Medway Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020 - 2030

May 2020

Medway Council
Serving You

FOREWORD

Councillor
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Portfolio Holder
for Front Line
Services

Welcome to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Medway. The plan sets out our priorities and how the council will improve public rights of way for residents and visitors over the next 10 years.

Medway has outstanding countryside and beautiful landscapes, which residents and visitors alike enjoy; including internationally important coast and marsh and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. People can explore both this remarkable countryside and the many greenspaces in urban Medway through using nearly 200 miles of rights of way.

Public rights of way and the wide range of activities that people enjoy through using them are part of what makes Medway a great place to live and work. In our online survey of Medway residents, 95% of people thought the rights of way network was an important asset and that it was important to support the health and wellbeing of residents.

More people now access the countryside and natural spaces for leisure, health and exercise. At the time of this plan, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the value of Medway's public rights of way has become even more apparent. Medway residents have been using Medway's paths for their health and wellbeing, including those who had never explored them before.

Rights of way are free and they stretch across both urban and rural Medway, alongside rivers and coast, through woodlands and parks. This means that everyone can use them no matter where they live or their level of income. They also support Medway's visitor economy and help to encourage more people to walk or cycle for short journeys, easing congestion and tackling air pollution. The need for public rights of way is now greater than ever to support a healthy population and a vibrant economy. The creation of the England Coastal Path in the next few years is an exciting development, not only improving access to the coast for more people but also creating the opportunity to raise awareness of Medway's exceptional opportunities for recreation and enjoying the natural world.

A good network of rights of way, well-maintained and promoted, will help Medway and realise its ambition for regeneration and growth. Investment, innovative ways of working and more support from the communities of Medway is how Medway will be able to ensure rights of way reach their full potential.

Whilst this ROWIP is realistic about the challenges faced, it is also ambitious and optimistic. Delivery of the plan will contribute significantly to making Medway a healthy, prosperous and enjoyable place in which to live.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

About this Plan 1

Policy 2

The Public Rights of Way and Access Network 4

Supporting a Prosperous Medway 7

THEME 1 – A WELL-MAINTAINED NETWORK 8

Maintaining the Network 8

Priorities 9

Theme 1 Actions – A Well-maintained Network 14

THEME 2 – AN EVOLVING NETWORK 15

The Need for the Network to Evolve 15

Priorities 15

Theme 2 Actions – An Evolving Network 20

THEME 3 – SERVING MEDWAY'S NEEDS 21

Meeting Medway's Needs 21

Priorities 21

Theme 3 Actions – Serving Medway's Needs 29

THEME 4 – EFFECTIVE DELIVERY 30

The Public Rights of Way Service 30

Priorities 30

Theme 4 Actions – Effective Delivery 35

Sharon Bayne

Riverside Country Park

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS PLAN

WHAT IS A ROWIP?

Every local highway authority is required by law to produce a ROWIP.[1] It is the council's strategic document setting out its goals and priorities for public rights of way and access. ROWIPs must be reviewed every ten years.

The law and government guidance sets out that the ROWIP must go further than the basic legal duties each council has for public rights of way. It must fully consider the needs of the wider public and not just those who already use public rights of way. It must assess how public rights of way meet those needs; now and in the future. It must also assess how rights of way can support exercise and recreation and those who are blind or partially sighted or have mobility problems.

ABOUT THIS PLAN

This report is set out in four themes, each covering an aspect of rights of way:

Theme 1: A well-maintained network
Theme 2: An evolving network
Theme 3: Serving Medway's needs
Theme 4: Effective delivery

The ROWIP is supported by several evidence reports. This is the main ROWIP document and contains a summary of the main findings and the statement of action. The document is supported by an extensive evidence base, contained in three supporting documents and the review of the first ROWIP.[2] A delivery plan will be produced which will contain shorter term actions. This will be updated when necessary.

HOW THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The views of many people were sought to produce this ROWIP. This was carried out through:

- An online public survey – this was carried out in 2018. This provided a good understanding of the views of users;
- A Citizens' Panel survey – this was carried out in 2018. This asked both users and non-users about their views on public rights of way;
- Parish council workshops – a series of workshops were held with parish councils to explore their priorities for public rights of way. This was followed up with a survey;
- A landowner survey;
- Engagement with stakeholders – These included organisations, user and interest groups, community organisations and the Local Access Forum. A workshop was held with people with physical or mobility impairments;
- Assessing the network and needs – to fully understand the present and future needs of the public.
- Literature review – strategy and policy documents were reviewed, along with a wide range of research.

