

Cambridgeshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Focus Group Report

mrुक for Peter Duthie - Countryside Services Team - October 2004



This report presents the findings from three focus groups conducted on 7, 8 and 9 September 2004 with the following groups:

- Unaffiliated users of the Cambridgeshire countryside
- Members of user groups who are active in the Cambridgeshire countryside
- Land managers.

The meetings were part of a wider consultation with stakeholders and members of the public about the Cambridgeshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The full consultation activity has also included paper and on-line surveys, and one to one depth interviews.

The focus groups were set up specifically to find out about current levels of public knowledge of Rights of Way, satisfaction with the RoW network, relationships between different types of countryside user, and the effectiveness of partnership working between land managers and other agencies.

The report was prepared by mrुक. Minor amendments have been made by Peter Duthie, Cambridgeshire County Council.

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SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report presents the findings from three focus groups conducted on 7, 8 and 9 September 2004 with the following groups:

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The meetings were part of a wider consultation with stakeholders and members of the public about the Cambridgeshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The full consultation activity has also included paper and on-line surveys, and one to one depth interviews.

The focus groups were set up specifically to find out about current levels of public knowledge of Rights of Way, satisfaction with the RoW network, relationships between different types of countryside user, and the effectiveness of partnership working between land managers and other agencies.

Focus groups are a particularly useful method of obtaining the views of different client groups and providing depth and insight into particular issues. Because the groups were facilitated by **mrुक**, an independent market research company, the participants were able to talk openly about potentially sensitive issues without concern about their identities being revealed.

1.2 Recruitment and Conduct of the Groups

mrुक handled the recruitment for all focus groups with the help of Peter Duthie and Anneline Wilson of the Countryside Services team.

For each of the meetings, an agreed topic guide was used and the discussions were noted during the session. Respondents were assured that the final report would be written in such a way that views could not be attributed to individuals and participants were not expected to comment in detail on their personal circumstances.

The recruitment steps were as follows:

- the Countryside Services team supplied **mrुक** with a list of key contacts
- **mrुक** wrote out to invite those on the list to attend a focus group, enclosing a reply slip and Freepost envelope
- where insufficient responses were received, **mrुक** followed up by phone with those on the list who did not have addresses
- each group meeting followed a standard format, with the facilitator delivering a brief presentation of the background to the consultation, before opening the meetings up to discussion and debate. A topic guide was also used by the

- facilitator in order to guide the discussion and ensure that all relevant issues were covered
- group members were offered a fee of £20 to cover their expenses in attending the meeting.

The recruitment and attendance for the focus groups is summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Focus groups recruitment and participation

Type of group	Date	Venue	No. of people recruited	No. of people attended
Unaffiliated members of the public *	7 September 2004	Shire Hall, Cambridge	14	14
User group representatives	8 September 2004	Shire Hall, Cambridge	10	7
Land managers	9 September 2004	NFU, Newmarket	12	11
		TOTAL	36	32

* Some countryside user group representatives attended this group for unaffiliated members of the public. They were asked to speak as individuals and not as group representatives.

1.3 Contents of the Report

Section 2 of this report summarises the key findings of the three focus groups, Section 3 contains the detailed report from each group and Section 4 contains the topic guides used for each group.

1.4 Acknowledgements

mrug is most grateful to the focus group participants for their agreement to take part in focus groups on a particularly complex topic. The work could not have taken place without the enormous amount of background information provided by Peter Duthie and Anneline Wilson. Paul Hammett from the National Farmers Union was an invaluable resource in helping to recruit land managers and encouraging their attendance.

SECTION 2 KEY FINDINGS

This section summarises the comments on the main topics made by each of three groups, comprising individual members of the public, countryside user group representatives and land managers. The detailed reports for each group are contained in Section 3.

2.1 Note on qualitative research

Qualitative research provides a way to probe underlying attitudes and obtain an understanding of the important issues. It must be noted, however, that when interpreting these findings that they cannot be stated as statistical evidence. It is also important to note that we are dealing with perceptions, not facts. Although some participants may hold views based on incorrect information, the perceptions are reported in the following report without analysis or comment.

2.2 Use of the countryside

Across the three groups, focus group members stated that they used the Cambridgeshire network of ROW routes for a wide range of countryside activities including walking, bird-watching, riding mountain bikes, riding trail bikes, photography, horse riding, carriage driving, dog walking, recreational cycling, cycling to work, athletics training, and boating.

Comments by individual members of the public

- Footpaths, bridle paths and byways are used frequently
- Circular routes are valued
- Routes between towns are valued for access and commuting
- The long distance paths between Histon and the Fens are highly valued
- Rights of way routes are limited in the north of the county because of intensive agriculture and the topography of the land

Comments by representatives of countryside user groups

- Most use the countryside routes closest to their homes
- Most people wish to preserve a 'natural' appearance on routes in order to minimise disturbance to wildlife
- Most people do not like footpaths that have been cleared too vigorously
- Safe cycle routes that link to towns or public transport interchanges

Comments by land managers

- All members had a combination of footpaths, bridleways and permissive paths on their land
- Some had experience of DEFRA support for stewardship schemes
- One group member commented that user groups don't always display common sense in relation to access issues, and they are always quick to blame farmers if there are problems with access

2.3 Barriers to Countryside Use

The following list summarises the problems with countryside access identified by members of the three focus groups; individual members of the public, user group representatives and land managers:

Comments on transport issues

- There are few circular routes, and it is difficult for cyclists and walkers to make arrangements to be dropped off and collected
- It is difficult to use public transport to get to and from the countryside
- Rural transport timetables deter people in towns from taking public transport for leisure reasons
- Finding safe parking areas on RoW routes can be a problem
- Buses are not designed to carry bicycles, and trains are increasingly restricting bicycle carriage

Comments on routes

- Some popular routes end up on busy roads, which are dangerous to cross
- There are too few routes for cyclists to use in commuting between villages and towns
- There are too few bridleways and byways available to cyclists
- There are too few routes for children to use to cycle safely to and from school
- Some paths are not cleared well enough to allow runners to pass unscathed
- There is access through farms for horses, but not carriages
- It is difficult to find walks that don't use stiles, and this restricts people with mobility problems
- Straight paths encourage cyclists to build up speed – endangering other route users
- The problems with permissive routes is that they can be lost if a farm is sold
- Locked gates are a problem for a range of users, even though the justification is often sound
- Paths close to villages may be unpleasant for walkers because of dog mess
- The use of crop guns in hedges near RoW routes frightens horses

Comments on maintenance

- Flytipping in East and South Cambridgeshire is a problem
- Some farmers fail to reinstate paths after ploughing
- Many bridleways and byways are too overgrown for use by horse riders
- There is also a perception that CCC allows paths to become overgrown and impassable, then blitzes them too vigorously – leaving tree stumps, which are dangerous for riders and cyclists
- The poor condition of wider paths and bridleways makes it difficult for walkers, horse riders and cyclists to use in winter
- Temporary repairs using gravel create problems for horses
- There was general agreement that routes should not be cut back too severely for aesthetic reasons and to protect wildlife
- In general, there is too little clarity about responsibility for clearing waste and debris from RoW routes

- Mounds of earth are left behind in some path clearing operations – leading to further access problems for some users

