 'Actions' to deliver the findings. The "We will" lists and the 'Actions' need to be brought together.

1. Policy 1: Maintaining and improving the existing PRoW network

The first paragraph mentions a "*rights of way network that is … ready for the future …*". We therefore suggest that the list should include reference to

mitigation against/dealing with the effects of climate change. (This has had a dramatic impact on the coast path in particular.) Therefore this should include for example: *Identify paths and structures which are vulnerable to climate-change damage, taking appropriate measures to protect and, where necessary, repair paths and associated furniture*.

We welcome the points made with regard to improving waymarking and accessibility, but again there is repetition across several of the points. And how will the commitment to improve waymarking "*by increasing high-quality waymarking including signs with destinations and distances*" be carried through?

We suggest revising the bullet point relating to connectivity to read:

Strengthen connectivity by developing links between communities, services and green spaces, including providing off-road links between rights of way and settlements, including investment in bridleways and multi-user routes.

Another priority should be an improvement in measures to assist users of the network to cross busy roads. There are 'severance' issues at many locations (e.g. bridleways E53/18 and 16 crossing the A350) and these should be identified in the ROWIP.

2. Policy 2: Raise awareness of public rights of way

There does appear again to be a great deal of repetition here, and some overlaps with Policy 1. In addition we do not believe that resources should be spent on developing virtual walks: that is not improving the rights of way network in accordance with the CRoW Act.

We do agree that "*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*." But how is this different from Policy 1, to improve waymarking etc?

3. Policy 3: Making our network more accessible

We propose an additional bullet point, which should include an unequivocal adoption of the "least restrictive option" (as set out in the British Standard for Gaps, Gates and Stiles) for all new hedge and fence crossing points (e.g., when a landowner applies for a new gate or stile under s.147 HA 1980), and a rolling programme of improvements to achieve the least restrictive option wherever possible, in particular on routes close to towns and villages and other settlements.

We suggest that the point relating to Open Access land would be better suited under Policy 1, as it is more about improving the extent of the network. A suggestion would be "*Improve access to Open Access land, working with the Local Access Forum to identify and provide access routes to inaccessible areas of Open Access land."*

4. Policy 4: Empowering communities to help improve their public rights of way network

In the preamble to the bullet points, it is stated: "*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*." How will this be achieved?
'Community Conversations' are a new initiative – will they still be functioning in 10 years' time?

We agree in principle with this Policy, however RoWLOs need to be given far more support and training. We suggest revising the bullet point to read:

Support the role of Rights of Way Liaison Officers (RoWLOs) encouraging each PC and TC to appoint a RoWLO; provide training for RoWLOs and strengthen the links between the Ranger Team and RoWLOs and their communities, identifying issues and opportunities at a local level and engaging their help with condition surveys.

One of the bullet points is to: ***expand Service Level Agreements (SLAs)….***". without explaining what these are, which we suggest is an oversight.

This section suffers from repetition.

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

We feel that the wording of the title of this policy again focuses on the corporate message, and should be reversed e.g.: *Using the Public Rights of Way to grow the Dorset Economy*. We do not have the expertise or figures to comment on this policy, but we feel that in the more rural parts of the county, already not as well served as the conurbations, access to 'promoted' routes is not easy without private transport. We would like to suggest the addition of something like: *promote the use of public transport as a means of accessing the public rights of way network, country parks and other green spaces*

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

The first paragraph of this section reads:

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 suggest (from experience) that in the rural areas of the county, it is far more likely that users will encounter a PROW obstructed by crops, or ploughing, than they will a cleared one as shown in Fig 24. Therefore the onus should not be placed on users alone. There needs to be a mention of landowner/land manager responsibilities, and we suggest. adding at the end of the paragraph. "*Of equal importance will be promoting good practice and understanding of rights of way law amongst landowners, land managers and contractors."*

We also suggest at the end of bullet point 7*, "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* ***to both land managers and path users****."*

The following should also be included in any actions:

- enforcing the law regarding ploughing and cropping and other obstructions
- ensuring that any practical or financial assistance to landowners/occupiers and farmers carries a proviso that all rights of

way (including furniture) on that landholding must be in first class condition

✸ ensuring that farms in the ownership of Dorset Council are exemplar in terms of the condition of public rights of way and access to access land.

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

We applaud the inclusion of this policy, and support all of the points made. Ideally, in the case of applications for large developments, a Public Rights of Way Management Plan, should be a document required by the Planning Team. When developments are built on the outskirts of towns/villages, there should be the requirement that footways should be integrated to avoid non-motorised users having to use roads, and importantly to minimise the need for the use of motorised transport.

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

Whilst welcoming this policy, we submit that again there is repetition and duplication of other policies within the 'bullet points'. As in Policy 5, 'aligning with Policy x' could be employed.