[1] Under s.60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

[2] Supporting Documents: 1 – Network and Needs Assessment; 2 – Stakeholder Engagement; 3 – Citizens Panel Survey Results.

POLICY

NATIONAL POLICY - 25 YEAR ENVIRONMENT PLAN 2018

The 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) sets out the government's intention to help the natural world regain and retain good health. Chapter 3, 'Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing', sets out to connect people with the natural environment and increase access. Public rights of way support many of the aims:

- Helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces;
- Improving mental health services and promoting health and wellbeing through the natural environment;
- Encouraging children to be close to nature, in and out of school;
- Greening towns and cities - through creating more accessible green infrastructure, especially where this is lacking.

LOCAL STRATEGY AND POLICY

The ROWIP links to and supports the delivery of several strategies, see Figure 1. It also shares the objectives of these strategies to address the needs of Medway, see Table 1, next page.

Figure 1: Local Policy Links

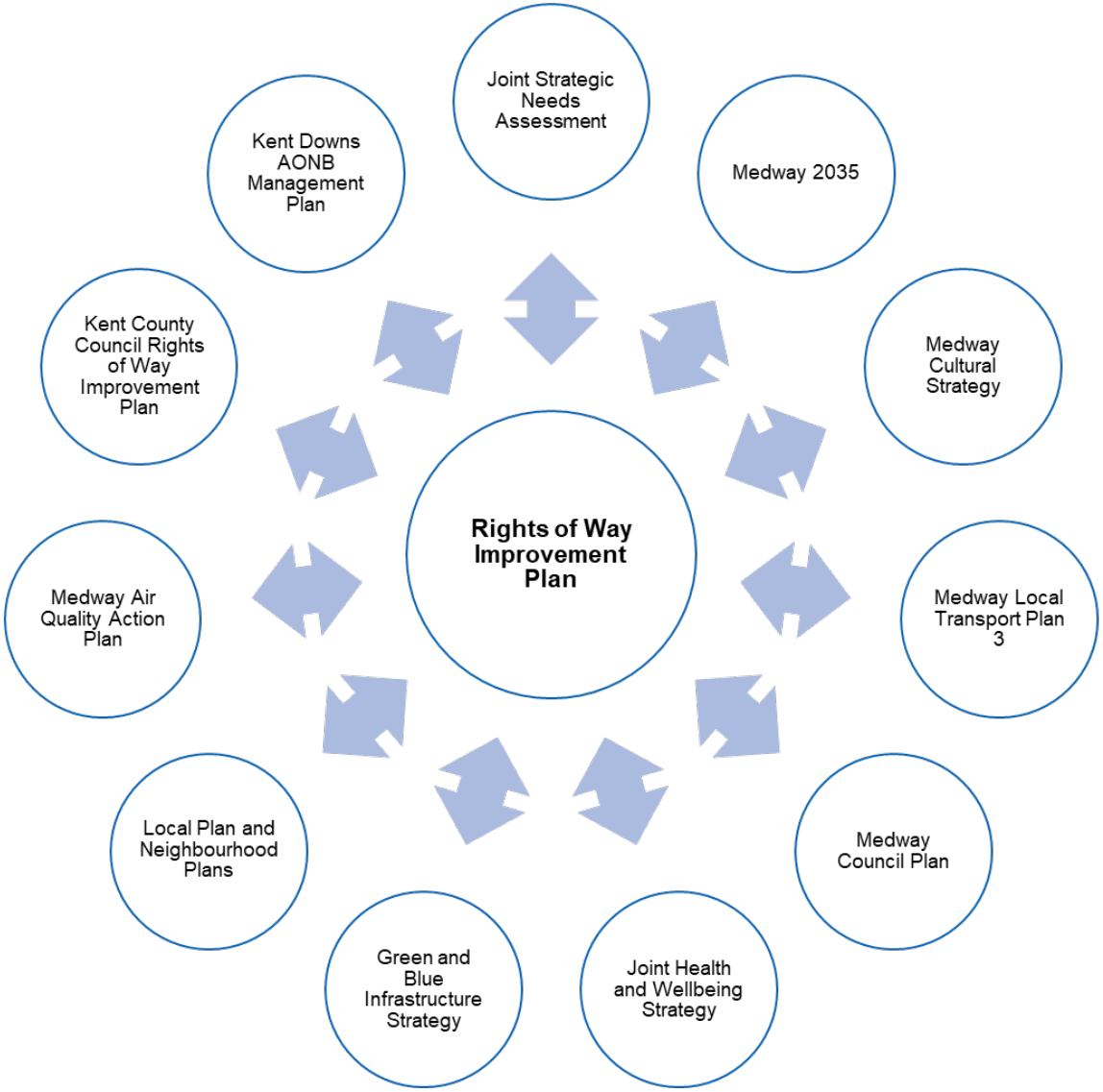


Table 1:Shared Policy Objectives

	Adapting to a growing and changing population and delivering their needs	Tackling health inequalities, improving health and increasing levels of physical activity	Delivering effective and efficient public services, delivering best value and maximising income	Supporting sustainable economic growth which doesn't damage Medway's unique natural environment	Managing the impact of new development and growth.
Medway Council Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Medway 2035	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment	✓	✓	✓		✓
Local Transport Plan (LTP3)	✓	✓	✓		✓
Medway Cultural Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans	✓			✓	✓
Kent Downs AONB Management Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Medway Air Quality Action Plan	✓	✓		✓	✓
Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy	✓	✓		✓	✓
Kent County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

THE PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS NETWORK

The public rights of way network is an outstanding resource for everyone to access the natural environment. There are nearly 200 miles of paths which are free for everyone to use and which are always open.

MEDWAY'S PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK

A public right of way (PROW) is a path that anyone can legally use and enjoy on foot and sometimes using other means of travel. In law, a public right of way is part of, and connects with, the wider highway network. There are public rights of way both in the countryside and in urban Medway towns. There are four types of public right of way:

- Public footpaths – can only be used by walkers;
- Public bridleways – can be used by walkers, horse riders and cyclists;
- Restricted byways – can be used by walkers, horse riders, horse drawn carriage drivers and cyclists;
- Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) – can be used by everyone, including motor vehicle drivers.