2.4 Comments on Access for People with Disabilities

- Permissive paths are often used by people with disabilities, and the access issues on these paths should be recognised
- Parish councils are concerned that the RoWIP will force them to spend money to upgrade access for people with disabilities – and they don't have the funds to do this
- Most group members agreed that it was impossible to upgrade all routes to full disabled access – and that a limitation on those accessible by wheelchair or pushchair was inevitable
- For the above reason, it is important to publish information about accessible walks

2.5 Comments on Information Sources

- People want up to date information about the accessibility of routes for different types of users
- Information should be provided on popular routes to indicate who is allowed to use a particular type of path
- The system of coding signposts is quite complicated in Cambridgeshire because each parish council adopts its own standard
- People would like information about where to find the permissive routes created by DEFRA
- Ordnance survey maps and local knowledge are often out of date
- The CCC website on RoW is impressive, but should have more up to date information on the accessibility of specific routes
- Some signs are at ground level or hidden by vegetation
- More waymarks should be placed at crossroads

2.6 Comments on Seasonal Controls

- Farmers don't adhere to seasonal controls
- Land managers have a moral, but not legal responsibility to respect seasonal controls
- Recreational vehicle users are often blamed for damage created by heavy agricultural machinery, therefore it is unfair to use seasonal controls to deny access to vehicles users
- Self-enforced seasonal controls on cyclists have worked in Soham, and this could be a model
- Although countryside user club members may be willing to adhere to seasonal controls, this will not prevent individuals from breaching the guidelines
- Mountain bike users often find gates locked after October whether or not this is required by the weather conditions
- Locked gates force carriage drivers off paths and onto roads, which is potentially dangerous

- It is not always possible to publicise the reasons for locked gates, particularly if a route goes through a wildlife breeding habitat.

2.7 Comments on Relationships between Users

- National government says that people should have more right to roam, but that farmers should do the work to make this possible for free
- Some farmers fail to reinstate footpaths within 14 days of ploughing, which forces walkers off RoW routes
- Because country roads are becoming increasingly dangerous, different types of user are forced onto the same countryside routes, and this creates conflicts
- Some farmers allow their dogs and pigs to chase horses, cyclists and walkers
- Some farmers feel that cyclists are irresponsible
- Carriage drivers [who cannot use bridleways] end up in confrontation with riders who use byways and green lanes
- Walkers feel that CCC prioritises maintenance of byways and bridleways, and not footpaths. Trail riders believe that footpaths are given priority by CCC
- Dog walkers present problems for farmers when dogs are let off their leads
- People with cars and motorbikes use bridleways as byways, and this causes problems for other users and land managers
- Some land managers perceive a conflict of interest between local people living in villages and high profile user groups, such as the Ramblers, and the Open Space and Commons Societies
- The number of irresponsible users and competing uses of the RoW network mean that friction is a fact of life.

2.8 Comments on Health and Safety

- Farmers are concerned about the rising number of insurance claims and prosecutions if people are injured crossing their land, and this public liability issue should be addressed nationally
- There was concern about the health and safety implications for both farmers and countryside users when routes pass through farmyards
- There was also concern that farmyard routes left farmers' homes exposed to vandalism or theft

2.9 Comments on Economic Issues

- Land managers need a budget to maintain and provide environmental access.
- CCC always runs out of money before it can finish doing a job properly
- There could be a market in trading RoW rights, as there is in carbon emissions and water pollution
- RoW should have an economic value put on it

2.10 General Comments on the RoW Network (Individual users and User group representatives)

- The closer a route is to Cambridge, the better the management of the RoW
- Riverside paths are perceived as being better maintained than other routes
- Cross field paths are more pleasant to walk than round the edges of big fields
- Trailriders find the byways quite good, unless they have been damaged by heavy agricultural machinery in autumn
- Recreational vehicle users often feel criticised for travelling on routes that they are legally entitled to use
- Most group members preferred the concept of minimal maintenance instead of vigorous path clearance
- Although CCC has the duty to maintain routes, they don't have the funding to carry out their obligations satisfactorily
- The establishment of P3 coordinators is viewed positively – although some group members would prefer to be able to contact them directly rather than through parish council clerks
- In general, Rights of Way have improved over the last 30 years.

2.11 General Comments on the RoW Network (Land managers)

- It is in farmers' interest to maintain the RoW on their land because they also use the countryside for recreation and they don't want to damage their crops or machinery on poorly maintained paths
- Payment for maintaining RoW is a very positive incentive
- Many farmers don't register the RoW on their land, which puts them at a disadvantage.
- Some farmers think that DEFRA will eventually pay them for their RoW.
- Farmers are doing the maintenance work for CCC, but not being paid (or adequately paid) for it
- Cross-field paths should be eliminated, and replaced by edge of field paths
- Parish Council volunteers funded by CCC are a valuable asset in maintenance work
- Farmers are taking increasing responsibility for the maintenance of RoW, but this work is not respected or acknowledged by the public
- The creation of permissive paths has reduced problems with cars and motorbikes because highways legislation is an effective control mechanism
- CCC is sympathetic to the position of land managers – it is difficult to provide a RoW network that meets everyone's needs and expectations

2.12 Recommendations

These recommendations on the key issues were generated by the focus group members, and are reported here without comment.

Access

- Investigate the integration of public transport with RoW routes to encourage more use of public transport for recreational use
- Investigate the options to encourage the public transport network to promote the carriage of bicycles to recreational RoW routes

Path Maintenance

- Maintain paths by hand and not by machine, which tends to cut them back too far
- Agree an acceptable standard width for different types of paths
- Dig up stumps, so that grass cutting is easier
- CCC should publicise it when RoW have been cleared so that users are aware which routes are newly accessible
- Eradicate blackthorn from paths
- CCC should consider paying farmers to maintain different types of routes
- Support parish councils in their role as key players in the co-ordination of volunteers to carry out maintenance activities

Routes

- Grade RoW routes for use and importance and maintain them to different standards – for example, footpaths to schools should receive high priority
- Maintain more heavily used routes to a higher standard than less well-used routes
- Map and link up bridleways and byways to encourage more use by riders and cyclists
- Consider the construction of more designated mountain bike and off-road routes
- Consider whether some paths could be divided to separate cyclists and walkers
- Review all national footpaths, and take local people's views into account in deciding new routes

Information

- Publish up to date information about the accessibility of different routes on the CCC website and parish council information boards
- Create an interactive site at the CCC site and have a forum for users to upload information about accessibility or ask questions
- CCC should follow through with its plan to publish a biannual magazine that focuses on footpaths and bridleways

- Publicise the colour codes on signposts and conduct user tests to see if members of the public understand them
- Promote consistent colour coding across the county
- Use signs to indicate the name of the next destination rather than just using an arrow to indicate direction
- Site signs so that they are clear of vegetation and indicate the obvious routes
- CCC should publish guidelines for the general public that explain the farmers' roles and responsibilities, and make recommendations for peaceful co-existence

Seasonal Controls

- Consult key user groups in advance of the issue of voluntary guidance on sensitive routes
- Inform people repeatedly about which routes are suitable for different categories of user in winter

Health and Safety

- Clarify the position on farmers' liability for injury that takes place on RoW crossing their land
- Investigate how to prevent the illegal use of bridleways by cars and motorbikes, by the use of deterrents such as bollards

Co-operation with Other Users

- Explore the creation of a regular forum for land managers to meet representatives of user groups, such as the Ramblers Association, to discuss potential conflicts

SECTION 3 FOCUS GROUP REPORTS

- 3.1 Individual countryside users
- 3.2 User group representatives
- 3.3 Land managers

3.1 Individual Countryside Users Group

Date of meeting: 7th Sept 2004

Venue: Shire Hall Cambridge

Time of meeting: 7.00 pm – 8.30 pm

Present: 14 users of Cambridgeshire countryside of whom three people switched from the Wednesday user group meeting.

