

Summary of the Consultation Report for the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf

October 2018.

Introduction

The draft updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan was published for a 12 week public consultation on 25th June 2018. The consultation was advertised in the local press, on the Council's website, in Council libraries, by email or post to the consultee list (see appendix one) and via the Local Access Forum (LAF). The closing date for observations was 17th September 2018. A questionnaire was provided on the Council's consultation webpage (see appendix two). In addition, a number of informal consultation events were held by Council Officers and LAF members at sites or with groups during the summer holidays.

The Response

A total of 335 responses were received. 170 on line questionnaires and 103 paper questionnaires, 7 written (including email) comments were submitted. A further 54 people contributed to informal discussions at; at least 4 locations. The draft was presented to the Council's Scrutiny Committee in September.

A detailed (248 page) report and an accompanying data spreadsheet has been produced, which records all the comments and the resulting actions or changes. This is a summary of the detailed report.

An excel spreadsheet holds all the data from the 273 completed questionnaires. Most of the respondents are regular users of outdoor space (weekly or daily), with parks and paths/tracks most frequently mentioned, closely followed by hills/mountains. A wide spectrum of reasons were given with walking the predominant. Health, leisure, family/social and dog walking were also popular. Places visited covered the whole of Rhondda Cynon Taf and most also visited outdoor space elsewhere, mostly in south Wales but some further afield.

Not all respondents gave their post code, but of those who did, most lived in Rhondda Cynon Taf with representation from 42 of the 52 wards in the County Borough.

The consultation responses generally supported the overall approach of the Plan and the six objectives. However, a number of changes have been made to the text of the Plan including some changes to the priority themes under each objective as a result of the observations made. The methodology used is described below.

The detailed responses relating to the draft Plan were collated in a series of tables covering

- general comments, including Delivery Plan comments

- comments relating to each of the six objectives
- comments relating to q14 'Any other information / comments'.

Each table has columns for the

- respondents reference number
- their verbatim response
- officer 'observation' (keyword summary)
- officer 'comment'
- officer proposed 'response or action'

It is likely that many of the respondents completing the questionnaire survey had not read the whole of the draft Plan. As a result, some observations made in response to the survey questions were already covered by existing wording in the Plan and this was recorded in the 'comment' column and 'no change' recorded in the 'response or action' column.

For the observations requiring revised or additional text, the proposed location was given in the 'comments' column and the text changes in the 'response or action' column.

Respondents offered a wealth of information and ideas relevant to the Plan and in particular the Objectives. Not all of these could be easily accommodated in the Plan format but have been collated into an 'ideas list', which will help to inform the work programme to be set out in the annual Delivery Plan. This has been noted in the 'response or action' column.

A number of respondents also volunteered to assist with various aspects of the Plan. The availability of contact details is given in the 'comments' column and 'contact volunteer' noted in the 'response or action' column where appropriate.

Some respondents raised specific queries, not relating to the Plan. Some of these will be passed to other Council departments for their information or action and others will be followed up with the respondent (where contact information was supplied). In both cases this is noted in the 'response or action' column.

Conclusions

Summary of responses re **Objective One:** *'People have said that the countryside of RCT is an asset and should be used to promote tourism and regeneration as well as health and recreation. What do you think?'*

There is overwhelming support for the countryside as an asset and its role in promoting tourism, regeneration, health and recreation. A number of concerns were raised about issues such as safety, litter, dog fouling, maintenance, signage, flooding etc. that detract or deter use. Suggestions were made about promotion, information, innovative tourism ventures, the importance of wildlife and heritage, the proximity to communities and public transport.

Summary of responses re **Objective Two**: *‘What do you think of walking and cycling as transport options? Welsh government is keen to promote active travel, not just for fun or recreation but for everyday journeys. We have a good network of community routes like the Taff Trail and the Church Village Bypass path. Do you use these routes? Would you like to walk and cycle more instead of driving?’*

This objective is supported by some but for many people active travel, for example to work, is not practical because of distance, terrain, time constraints and lack of suitable routes. Health, age, family commitments and work requirements are also cited. Many people are concerned about safety, the standard and continuity of routes, maintenance, signage, lighting, promotion and conflict between users (vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians). A number of suggestions were made for route improvements, cycle hire, parking and changing facilities at work.

Summary of responses re **Objective Three**: *‘We have legal responsibilities to look after public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways etc.) and that includes taking enforcement action when paths are blocked. We can also use policies and work with others to protect all the different access opportunities that exist in RCT. What do you think?’*

Whilst most people think we should be protecting public rights of way and other access routes/areas, there are a variety of views on current performance and priorities. The need for more inspections, better reporting, better maintenance and a higher priority for enforcement action are all noted. There are also suggestions for liaison with the police, neighbouring local authorities, community and town councils, voluntary organisations and community groups. Other issues raised include blocked paths and pavements, antisocial behaviour (including litter, flytipping and motor bike trespass) and overgrowth management.

Summary of responses re **Objective Four**: *‘Improve provision for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, off road vehicles and users with mobility or sensory disabilities. This is the biggest challenge because there is not much public money available for new projects. The priorities are likely to be driven by funding bodies and we will need to be creative to make the most of any funding opportunities. What do you think the priorities should be?’*

The main priorities identified by respondents are ‘users with mobility or sensory issues’ and ‘walkers and cyclists’. Provision for off-road vehicles generated divided views; with low or zero priority from some and suggestions for dedicated provision from others. Some respondents suggested the promotion and information provision should be the priority. A significant number of respondents considered that the priority should be for the protection and maintenance of the existing network etc. (see Objective 3) rather than improving provision. Suggestions for funding opportunities and potential for collaboration with others were also made.

Summary of responses re **Objective Five**: *‘What do you think about involving local community and voluntary organisations in the development, promotion and use of access opportunities? In the earlier consultations some people said they wanted to be more involved in their local greenspace, in developing ideas in their local community. Is this something you might want to be involved in?’*

This question generated a mixed response with regard to personal involvement. A total of 81 volunteers (with contact details) have been recorded. This is a significant resource for the future. Information was also provided about current volunteering, as well as the importance of family circumstances, work responsibilities, location, age, health etc. Where people provided additional information there was much support for both individual and group involvement and plenty of ideas to progress this. The involvement of local people in local spaces was a common theme, supporting community pride, utilizing local knowledge and expertise. Concerns were expressed about the Council ‘off-loading’ responsibilities, and the need for community engagement to be properly resourced and supported.

Summary of responses re **Objective Six**: *‘We have legal duties to manage Rights of Way work and we are proposing to develop a series of policies and guidance notes that set out how we will do that work. Is this something you would be interested in? or have suggestions?’*

A number of people suggested that they would be interested in getting involved in policy development. These people will be contacted, where contact information is available. Others suggested that there should be wider consultation on draft policies and guidance or offered other ideas for groups to be engaged. Not all respondents supported policy development and there were practical concerns regarding the speed of preparation, officer time, diversion of available resources from implementation etc. There were also practical suggestions to assist the process and suggestions for improving reporting of issues and the availability of information.

Summary of responses re **Question 14**: *‘Is there anything else you think we should be including into our rights of way improvement plan?’*

There was a wide range of responses to this question, most reflected earlier comments although some additional suggestions for the ideas list and some minor text amendments resulted.

Overall, approximately 38 changes have been made to the Plan as a result of the consultation, ranging from minor wording changes to additional priority themes under some of the Objectives. A brief description of the responses has also been included relating to each of the Objectives in the final Plan.