There are 186 miles (300 km) of public rights of way in Medway, see Table 2, next page. Most of these (86%) are public footpaths. Around 6% are bridleways and 8% are restricted byways and BOATs. All the public rights of way together are called 'the public rights of way network'. All public rights of way are recorded on the Definitive Map and Statement, which is the legal record of public rights of way.

[3] The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

EXCLUDED AREAS

Until a change in the law in 1981,[3] paths in urban areas did not need to be shown on the definitive map and statement. Medway Council finished surveying and mapping these 'excluded areas' in 2014. All the identified paths were then processed through individual definitive map modification orders and legal orders.

Around 11 miles of the network are in excluded areas; around 6% of the network. All these public rights of way are footpaths. Medway Highways are responsible for the majority of public rights of way in excluded areas.

Table 2: Public Rights of Way Network

PROW Type	Length Km	Length Miles	Number of Paths	% of PROW Network	% of KCC Network	% of National Network
Footpath	256.2	159.2	386	86%	83%	75%
Bridleway	19.1	11.8	25	6%	11%	17%
Restricted Byway	12.2	7.6	17	4%	2%	3%
Byway (BOATs)[4]	12.0	7.5	10	4%	3%	2%
Footpaths - excluded areas	17.4	10.8	98	6%		
Grand Total	299.5	186.1	438			

[4] Byway open to all traffic.

Medway's Public Rights of Way Network

MEDWAY'S WIDER ACCESS NETWORK

There are other places where people can access nature, including country parks and woodlands.

The Coastal Park on the Isle of Grain is an important asset for this community and although the public rights of way network in this area is extensive, it is disconnected from the rest of the network. However, this should be addressed through the implementation of the England Coastal Path.

Within urban Medway, public rights of way are important to access many greenspaces, as well as forming linking paths across the towns. While many of the urban greenspaces have permitted access, the public rights of way are important legally protected access routes.

The public rights of way network is an important way to access woodland, especially in the Kent Downs Area of Natural Beauty. There are fewer woodlands on the Hoo Peninsula, but these can be accessed by public rights of way. Public rights of way also pass through or near many of the woodlands in Medway's urban area.

There is also a section of the North Downs Way National Trail within Medway. The England Coastal Path is also being developed through Medway and is due to open by 2021. This route will also have the status of a national trail. On completion of the England Coast Path, the Thames Path National Trail will be extended from Woolwich to Grain resulting in three national trails passing through Medway.

Chris Child

Capstone Country Park

SUPPORTING A PROSPEROUS MEDWAY

There are changes and challenges on the horizon for Medway, as well as opportunities for regeneration. Public rights of way can help to support the needs of Medway's residents and help ensure Medway is prosperous and has a high quality of life.