Facilitator: Joanne Manchester, from mruk

Topic: Cambridgeshire County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Participants were asked to speak as individual members of the public rather than as representatives of user groups.

What do people currently do for recreation in the countryside?

Participants highlighted walking; bird-watching; mountain biking on bridleways; photography; horse riding; carriage driving; dog walking; walking small children; recreational cycling; cycling to work; trailriding on motorbikes; training rugby team.

Footpaths; bridle paths and byways are all used frequently. They value routes which are circular for recreation/health grounds and routes between villages and towns for access and commuting.

Being in nature and fresh air is important. They appreciate the country for wide range of health and leisure reasons and because it is where they live.

Rights of way network in the north of the county is limited because of intensive agriculture and the nature of the land. Many mentioned that they particularly enjoy riverside walks towards King's Lynn and the Wash.

There was a general agreement that RoW have improved greatly in the last 30 years. The reps of user groups such as the Ramblers acknowledged that they generally hear about problem routes rather than routes that are frequently used and where problems are not frequently encountered.

The main problems raised in relation to access to the countryside were:

- Not enough access to the countryside particularly in north Cambs;
- Lack of circular walks;
- Routes which end up on busy roads;
- Lack of routes, which bicycle riders can legitimately use for commuting between villages and towns.
- Lack of safe bicycle routes which children can use safely, year-round to and from school.
- Problem that the paths cleared are not wide enough to run/train safely (in rugby shorts).

- Problem of flytipping. Response to flytipping by East and South Cambs was singled out as being particularly poor. (Ramblers reported an abandoned car on the roman road last year, this year it was still there).
- Failure by farmers to reinstate paths.
- Most bridleways and byways are so overgrown that horses cannot use them.

There was a general perception that the closer to Cambridge the better RoWs were managed and maintained and that more problems were encountered further away from Cambridge.

The riverside paths particularly along the Cam were praised for their very good condition. Was this because the river authority maintains them? Some participants considered this to be true – others felt that the river authority do not generally maintain RoW.

Long distant paths for example between Histon and the Fens are highly valued.

The horse riders are also carriage drivers and expressed frustration that there is access through farms for horses but not for carriages. Kent Gaps would be much appreciated in this regard.

Awareness of legislation and rights and responsibilities

Ramblers Association representatives expressed great frustration that the open land access does not benefit Cambridgeshire. They submitted a few areas of downland for consideration but as they were less than 5 ha they were not eligible. Ramblers want legislation to cover woodland and riverside areas as well in order to benefit Cambs.

Maintenance and management of RoW (dealing with obstructions)

Complaints about long grass and nettles were countered with feelings that the countryside should not be too laundered and that walking through long grass is part of the countryside experience.

Another participant pointed out that grass can be left uncut for the sake of nesting birds or wildlife.

It was recognised that there is little clarity on whose responsibility it is to clear waste and debris from RoW. One participant said that local authorities have no power to remove debris from private land.

The issue of widths of paths was discussed. It is perceived that CCC let paths become so overgrown that they can no longer be used and then blitz them for clearing. This approach was criticised because Hawthorn and Blackthorn stumps are not cleared adequately and make paths quickly impassable particularly for horses.

A contractor at the meeting felt that rather than spending money on making certain byways very wide – that a width that is acceptable to all should be agreed and then all the stumps properly dug up so that basic maintenance like grass cutting is possible.

There were several calls for the CCC to publicise when RoW have been cleared so that users know that they are accessible again. This could promote increased usage to keep the vegetation down (that is apart from blackthorn and hawthorn).

One needs to be brutal in clearing blackthorn in order to make any progress. However this is sometimes seen as being in contrast with preserving nature etc..

Several users spoke of mistakes made by CCC where much money was spent to open up RoW but in effect the mounds of earth that were left behind and the lack of access for horse drawn carriages means that they are unable to benefit.

The question of money was raised repeatedly over the course of the discussion. Most participants recognised that there would never be enough funding to maintain all footpaths and byways to a high standard. One participant proposed that RoW should be graded for use and importance and that these should be maintained to different standards. For example a footpath to a school would be a priority whereas a little used path should not be prioritised.

A graded system would enable users to know whether a path was always open and accessible or whether it was dependent on season or weather conditions. This would also mean that scarce resources are better prioritised.

There was not total agreement with this suggestion:

- The ramblers felt that the proportion of the transport budget spent on RoW was miniscule. If some of the money for the guided bus was diverted for RoW there would be more health and environmental benefits.

One participant asked whether it was true that 80% of users used 20% of RoW? If that is the case is it possible to identify the heavily used paths and spend more on maintaining them as opposed to less used routes?

The horse /carriage riders did not agree with this as the 80% figure only refers to walkers not riders or carriage drivers or cyclists and the routes that they use.

The trailriders commented that the byways in Cambs that they use are quite good. The main problem they encounter is the damage caused by heavy agricultural machinery that often destroys fenland routes in autumn.

One gentleman observed how in the past farm tracks were maintained by asbestos and wondered if reverting to this would help keep routes accessible?

' I don't want to walk on asbestos paths' seemed to be the general response.

Another gentleman noted that there seemed to be a lot of pleading at the meeting from special interest groups but he felt as a user of the countryside that maintenance and management of RoW should be as minimal as possible as he wants to enjoy the countryside. He would rather walk through nettles than on an asbestos path.

Access for people with disabilities

Permissive paths are important for local access, particularly for disabled access.

In Meldreth the parish council recently completed a riverside path that is only accessible for able bodied. They are concerned that the new RoW plan will force them to spend a lot of money to make it accessible for disabled people particularly as there is a large school for disabled children in the village. The cost of redeveloping as a result of the plan was raised as a key issue.

Issues around carriage driving and access for the disabled were echoed by many participants. However other users pointed out that they do not want the countryside to be paved and that there should be a limitation on the amount of wheelchair / pushchair accessible routes.

A number of paths closest to villages and towns should be accessible for people in wheelchairs or with pushchairs. It was suggested that small armies of individual volunteers could maintain some routes with hand tools.

Parishes were seen to have a key role in organising this. The establishment of P3 coordinators has helped. However the RA representatives pointed out that CCC has ruled that the identity of P3 coordinators be kept confidential and that enquiries need to go through the parish clerk – however in many cases there is no parish clerk. So unless someone says that they are the parish representative you don't know who they are.

One participant asked whether it was realistic to expect the entire network to be accessible to wheelchair users?

'No, but we should prioritise certain paths.'

Several people commented that permissive paths maintained by farmers were the only paths in their area that were accessible for wheelchairs or pushchairs.

'The Ely easy access trail was beautiful and accessible but CCC seemed to lose interest in maintaining it and last time I visited it it was under 2 ft of water'.

'Books about walks give some information about accessibility for the disabled.'

'Mostly you find out by trial and error – I take my grandchild out in the pushchair and find the route ends and I just can't get any further. – it's very frustrating.'

'Weather and time of year affects accessibility.'

'In Hampshire farmers maintained all the tracks and were paid to do it – why doesn't this happen in Cambs?'