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

We suggest that this policy could better highlight the need to prioritise the provision and use of 'off-road' multi-user routes to "***align delivery with wider transport and climate strategies***, *ensuring rights of way improvements contribute to reducing car use and supporting Dorset's environmental objectives.*"

10. 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

We note that this is simply stating what the Authority is required to do by law.

Resources are the key, and there are many outstanding long-term intractable rights of way obstructions which need resolutions. There are definitive paths which simply cannot be used, thus negating the assertion made in Policy 2, 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"*. A programme should be developed to resolve them, by way of diversions and creations if necessary.

GENERAL

We note that many of the Case Studies are not really case studies at all, for example Case Study 10. It simply lays out what is done.

Section 5: ROWIP implementation and investment plan 2026 to 2036

We suggest that the Monitoring and Review section on p.48 is too vague.

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

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

There needs to be a method of measuring progress, reporting and monitoring. Targets need to be set, which are measurable and achievable.

For example:

- Policy 1 includes in the 'we will' list: **resolve maintenance issues.** Currently there is a timescale given for *inspection* but not for resolution, and some reports date back years. 'Easy' tasks are dealt with quickly, which tends to distort the statistics. The MNT reports are marked as 'resolved' when in fact they are not.

- Policy 3 includes: *"**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*". What are these routes, and are they the ones to be 'enhanced' under Policy 1? If so, what is the target date(s) for these, and how will this be monitored?

- Policy 3, dealing with access to access land could include a target for creating a specific number of links.

- Policy 4: could set a target for recruitment of RoWLOs e.g. 90% coverage of parishes.

The **Conclusion** states:

"Building on previous plans, this ROWIP responds to changing needs and opportunities, placing greater emphasis on accessibility, connectivity and the use of the network for everyday journeys, as well as recreation. It supports Dorset Council's wider priorities, including sustainable travel, climate resilience and improving quality of life."

We trust that this will be deliverable.

Ramblers, Dorset Area (Footpath Committee).

Appendix D, member of public response –

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the current 2026-2036 ROWIP consultation.

I am responding by letter rather than the online consultation form as I feel that this format allows me to make the points below clearly.

Although I sit on the Loders Parish Council I am replying in my personal capacity - I have shared my response with it for information.

I have highlighted below my suggestions in yellow for ease of identification.

Referencing the different sections in the draft ROWIP:

2. Vision for ROWIP2

Regarding the penultimate paragraph, I don't feel that Dorset Council has complied with section 61.1(b) of CROW 2000.

> 61 Rights of way improvement plans: supplemental.
>
> (1) Before preparing or reviewing a rights of way improvement plan, and in particular in making any assessment under section 60(1)(a) or (3)(a), a local highway authority shall consult—
>
> (b) each district council, and each parish or community council, whose area is within their area;

I understand that Dorset Council considers that the "2021 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review Consultation" discharged this obligation. However, this process, whilst useful in gathering the public's views on certain Rights of Way topics (re CROW 2000 60(2)), and which informs section 7 of the ROWIP, doesn't meet the expectations set out in the Gunning Principles / Dorset Council's own "Consultation and Engagement Policy - Consultation principles and legislation" :

Gunning principles:

- Consultation must take place when the proposal is at a formative stage
- Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response
- Adequate time must be given for consideration and response
- The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account

The second of these requirements was elaborated by the High Court and the Court of Appeal in R (Breckland DC) v Boundary Committee [2009] EWCA Civ 239, in which it was held that consultation could not be conducted in a vacuum, and that it was necessary for there to be some form of proposal to which consultees could

respond, and that the relevant information must be presented in a form which is digestible for those to whom it is addressed.

This is just by way of explaining why some of the points raised below were not been raised when the ROWIP was at a more formative time and so could have more easily been considered.

4. Policies of the ROWIP 2026 to 2036

In general, each policy includes a list of objectives – however there is no discussion in the ROWIP of the process whereby an initial suggestion for action is assessed, the relevant criteria considered and the considerations through to implementation.

Active Travel England's publication of Active Travel England - Rural Design Guide, sponsored by the DoT was published on 14 July 2026.

This guidance builds on LTN 1/20 and extends its principles to rural areas, to enable people to walk, wheel and cycle.

As it will be applicable to all current and future relevant projects that haven't yet progressed past the strategic stage, and as it clearly sets out in detail the assessment, consultation and delivery process, I would encourage Dorset Council to include within the ROWIP an overview of the steps required, including impact assessments, defining objectives, local consultation etc and referencing this document.

Explaining the process will help assuage the concerns that there is a disconnect between Dorset Council and local communities, and that larger projects are pushed through with little consideration of the impact on local parishes.