Support health and wellbeing - Walking has been described as "the nearest activity to perfect exercise", being the easiest, lowest cost and enjoyable way for most people to increase their physical activity and to enjoy the outdoors. Supporting more people in walking, through good quality paths and walking schemes will help the most people benefit from more exercise. All other forms of recreation on rights of way also help people to be more active and to benefit from nature.

Improve accessibility - Paths should be as easy to use as possible for people with physical and visual impairments and the ageing population. Stiles, steps and uneven ground, for example, can prove difficult for these people. A 'least restrictive access' approach means continuing to replace stiles with gaps or gates and making sure the paths are easy to use for as many users as possible. More can be learned about the requirements of people with additional needs from working with partners.

Increase active travel - Increase walking and cycling to help ease congestion and reduce negative effects from vehicles such as noise and air pollution. Routes which can be used by many types of users should be provided through new development, with improved surfaces to reflect their use in an urban setting.

Improve information - Improvements in information are needed in many areas. There is a need to make information easy to find and attractive to use, for both visitors and residents. Improving information on Medway Council's website is an integral part of this. Improved information about existing promoted routes, standards of infrastructure, the Definitive Map and Statement and Rights of Way Service Policies is needed. A changing population will have differing needs and interests. The planned housing growth will also bring new residents to Medway who will want to explore their new surroundings. Information on promoted routes needs to be easier to find and there need to be more promoted routes.

Ensure housing growth is positive - Protect and improve existing paths – existing paths need to be protected, with no net loss of access because of development. Improvements will be needed. Disruption during construction also needs to be minimised. New development needs to be linked to the countryside. Support active travel. Ensure public rights of way improvements are embedded in Medway Council plans and policies.

More 'higher status' routes and address the needs of horse riders - More bridleways, byways and restricted byways and better-connected routes will help horse riders, cyclists and motorised vehicle drivers (byways only). New routes coming from housing development should allow as many types of users as possible. Issues including fly tipping, overgrown routes, busy and dangerous roads, better crossing points or paths on verges and better gates and surfacing also need to be addressed.

Increase the impact of public rights of way - There is huge potential for rights of way to support the regeneration of Medway to bring real quality of life improvements. There is a need to raise the profile of rights of way both within Medway Council and with existing and new partners. There are opportunities to develop projects and funding bids with a wider range of partners.

THEME 1 – A WELL-MAINTAINED NETWORK

MAINTAINING THE NETWORK

The quality of public rights of way is important. Poor quality routes not only reduce enjoyment, they can also prevent some people from using paths, particularly those with physical impairments. The level of funding available to maintain the network has reduced since the previous ROWIP. The council must now prioritise the most important maintenance. New ways of achieving the level of maintenance of the network that the public seek will need to be explored.

Some maintenance is the responsibility of Medway Council and some is the responsibility of landowners. A summary is shown to the right, but this is not exhaustive.

The maintenance of public rights of way in excluded areas is mainly the responsibility of the Highways Department of Medway Council, whilst all other public rights of way are the responsibility of the Public Rights of Way Service.

A summary of responsibilities for public rights of way maintenance

COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES	LANDOWNER RESPONSIBILITIES
Keeping the surface fit for public use.	Reinstating and clearing paths crossing arable land.
Clearing surface vegetation.	Cutting back trees or hedges overhanging the path.
Making sure obstructions are removed.	Keeping the route clear of obstructions.
Maintaining steps and some bridges.	Not ploughing or cropping field edge paths.
Contributing to landowner costs for replacing gates and stiles for controlling livestock.	Installing and maintaining gates and stiles for controlling livestock.
Signing where a public right of way leaves the road and waymarking along the route where needed.	Providing bridges if the need arises from the action of a landowner, e.g. widening a ditch.

Woodland path, Gillingham

Chris Child

PRIORITIES

Through the process of assessing the network and finding out the views of stakeholders and users, the following areas have emerged as priorities for public rights of way in Medway.

TACKLING OVERGROWN VEGETATION

The overwhelming majority of complaints are concerning overgrown paths. This was also the highest priority for the public - 82% of the public said they had come across overgrown paths. It was also the highest scoring reason for people not using paths. Overgrown paths also hinder people with visual or mobility impairments.