'There is no money – Education and Social Servs take most of the budget and won't accept cuts for RoW'.

'When we phone to complain we are told either that farmers are responsible or that the path has been cut back when it hasn't. No one is checking or following up.'

Sources of information

The group seemed to be confident about their knowledge on RoW. This is because routes are mostly well signposted. However there is little up to date information on whether or not paths are accessible.

Up to date information should be available on:

- County Council Website;
- Parish council information boards

One participant mentioned the intention for the CC team to produce a biannual magazine with a focus on footpaths and bridleways, which would publicise accessible RoW.

Several were concerned that RoW is confusing for members of the public who use the countryside occasionally and without maps. That the signs once you leave the road often disappear and the colour coded signs may be meaningless to some people.

‘Also why don’t the signs show where they are going – should have the name and distance of the next village rather than just an arrow. ‘

Users:

Walkers who use footpaths felt that CCC prioritised maintenance and management of by ways and bridleways.

Users of by-ways (e.g trailriders) felt that all attention is on footpaths and that there are not enough by-ways to use. Where there are by-ways they feel that they are blamed for damage when most of the damage is caused by farmers using heavy agricultural machinery (tractors) and landrovers in all weathers.

Carriage drivers are technically using vehicles so they cannot use bridleways and can only use byways and green lanes. As they cannot take their horses off road they often find themselves in confrontation with trailriders on the same track.

‘Dog walkers are not represented here but in my village there was uproar when a countryside stewardship scheme ended and access to fields where dog walkers go was denied’. We need access close to villages.’

Another problem is that local bus services have been withdrawn. My village is 3 miles from the village college. We are trying to make a linked path that children can cycle safely on, especially in the dark but this is proving very difficult. A private bus company is charging £150 per term per child just to take them to school and back.

The Duxford bus no longer needs a subsidy as so many people use it. Why not have a similar service to Wimpole Hall so people can use it without driving there?

‘RoW should provide safe access for schoolchildren and get them away from dangerous roads.’

'People also use footpaths to cycle to work because it is safer than cycling on country roads.'

'Yes, but it isn't safe if you are walking on one and get run down by a bike.'

'We should be able to cycle on main footpaths between towns and villages. It's the safest way to get children off the roads and to give them exercise'.

'Could a budget for cycle ways not come from the same sources as cycle routes? Road chipping is cheap and effective. The path between Coton and Comberton was chipped years ago and it is still in good condition.'

Motorised vehicles

Whilst you can't deny farmers access to their fields, off roaders get blamed for the mess made by tractors.

I know farmers who can't get to their fields because of the damage caused by off-roaders.

Problem is caused by lack of drainage – this is heavy clay so once it's wet nothing can be done.

Problem that 4x4 drivers ignore the seasonal controls and then do a lot of damage. Walkers can't walk on ground that has been cut up by these vehicles.

Horses can't go there either. When gravel is put down it prevents access for horses.

Problem is that a small number of irresponsible users and multiple and conflicting uses of the RoW – the friction is a fact of life.

Economic issues

Wouldn't mind pay and display if I knew that the money was going to be spent on maintaining RoW.

Driving to the countryside goes against the principle of walking.

It's not practical because they will pay someone to collect the money – or have machines which will be broken into.

The countryside should be open and free.

Car parks would be good but should be free of charge.

If you have a car park travellers will move in.

Car parks on well used paths – with height barriers would be good.

Small car park near us is used. Even if there was a charge the CC wouldn't make much money.

Wimpole is a popular place to park and walk – they don't charge at the moment.

Swaffham Priory parking was well intentioned but hasn't worked. Cars get broken into so no one leaves them there.

It would be good to have circular walks around villages. The village hall car parks are under utilised and could be used for this. It would also bring in money for local pubs, shops etc... If local enterprises worked together to increase access by offering parking they would all benefit.

What about having honesty boxes? If you see somewhere is well maintained people are quite generous.

They would be broken into.

Is this parking question just about making some money for the CCC?

The CC should work more closely with the district councils as they have more interest in promoting local tourism. When we made the Ooze river valley more user friendly it brings in lots of people from outside the area.

Districts have not realised the full potential of having good RoW.

What would you like to see done differently in the management of the countryside RoW?

Finish what you start.

Minimal but coherent signage.

Signposts should tell where the path leads to. If you are not a local you would not be able to follow the Cambs waymarks.

Make farmers reinstate paths to the width they are supposed to be.

If farmers receive subsidies can they be held responsible to maintain RoW or risk losing their subsidies?

End of discussion

3.2 User Group representatives

Date of meeting: 8th Sept 2004

Venue: Shire Hall Cambridge

Time of meeting: 7.00 pm – 8.30 pm

Present: 7 in total with representatives from Sustrans, Green Lanes Association, International Mountain Biking Association; Trail rider fellowship; British Horse Society. Two participants regarded themselves as users rather than representatives of user groups – both were walkers.

Facilitator: Joanne Manchester, from mruk

Topic: Cambridgeshire County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Using the countryside

Off road motorcycling, mountain biking, walking, driving 4x4, horse riding, carriage driving, dog-walking, riverside paths for boating, rambling and cycling to work were all highlighted.

Most use the countryside closest to their homes. The mountain bike representative would like to see the construction of custom-made off road facilities for mountain biking which would appeal particularly to young people.

One gentleman worked as voluntary warden in Glos and maintained miles of footpaths. Feels that footpaths should remain part of the countryside and that clearance should be minimal so as not to destroy wildlife and to keep the countryside looking pretty.

There was agreement that these 'main road' footpaths are unsightly and not enjoyable to walk on.

Glos was an area of outstanding natural beauty so paths had to be kept looking beautiful – not the case here in Cambs.

Sustrans rep was keen to discuss the benefits of taking the bus to the countryside to enable access for town people. As a cyclist he feels that only the bravest venture very far as the roads are so dangerous that no one can get to the countryside on their bikes. So families load up their cars to go cycling around Graffham water and Rutland. The cycle network aims to connect places so that cyclists don't have to be fearless to get to places. Work to join up safe routes and make new links. He is also a member of the local access forum in Peterborough.

Impediments to using the countryside as much as they would like

Rural transport is seen as a service for people who live in the countryside and who don't have cars (a tiny minority). So buses leave early in the morning and return in the evening. This means people in towns without cars can't use buses to get to the countryside for leisure purposes. Some rural villages are hostile to increased bus services because they don't want people from towns coming to their villages. There is a them and us mentality.

Problem is that roads used to be safe for everyone to use but as fast cars make country roads too dangerous we are all being forced on to the same routes and this creates conflict and has led to the demand for categorisation.

Need public transport to get to the countryside. If we go by car then finding safe parking is a problem. Also if there were buses you could have a linear walk because you don't have to return to your car.

Buses are not useable by cyclists in this country. In other countries buses have been adapted to carry bicycles on the front or back of the bus.

Trains won't take bicycles unless they are folded. Even when they do it is very confusing knowing which trains you can use. You can't book tickets over the internet if you are taking a bike.

Train situation is getting worse and I have been turned away at the station with my bike.

Another problem is that people with mobility problems can't get over the stiles. Organising stile-free walks is very difficult. To replace them all with kissing gates is very expensive.

The number of bridleways and byways that cyclists can access is very limited.

Problem for walkers is the amount of sticky mud. Wider paths and bridleways get completely cut up in the winter so you can't walk on them.