I would ask that you include a Policy to the effect that projects will be completed in accordance with this guidance.

Performance indicators

To evidence that the actions proposed and undertaken are achieving the purposes at set out by government, you need base data, for example short car journeys in Dorset; where, by whom and for what purpose. Then you will have the baseline to be able to measure the effectiveness of projects to decarbonise in the future, you will know where the low hanging fruit is, and it also enables you to spend taxpayers money most effectively.

Re policies 3, 8 and 9, there are a number of references to the perceived benefits, but no information on how they will quantify the impact of the improvements achieved. This is particularly relevant for **active travel** vs **health and wellbeing.** Without very clear data before and after any improvements it will be the very difficult

to assess whether increased usage has had a positive or negative impact on car usage and whether we are meeting our climate change objectives.

It would also help ensure that limited resources (both financial and man management) are focussed on those projects that maximise Dorset Council's targets regarding tackling climate change, supporting communities and enabling sustainable economic development.

The Dorset Local Transport Plan - Implementation Plan 2026 to 2031 – Annex P sets out the performance indicators that Dorset Council will use more broadly, including "Carbon emissions from transport", "Air quality" and "Levels of walking, wheeling and cycling".

I would encourage Dorset Council to include this Annex P and the stated measurables in the ROWIP, and explain how they are used to measure the effectiveness of projects.

7. Appendices

Crow 2000 60 (1) requires that Dorset Council include within its ROWIP, an assessment of the matters in 60(2), and also a statement of the action they propose to take.

I understand that 7 Appendices sets these out:

Consultation Findings and Strategic Responses (pages 50-55) is the assessment of matters in
60(2) and the statement of action is detailed on pages 56-58 under three headings; "Linking Communities", "Accessible Routes" and "Improving and Investing in Bridleways and Trailways".

So, the 2021 consultation informs the findings, which then drive the actions.

My concerns are that the statement of actions read as a list of activities underway (the heading "implementation and delivery plan" is unhelpful in this regard), whereas Dorset Council have previously confirmed that a number are still aspirational / strategic.

From personal experience this can lead to misunderstanding and mistrust of Dorset Council, as it suggests projects are already in their implementation stage without any prior consultation, impact assessments or sizing of the benefit to the community.

I would encourage Dorset Council to provide some further explanation around the tables on page 56-58; how they flow from the consultation findings and clarifying Dorset Council's obligations regarding local consultation and compliance with Active Travel England - Rural Design Guide.

Other matters for consideration

National Cycle Routes 2 and 26 both go through Dorset – where they are on road, there is a presumption in XXX that they will be on quiet lanes.

Whilst I appreciate that they are not “Rights of way” I would encourage Dorset Council to actively work towards making any road elements not already due to be changed to 20 mph, into quiet lanes.

Regards

[Redacted]

Appendix E, Dorset Council Public Health staff response –

[Outlook, email]

Dear [redacted],

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft RoWIP, and for involving us in its development prior to the consultation. It's an important document that will deliver benefits across Dorset and we're very happy to support it.

The PROW network is a key asset for Dorset that supports health and wellbeing, whilst also contributing across Doret Council's wider strategic priorities. Footpaths and bridleways enable physical activity, contact with nature, access to vital services like employment and education and can support sustainable travel avoiding carbon emissions. The network is already delivering across these outcomes and can do more - as the plan demonstrates.

One of the most significant opportunities lies in enabling more people to build physical activity into their daily lives, particularly people who are the least active or inactive. The evidence base for this is becoming ever clearer. During the course of this consultation, the UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines have been updated to state that any amount of physical activity, of any intensity, is beneficial and helps prevent ill health. Importantly, the most significant health gain from physical activity is experienced by the least active people.

We know increasing physical activity for the least active is not easy , but availability of high quality and inclusive infrastructure is an important enabler. Supporting the least active people in Dorste to move more will help prevent ill health and avoid or delay the significant pressure on Dorset Council services and the wider health system from conditions like cardiovascular disease, dementia, frailty/falls and more.

'Policy 8: Maximise the PROW network’s contribution to health and wellbeing provides' provides a strong basis for this, particularly the proposals to:

- 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
- develop a better understanding of usage and barriers, working with partners to gather data, improve monitoring and target interventions effectively

It would strengthen the plan even further if the ROWiP's vision could reflect these aims including:

- an intent to reduce health inequalities by promoting inclusive access for all
- focusing on people who are least active/inactive
- and populations who are less able to access and benefit from the network

We'd welcome the opportunity to continue working with you and your team on these aims, particularly how we can improve access for people who face the greatest barriers to using the network to reduce health inequalities.

Best wishes,

[Redacted]