Keeping paths clear is a challenge faced every growing season. The time spent by the Rights of Way Service dealing with complaints around vegetation is also a drain on staff resources. To ensure more paths are kept clear of overgrown vegetation, the council has set up an annual clearance programme for those paths which are known to present issues each year. The contract will be reviewed to ensure that the most appropriate paths are listed. Popular paths in urban areas will be prioritised, along with other high priority paths as outlined in the management matrix (see page 11 for further detail on the management matrix which the council will adopt).

Overhanging trees and vegetation are the responsibility of landowners to keep clear. The council will work with landowners to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities in keep paths clear from obstructions to use, including vegetation.

A cleared path at St Mary Hoo (RS17)

UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITION OF THE NETWORK

The last full survey of the network was carried out in 2005. The estimated value of the bridges, stiles, surfacing and other 'assets' on the network, based on the 2005 audit, is over £3 million. This does not include higher value bridges. Most of the assets are the responsibility of Medway Council; either wholly or in part.

It is important to understand the number, value and condition of the assets on the network and the liabilities of poor quality assets. Until 2013 a Best Value Performance Indicator survey was carried out. This survey, of a minimum of 5% of the network chosen at random, assesses whether the network is 'easy to use'. As no survey had taken place recently, a condition survey of 14% of the network was carried out in 2018 for this ROWIP. This survey showed that there are issues with the condition of the structures included in the survey – fingerposts, bridges, stiles and steps. Not all structures were included (gates, kissing gates, barriers and others were not included) and therefore the condition of these needs to be determined.

A condition survey is needed to record detail of assets, their condition and location. This will help the council understand the overall condition of the network, and especially of those assets for which it assumes liability. The council will aim to assess the condition of the network through surveying 10% of the network each year. In order to achieve this, support will be required from volunteers, parish councils, health walk leaders and others.

The Rights of Way Service is reactive to issues and problems. Over time, the service will aim to work towards an asset management approach. Assets will be replaced first on the highest priority paths or where they present a safety concern.

There are a range of structures on public rights of way which need to be maintained, e.g. here at Nashenden.

PRIORITISING LIMITED RESOURCES

As there is a very limited annual budget for maintaining the network, it is important that these resources are allocated to the most important issues. To do this, the council will develop and adopt an approach to prioritising complaints and maintenance actions.

Problems with paths will be addressed following a hierarchy of the severity of problem and the importance of the path. High severity problems on important paths will be addressed as a priority.

An example of the possible hierarchy is shown to the right. The final hierarchy will be developed by the Rights of Way Service and Local Access Forum. When finalised it will be made available on the council's website.

For this matrix to be implemented, improvements are required to the complaints system. This is outlined in Theme 4 (Effective Delivery). Promoted routes are considered as higher priority as they are important to support people in exploring the countryside. The future approach to promoted routes is outlined in Theme 3 (Serving Medway's Needs).

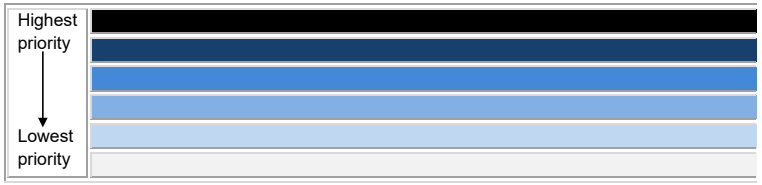


Figure 2: Example of Problem Prioritisation Approach – Not Finalised

SEVERITY OF PROBLEM	CATEGORY OF PATH
High Severity A problem which is an immediate or potential danger or nuisance, requiring priority action	**High Priority Paths**
Possible examples: – Dangerous tree – Dangerous structure – Shooting across a public right of way – Fallen tree completely blocking path	Possible examples: – The North Downs National Trail – The Saxon Shore Way – Paths crossing a Medway Council Country Park – England Coastal Path – Paths used as routes to schools, shops or other community resource – Paths used by health walks
Medium Severity A problem which impedes access	**Medium Priority Paths**
Possible examples: – Obstruction – crop, vegetation or other – Disturbance of path surface – Missing fingerpost at roadside – Structure repair	– Routes within 1km of a settlement – Paths crossing a Medway Council or other accessible greenspace – Other route promoted by Medway Council – Multi-user routes
Low Severity Problems which have a minor impact on access	**Low Priority Paths**
Possible examples: – Cycles or horses on paths not causing damage – Missing waymarker	– The remainder of the network

Severity/Priority	High Priority Paths	Medium Priority Paths	Low Priority Paths
High Severity	Highest priority action		
Medium Severity			
Low Severity			Lowest priority action

SUPPORTING THE MOST INCLUSIVE ACCESS

There are a range of structures on public rights of way. The condition of these is important to enable people with a range of abilities to get the greatest benefit from the public rights of way network.