They are cut up by agricultural vehicles and horse riders – there should be a system to divide the path half and half for cyclists and pedestrians. Walking in uneven mud is disastrous for older people's joints.

Same problem for cyclists – we don't want wide straight paths because then people gather speed and come into conflict with other users.

By Soham the paths were cleared but were more like motorways – would be better if user groups were encouraged to maintain paths by hand because machines hack them back too wide.

The uneven surfaces of bridleways can be dangerous for horses and riders and there is always the problem of mud.

CCC has duty to maintain routes but they always say they don't have enough money.

Satisfaction with RoW network

How do you know what is a footpath? How are members of the public supposed to know if they are allowed to cycle or not?

Coding in Cambs is very complicated – each parish has its own code – how are you supposed to understand the maps, especially if you have come from outside the parish?

There are permissive routes created by Defra but how are we supposed to get information about them? Is there a website?

Permissive routes are not recorded on ordnance survey maps so people don't know about them.

Problem with permissive routes is that owners can close them permanently so if a farm changes hands, routes can be lost.

My information is based on having local knowledge and using ordnance survey maps. But these are usually not accurate and need to be updated.

I was impressed by the CC website on RoW

RoW information also needs to be available on parish noticeboards.

Could more information be published about usable roads? This could be posted in libraries, at supermarkets, on websites...

The definitive map should be updated yearly

Footpaths are waymarked in yellow – others are different colours – but most people don't know what the colours stand for.

There should be people patrolling the footpaths.

Footpaths are 78% of all RoW –horses, bikes etc are not allowed on them so they cannot be causing the damage. Bridleways are 17%, RUPPS 3% and byways 2% - would be interesting to do a survey to regrade the routes according to people who use them – 80% of walkers only use 20% of footpaths.

We need bridleways and byways to be linked up so we can use them properly. Many routes start as a bridleway and end as a footpath or in the middle of a field.

Signs on the ground get hidden by vegetation. Waymarking is very poor. Signs from the road are generally ok but once you are off the road they disappear. People without maps will get lost. There should be a way mark at any point of doubt which way to go.

Statutory green signposts often get stolen.

The P3 scheme does a good job. It is easy to organise volunteers from a parish.

It would be really useful to have information about the condition of paths – who should we report it to if we find a path is not useable?

Can report it on website to Cambs but can't share this with other users – would be good to have an interactive site that people can share information about condition of routes with other people.

The most important thing is know about the existence of a certain route. Then once you know it is there you need to know about the condition of it. We should have guidance about where to and where not to go.

Don't you think the ordnance survey maps provide good info? I think the 25,000 is very good.

Most people are confident about using maps

But they are the ones that stick to the main paths, which are signposted.

Some landowners discourage people from using the land and hide way marks – they also forget that they are responsible for the surface of the path.

Farmers try hard to reroute paths – but the people in little bungalows are worse.

Problem is that the network is an old historic network where people walked through farms and past houses but people today don't want routes going right past their houses.

Another problem is that leaflets about routes are not updated.

Going back to the question of signage – as a recreational vehicle user I sometimes come into conflict with other users because of the problem of signs. I am a responsible user and only go where I am legally entitled to ride but there is a lack of understanding among the general public about routes which are legally accessible to vehicles but are also promoted to walkers and horse riders. We don't ride on footpaths or bridleways but we want to be able to use the byways and some people want us to be criminalised for that.

Seasonal controls

Problem is that farmers don't have to adhere to seasonal controls. A farm near me regularly has shooting parties in the winter despite having seasonal controls for access.

The owners of the land can do whatever they want on it and the recreational vehicle users get blamed for causing damage.

Land managers have a moral but not legal responsibility to respect seasonal controls.

What about for users? I don't have a problem with the concept, as recreational vehicle use needs to be properly managed but when legitimate users are criminalised and denied access for spurious reasons then that is not acceptable.

The problem is when the tactic is used to appease people who object to our presence rather than for real maintenance purposes.

In the past motorcycles were included in the seasonal control when we are not responsible for damage to routes. Now that has changed thanks to pressure from the trail riders.

The other kind of control is voluntary guidance. In Soham there is a very steep bridleway, which cyclists would ride down too fast. Voluntary guidance about usage in wet weather, speed etc.. was issued and cyclists have kept to it. It is self-enforcing without controls.

Majority of people are responsible so if you give guidance about where to avoid in winter they will not go there. But they do need to know about alternatives and this can be difficult to find out.

CCC say that they have tried voluntary restraints but the problem is that there was no real consultation between the CC and user groups involved so the guidance was not accepted.

Last year I turned up at a byway, there were no signs as they had been destroyed. If I'd have known there was a voluntary restraint I would not have gone there in the first place. But it seems that CCC uses voluntary restraints as a stepping-stone to seasonal control rather than really trying to make them work by informing users about them.

It is very complicated to enforce a voluntary restraint on a legal activity. It's ok if users know each other or are members of a club but it is difficult to control individual members of the public.

Most mountain bike users will stay off trails that get damaged in wet weather but the problem is that gates are locked in October whether or not it is wet or dry.

From a horse riders perspective I think seasonal controls should be used cautiously and I don't agree with illegitimate use of controls. They can be appropriate but the CC needs to be careful how to use them. The main thing is to respond to the current climate rather than sticking to seasons.

The lockable gates also prevent horse drawn carriages from accessing routes yet they are not responsible for the damage. This then forces horses and carriages onto country roads, which is dangerous for everyone.

Routes are sometimes blocked because of wildlife breeding etc.. This can't be publicised because people go hunting for badgers.

Other obstacles to using RoW

Farmers fail to reinstate footpaths within 14 days of ploughing them up. Walkers then become hostile to farmers if they have to fight their way through RoW. You can walk through fields of wheat but not rape it's too tall. Near us we just took a map and a compass and walked 3 abreast to force a route through.

Cross field paths have been moved for so called safety reasons that's a pity as it is not so nice walking around the edges of fields – and they are very big fields!

The other thing that ruins enjoyment is the problem of flytipping. People drive a long way down byways to leave computers, wardrobes etc..

Byways are sometimes used closed to recreational vehicles just to prevent fly tipping but that is not a legitimate reason to close a byway.

I take photos of dumped stuff and put it in the local newsagents window –it's amazing how quickly people will move them again!

We need some high profile prosecutions to act as a real deterrent.

Often byways are locked to prevent cars being driven down them and burnt out.

On the fens gates are locked to prevent hare coursing.

Another problem is the footpaths out of villages are dog walker paths and they are filthy.

Use of crop guns is a problem – if you don't see them and they are fired from behind a hedge they can make a horse bolt.

Some farmers deliberately keep pigs near routes because they know they scare horses.

Loose dogs in farmyards chase cyclists and walkers.

Economic issues – pay and display car parks

They'd be targeted by vandals.

Huge expense to collect cash and patrol them

Ramblers don't publicise meeting points for fear of cars being targeted by thieves.

We should have better public transport not more car parks.

Car parks concentrate people using the same stretches of RoW rather than spreading out and doing less damage to paths etc..

Is the idea of pay and display as opposed to free parking? How would the money be spent?

Forestry commission has honesty boxes which people seem to use.

Parking could work for some horseriders e.g to drive to Graffham Water but children ride but don't drive – not everyone has a horse box – not all horses will go in boxes...

What would you like to see done differently?

Involve user groups in the general maintenance. We offer our services but the countryside team does not take this offer up and we always seem to be the last to know about changes or developments.

More consultation

15 years ago when Peterborough was part of Cambs we were involved in technical work like erecting stiles etc.. this is not done so much now. Maybe it is because if people are using equipment then the health and safety people become involved and it all gets really complicated.

CCC won't provide money for raw materials even when people are prepared to do the work for free.

Is there a volunteer coordinator for path maintenance at the CCC?

No, just at parish level.

User groups could be more involved in compiling status reports about routes, identifying gaps, reporting good or bad conditions...

Should have parish path wardens

Young cyclists need to be better catered for. They are often forced to ride in illegal areas such as the quarry at Cherry Hinton because there is nowhere else to go.

If you give people the option to stay on the right side of the law, they will.

End of discussion

3.3 Meeting of Land Managers

Date of meeting: 9th Sept 2004

Venue: NFU, Newmarket

Time of meeting: 7.00 pm – 8.30 pm

Present: 10 land managers and 1 NFU representative

Facilitator: Joanne Manchester, from mruk

Topic: Cambridgeshire County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Introductions

Most participants are landowners with public RoW, 5 have Defra support for countryside stewardship scheme. All have a combination of footpaths, bridleways and permissive paths on land. Two mentioned byways on their land. One farmer /county councillor has recently given up involvement on this issue because of the introduction of the CROW Act and problems with user groups. He felt that user groups don't have common sense when it comes to access, they expect farmers to spend a fortune building bridges over fens to nowhere, that conservationists in search of newts and waterbells paralyse farmers from doing their work and that when something goes wrong (gates left open etc...) that the farmer is always blamed

Overall impressions of RoW

'We are managing them better' managing them on behalf of CCC. But CCC gets hundreds of thousands of £ for maintenance which isn't passed on to the farmers who are doing the work.

Some receive money from parish funds for maintaining heavily used RoW within the parish.

The routes which are not used should be moved, rerouted. Would like to move them to where people would use them more.

Cottenham Parish council has 12 miles of footpath, which was unusable for many years because of nettles and drainage. A group of volunteers in the village were funded by CCC to clear the path – CCC gave the money directly to the parish council but now the money goes directly to that group of volunteers. It is brilliant and the issue of the state of the footpaths has not been raised at parish council meetings since the group took over maintenance. It is a good example of how paths could be maintained.

Main concerns for farmers are around litigation between owners and users. We are asked not cut around ditches to protect habitat of water voles but then if people fall in ditches we are to blame. Is there any way owners can opt out of responsibility for users of RoW on their land?

Our insurance premiums are rising astronomically and claims against us are rising. People make frivolous claims for what was their own fault. Insurance companies pay out because they want to close the file and this impacts on all our premiums. This needs to be tackled nationally under the RoW scheme. People should carry their own public liability insurance if they are out in the countryside.

I was told by CCC officer that public liability indemnity was held by the county council – is that the case?

But in Peak District this year someone left a gate open and the farmer was prosecuted.

The problem is that we can own land in this country but we can't use it how we like – we need planning permission.

If the state wants people to wander all over the land then the state should pick up responsibility not the luckless owner.

The problem with free access is that we want to encourage people to enjoy the countryside if they are not doing any harm – in some cases walkers can help to prevent vandalism, arson etc..

Farmers are now more responsible in the management of RoW than in the past 30 years. Most farmers respect the RoW but do the public treat them with respect?

Other users take for granted that landowners will deliver everything but it costs us a lot of money.

My vandalism problems disappeared by making permissive paths and now we can go after the motorbikes and cars by using highway legislation. So the fact that we have made them into RoW has actually solved a lot of our problems.

Most walkers are very nice and I enjoy them being there. Most problems arise from people who shouldn't be there in the first place.

Knowledge of the Public RoW

Problem is that many farmers don't register RoW on their land- the statutory declaration under the 83 act. Very few people do it but if they did it would protect their rights.

Some farmers think that if they don't sign up for RoW now in a few years time they will be paid by Defra for it – why give it away now when you could earn from it in a few years?

Well you can terminate the existing agreement with 3 months notice so it's not really a problem.

Dogs are increasingly becoming a problem because owners let them off the leads. I have a permissive track and find that people are driving down it to let their dog off at the end of it.

Problem is that there is no law which obliges people to keep dogs on leads – just says under control.

In the Peak District there are signs about keeping dogs on leads everywhere.

Dogs should be on a lead, on a path – not just ‘under control’.

Why do we keep opening up the countryside more when we can’t control the parts that are already open?

If we don’t offer it the government will take it – better to do it on our own terms.

A major problem is that of security of premises and farm environments.. A bridleway runs through my farm, which people use as a byway – that is a real problem people with cars and motorbikes using bridle ways.

Where bridleways leave roads we should put up bollards to prevent drivers.

We need to look at the illegal use of bridleways and need to see how they can be gated. Problem is that motorbikes can still get in if horses can.

We are working out a plan with the district council to make a circular route – but if just one rambler objects then the whole thing falls apart and has to go to appeal. That is not democratic – we need to make laws to benefit the majority. If the villagers want something how can a rambler who doesn’t live in the same county scupper it? Also the CCC picks up the tab for user appeals but the landowners have to cover all our legal costs.

The Commons and open space society are more problematic than the ramblers. They search the internet looking for plans to object to – if they see anything that threatens any RoW they will put in an objection – whether or not it makes sense, is supported by villagers ...

We need a simplified planning division with more power to the council to make decisions. The whole system is out of date.

Villagers should have more say about diversions – in my village the locals all supported a diversion but the ramblers objected and put a spanner in the works.

That’s why the Cottenham group works so well because it is made up of interested villagers.

Another problem is that of cyclists using footpaths. CCC don’t like bikes on footpaths but kids especially need somewhere safe to cycle.

The majority of cyclists seem to have no knowledge about their responsibilities.

When notices are put up they are usually torn down or defaced.

CCC are not good at replacing notices.

Would be really useful if CC or other authority issued guidelines explaining why landowners do and ask for certain things. For example in our parish people complain that they don't see the wildlife but that is because of the dogs running all the place – they are a menace to birds and small wildlife.

In our area there are magpie traps because they destroy the nests of other birds. But walkers release them not knowing they are putting other wildlife in danger.

We should have meetings between us the and RA etc.. to explain that the countryside is managed so that they can enjoy it and what that management means and entails.

We are putting 6m grass strips around our fields for wildlife but then people walk, cycle etc.. down them.

Problem is how to enforce good behaviour on RoW.

We are starting to address this through a school –farm link. We lecture the kids who visit about respecting the countryside and wildlife – they won't change unless we teach them as youngsters.

Satisfaction with the RoW network

Most of the network is over 100 years old and was intended for people to walk from All of us want to abolish cross field routes but opposition from the ramblers etc.. make it very difficult to come up with workable alternatives village to village.

(100% of those present wanted to abolish x field RoW)

We were lucky we changed ours in the 1970's but the ramblers won't give an inch - - they refuse to take a pragmatic view.

In one case a development of new houses was moved because of an old RoW.

That's why we go down the permissive route because it can blight future planning permission if we do down the statutory route. .

Security

Should be easy to move RoW that go through farmyards. There are clear health and safety implications for having members of the public wandering around working farmyards.

Public footpaths threaten property security – we need them to be moved away from our houses.

There are basically 3 types of users:

- the dog poo brigade – local villagers who keep to small area around villages to walk their dogs
- the socks and boots brigade – serious walkers with maps
- the others who we don't want who cause a nuisance, don't stick to paths and are potentially dangerous.

The number of people walking at weekends has risen astronomically.

Problem of night joggers and night shooting (although in theory they are not allowed to shoot within 20 yards of a footpath).

We have a footpath going through our farmyard and so far have lost more than £4,000 worth of movable tools.

Those of us with farms on the edge of towns have more problems. If you are next to a council block you are farming under completely different rules – we need support.

The CCC have sympathy for our predicament I think that CC and landowners are in a similar position – both are frustrated trying to provide a RoW network that is useable in the modern age.

That's it, it needs to be modernised.

We need cycleways within 20 miles of big towns – they don't exist at the moment and farmers will have to make a big sacrifice.

People are prepared to cycle a long way to work these days if they can.

As landowners we will be asked to provide cycle paths and we should be paid for it.

Problem is that these paths will be used by motorbikes – there are kids around 15-16 who already have motorbikes and their parents encourage them to ride off road on our paths. In the past I have caught them and called the police but I got a death threat from one of the parents.

I think that RoW wherever they are, should have a purpose. One farm has 3 paths starting and ending at the same point in one field – what is the point of that?

Now paths can't cross the A14 – are we supposed to build footbridges over the A14?

There is one over the M11 at Grantchester – cost a fortune just to save walkers a quarter of a mile.

On the A14 in Northamptonshire there are footpaths across the road – it is incredibly dangerous.

Signs

Waymarks should be higher so you can see them from one to the next.

I think waymarks are a waste of time – no one knows what the different colours mean.

People try to take them home

What information should they contain

They should say if they are a bridleway or a permissive route and what that means.

Cambs has much worse signage than other counties.

Structures like kissing gates where there are cattle – the wooden ones were chopped down for barbecues – now have metal ones but even they get nicked.

Fly tipping is a big problem down byways.

All weather use of RoW

CCC are supposed to be responsible for the surface of the paths but we look after ours, otherwise they become impassable.

We have grassed ours over and just keep it mowed.

CCC very bad at looking after bridleways – I would rather be paid to do it because I have the machinery. Now I get paid for cutting the grass on my grassed paths.

Bridleways are different because people will use them when it is too muddy and they ruin them.

We can close our permissive paths seasonally. Or if we were spraying potatoes with acid we would close the path.

We have just reorganised all our permissive horse riding routes so that they don't come into conflict with walkers using the same paths.

In Bedfordshire they close byways during winter and usually keep them closed if wet weather continues. They are closed with a steel fence to which the farmer has a key if he needs access.

Seasonal controls for motorised vehicles is a good idea as it is very costly to reinstate land that has been cut up by vehicles.

What about seasonal controls on agricultural machines/vehicles?

We don't use tractors on bridleways and byways in the winter – that is just common sense as we don't want to cut them up. It is in our interest to keep them in good condition as we need access during the harvest.

4x4 cause most damage to the byways.

Working in partnership

Land owners want to be able to use their roads safely without damaging crops or machinery. So it is in our own self interest that we maintain our roads.

I cut the footpaths on my farm because I enjoy walking and because I don't want thistles in the crops – but mainly it's a community thing – I like locals coming for pleasant walks on my land.

We do it because when it wasn't done in the past, people would just walk or ride in the tramlines of the fields.

Now we get paid to do it, which is good. It's not a lot of money but it is relatively easy for us to do.

I didn't want to have a local reputation of blocking RoW so I work to keep my footpaths clear.

Also if I maintain it, then people will walk and that does keep the vegetation down to a certain extent.

You must realise that those of us here are the converted. Many farmers are not interested in RoW – you are getting a warped view.

The farming community is feeling embattled and this is reflected in their attitudes towards the public and RoW.

There are difficult awkward farmers, just as there are difficult awkward walkers and other users.

We are very clear about our legal responsibilities. Most of the grey areas occur for farmers who basically don't want public access on their land.

I have not had any problems dealing with the highway section of CCC.

Around trees and planning permission – relations with CCC can be more difficult.

Problem is that the CC runs out of money before it can efficiently do the job and pay for what has been done.

We are doing much more work than we are paid for and this should be recognised.

There are budget cuts at CC every year – don't see how the RoW improvement plan will be funded. A14 and schools are the council's priority – we will end up picking up the bill.

The cost for developers will rise massively. There are questions about RoW and access in section 106 of the development bill. No land will go for development because of the development land tax – if you sign it they will build a bypass.

National government says that the public should have freedom to roam, more footpaths, more cycle paths. They expect farmers to do the work for free. Those farmers who pull down the shutters don't feel as though they are working in partnership but as being told they have to open up more land to the public.

It would be nice to open up from place to place so people can cycle, ride and use the countryside. But this requires a lot of money for those new links to be made.

Sustrans got money from the lottery – will the RoW?

We are currently entering agreements to offer a route, service it and make it permissive – seems like the best way to go.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

You can't provide accessible RoW because there is not enough money.

Cross-country mobility machines cost around £7k – if they have a motor they need a licence.

Short of metalling the RoW then access for disabled people is going to be very difficult.

Some paths have grids that wheelchairs and pushchairs can cross – money came from CLA.

It's laudable but it's not really achievable to a broad extent.

Disabled access is bankrupting some churches and schools.

It's basically a route down which we don't want to be looking because of the cost benefit ratio. We would rather spend £ to benefit more people rather than a very small number.

Maybe if we could develop a market in access to the countryside – if we are not growing crops maybe this could be a way to bring in an income?

Land managers need a budget to maintain and provide environmental access.

Back to the old argument – you own the land but the state tells you what you can and can't do with it.

The countrymen are overrun and ignored.

What would you like to see done differently in the management of the RoW?

Want to see a revision of all the national footpaths – taking in local people's views and have a common sense not a historic approach.

Planners need to show more common sense and understanding.

Could there be trading of RoW like there was trading for water?

Would need to establish a value for RoW to make that worthwhile.

We need a complete overhaul of the RoW. Objective of the improvement plan is to bring the RoW up to date and meet the needs of the various users. But problem is that this can't be achieved because the law says once a highway always a highway so we are totally hamstrung by dead end paths and paths that no one uses.

Without goodwill from users we end up with more and more paths but we would like to end up with better paths rather than just more – quality not quantity.

End of discussion

Section 4 Topic Guides

The ROWIP Focus groups for Users

	Topic	Prompts for questions/ discussion points
1	Introduction and Welcome	Who we are Why we are doing this (prepare separate briefing note) How we want to do this e.g. respect for others during discussion Housekeeping : Toilets, refreshments and fire safety
2	Warm up exercise: Using the Countryside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do people currently do for recreation in the countryside? ▪ Any other typical recreational uses not mentioned? (prompt for dog walking, cycling, riding, 4x4 etc. if not mentioned) ▪ Which countryside routes are used most often? ▪ What do they most value about access to the countryside? ▪ What stops them using it as much as they would like?
3	Knowledge of Public Rights of Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Briefly, what do people know about their rights to use the countryside? (Don't stray too far into detailed legal explanations or discussions about new 'Open Land' access – Cambs will have little or none) ▪ Where do they find out information about their rights and responsibilities? ▪ Are they confident that they have accurate information on their rights and responsibilities? ▪ What makes it difficult to be sure of their rights and responsibilities? ▪ What would make it easier to be sure of their rights and responsibilities?
4	Satisfaction with ROW Network	<p>What are people's opinions about: (probe for both positive and negative aspects of each question)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The coverage of the Rights of Way network (paths in interesting locations, stop and start in accessible places, enough different types of route, routes for different types of user (foot, horse, vehicle)?) ▪ Accessibility for people with disabilities ▪ Quality of information provided by CCC and partners about routes for different types of user ▪ General maintenance of the Rights of Way network (paths, obstructions, etc) ▪ Signposting (are way-markers well-maintained and easy to follow?)

	Topic	Prompts for questions/ discussion points
5	Relationships with Other Types of User	<p>Who are the different types of user on the Right of Way network? (Ask which types of user focus group members specifically encounter when using countryside routes)</p> <p>How good or bad are the relationships with different types of user when using the Right of Way network?</p> <p>What is the view on introducing seasonal controls on recreational motorised vehicles legally using byways, such as 4x4 and road-legal motorbikes? (That is, allowing use only in summer)</p> <p>How could relationships with different users be improved? For each suggestion ask who should be responsible for making the improvement and how would it make a difference.</p>
6	Economic issues	<p>Do people tend to spend less than £5 per head or more than £5 per head when out in the countryside for the day?</p> <p>What do people typically spend money on if out for the day?</p> <p>If Pay and Display car parks were introduced at the beginning and end of particularly promoted and developed routes, how much would be reasonable to pay for a day's parking?</p>
7	Summary	<p>What are the most positive benefits of the countryside rights of way routes?</p> <p>What would you like to see done differently in the management of the countryside rights of way network?</p> <p>Summary and key messages from the group.</p>
8	Close	Thanks and Payment of incentives

The ROWIP Focus groups for Groups / Organisations

	Topic	Prompts for questions/ discussion points
1	Introduction and Welcome	Who we are Why we are doing this (prepare separate briefing note) How we want to do this e.g. respect for others during discussion Housekeeping : Toilets, refreshments and fire safety
2	Warm up exercise: Using the Countryside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which user groups / organisations do people represent? ▪ What is the main use they make of the countryside? ▪ Where in the County are they most likely to use the Rights of Way network of routes? ▪ Does anything stop them using particular routes as much as they would like? <p>Pick out a few of the key ideas offered by the group and explore further.</p>
3	Knowledge of Public Rights of Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Briefly, how well informed is their membership about their rights to use the countryside? (Don't stray too far into detailed legal explanations or discussions about new 'Open Land' access – Cambs will have little or none) ▪ Where do user group members find out information about their rights and responsibilities? ▪ Are they confident that they have accurate information on their rights and responsibilities? ▪ What makes it difficult to be sure of their rights and responsibilities? ▪ What would make it easier to be sure of their rights and responsibilities?
4	Satisfaction with ROW Network	<p>As user group representatives, what are people's opinions about: (probe for both positive and negative aspects of each question)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The coverage of the Rights of Way network (paths in interesting locations, stop and start in accessible places, enough different types of route, routes for different types of user (foot, horse, vehicle)?) ▪ Accessibility for people with disabilities ▪ Quality of information provided by CCC and partners about routes for different types of user ▪ General maintenance of the Rights of Way network (paths, obstructions, etc) ▪ Signposting (are way-markers well-maintained and easy to follow?)

	Topic	Prompts for questions/ discussion points
5	Relationships with Other Types of User	<p>Who else typically uses the same RoW network as user group members?</p> <p>How good or bad are the relationships with different types of user when using the Right of Way network?</p> <p>What is the view on introducing seasonal controls on recreational motorised vehicles legally using byways, such as 4x4 and road-legal motorbikes? (That is, allowing use only in summer)</p> <p>How could relationships with different users be improved? For each suggestion ask who should be responsible for making the improvement and how would it make a difference.</p>
6	Economic issues	<p>What do user group members typically spend money on if out for the day?</p> <p>If Pay and Display car parks were introduced at the beginning and end of particularly promoted and developed routes, how much would be reasonable to pay for a day's parking?</p>
7	Summary	<p>What are the most positive benefits of the countryside rights of way routes?</p> <p>What would you like to see done differently in the management of the countryside rights of way network?</p> <p>Summary and key messages from the group.</p>
8	Close	Thanks and Payment of incentives

The ROWIP Focus groups for Land Managers

	Topic	Prompts for questions/ discussion points
1	Introduction and Welcome	Who we are Why we are doing this (prepare separate briefing note) How we want to do this e.g. respect for others during discussion Housekeeping : Toilets, refreshments and fire safety
2	Warm up exercise: Management of the Countryside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is their particular interest in the land? (Landowner, tenant farmer, conservation organisation, land agent, etc) ▪ Have they got public RoW on their land? Have they got DEFRA Countryside Stewardship support for access ▪ What is their overall impression of the management of Rights of Way routes– getting better or worse? ▪ What is their experience of countryside access – good and bad. ▪ Do they feel that their interests are given the same priority as those of other countryside users in the management and development of Rights of Way? If not, why not?
3	Knowledge of Public Rights of Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Briefly, what do they know about rights of way? (Don't stray too far into detailed legal explanations or into recently publicised Open Land access – as Cambs will have little or none) ▪ Where do they find out information about rights of way? ▪ Are they confident that they have accurate information on rights of way on land they manage? ▪ What makes it difficult to be sure of their rights and responsibilities? ▪ What would make it easier to be sure of their rights and responsibilities? ▪ How much do they think other countryside users know about rights of way and their rights and responsibilities?
4	Satisfaction with ROW Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are people's opinions about: (probe for both positive and negative aspects of each question)The location of the countryside routes (e.g. cross-field vs field-edge) ▪ The number of ROW routes at footpath, bridleway and byway status ▪ General maintenance of the Rights of Way network by Highway Authority (paths, obstructions, etc) ▪ Signposting (are way-markers well-maintained and easy to follow?) ▪ All-weather use of ROW routes – how best to reconcile with agricultural use ▪ What is the view on introducing seasonal controls on recreational motorised vehicles, such as 4 x4 and motorbikes? (For example, allowing use only in summer) ▪ Issues of safety and security where routes pass through farmyards. (Can extra eyes help security?)

	Topic	Prompts for questions/ discussion points
5	Partnership Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do they currently work in partnership with CCC or other partners to manage any aspect of a countryside route? ▪ Does anyone have experience of successes or failures in reaching agreement for maintenance responsibilities on any parts of a route, such as hedges? If yes, what made the negotiations easy or difficult? ▪ What would be a fair way of managing and paying for maintenance work in 'grey' areas? ▪ [Prompt, if necessary: Who is responsible for what? Is it fair to pay farmers (and other land owners) to help deliver highway maintenance responsibilities on the ROW network on their land? ▪ What are the advantages of suggested approaches? And the disadvantages?]
5	Relationships with Other Types of User	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How could relationships with different types of user be improved? [For each suggestion ask who should be responsible for making the improvement and how would it make a difference] ▪ How could countryside routes be made more accessible for people with disabilities?
7	Summary	<p>How well do the Right of Way networks meet their needs and the needs of the other users?</p> <p>What would they like to see done differently in the management of the countryside rights of way network?</p> <p>Summary and key messages from the group.</p>
8	Close	Thanks and Payment of incentives