Stiles are allowed where they are needed to control livestock. However, they often create difficulties for less mobile people or, if poorly constructed, the able bodied. Gates or kissing gates are often easier to use. When stiles fall into disrepair, the council will prioritise their replacement with gates or kissing gates where there is livestock present, or removing structures altogether where they are not needed. It would be highly beneficial to take a more proactive and ambitious approach to removing stiles; however, additional resources will be required to speed up the removal of stiles across the network.

The council will also work with landowners to ensure that the structures for which they are responsible are maintained in good condition. A set of standards for structures on public rights of way will be produced and made available through Medway Council's website. New structures installed to control livestock should conform to British Standard BS5709: 2018.

Any new structures installed on the network will be made as accessible as possible for those with mobility and visual impairments (see also Theme 3 – Serving Medway's Needs). This will include installing wider bridges, ensuring access onto and through structures is as accessible as possible and inclusion of handrails on step flights. Surfacing may be required on the most used routes or those used for travel to work or school.

Wider paths are also easier to use. For some paths a width is recorded, but where there is no evidence of a legal width, the council expect widths to be sufficient for two users to pass. This means 2 metres for a footpath and 4 metres for a bridleway. The council will also seek these widths for newly created or diverted routes. The statutory default minimum width[5] will only apply in respect of path reinstatement across arable land following ploughing.

Motorised vehicles can use BOATs but may not use other types of public rights of way. To do so is an offence and will damage the path, making it less accessible for legal users. In the interests of safety, some rights of way may need to be managed through Traffic Regulation Orders to prohibit use for a period of time. The council will work with organisations representing motorised vehicle users to limit conflicts between users and help keep routes in good condition.

Kissing gates make public rights of way more accessible for a wider range of people.

[5] Set out in the Highways Act 1980 Schedule 12a.

SUPPORTING LANDOWNERS IN DELIVERING THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

The council will work in co-operation with landowners to support them and to make sure they are aware of their responsibilities. The council will continue to financially support the replacement of necessary structures at a minimum level of 25% but will also require landowners to contribute where appropriate. The council, where possible and appropriate, will cover more of the cost if a stile is replaced by a more accessible gate. The council will provide waymarker discs to landowners and volunteers to help ensure paths are well waymarked.

The landowner survey showed that more information for landowners regarding their duties would help both landowners and the council. An outline of the main duties of both landowners and the council, and the requirements for structures, will be produced and included on Medway Council's website.

Many public rights of way cross arable land. Paths crossing fields should not be ploughed but, if this cannot be avoided, the landowner must make sure the path is levelled and clearly marked within two weeks. The right of way must also be kept clear through the crop. Rights of way following the edge of a field (headland) must not be ploughed under any circumstances.

The council will try to negotiate to resolve issues in the first instance. However, enforcement action might be needed in some cases if duties are not carried out. The police will be alerted to illegal activities where necessary or asked to attend site to protect officers when carrying out enforcement action.

Clearly marked path across arable land, Cliffe Luke McKernan

THEME 1 ACTIONS – A WELL-MAINTAINED NETWORK

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
T1A	To protect the network and maintain it in the best condition possible, prioritising safety and areas of greatest need and seeking improvements where possible.	T1A.1	Continue to ensure the highest priority paths are kept clear through a vegetation clearance contract and review annually to ensure the highest priority paths are included.
		T1A.2	Develop a problem prioritisation matrix in partnership with the Local Access Forum and publicise on Medway Council's website.
		T1A.3	Develop standards for structures and publicise on Medway Council's website.
		T1A.4	Remove stiles from the network to increase accessibility.
		T1A.5	Support landowners in maintaining a high quality network in areas for which they are responsible - including through providing advice and information and, where appropriate, materials for waymarking and for replacing structures and assistance in maintaining signs and structures.
		T1A.6	Ensure landowners are made aware of their responsibilities for vegetation and structures through guidance on Medway Council's website.
T1B	To improve understanding of the network, its assets and its condition.	T1B.1	Survey the condition of 10% of the public rights of way network each year with the support of parish councils and volunteers to ensure the entire network has been surveyed by the end of this ROWIP. Include condition and location of structures and map locations.
		T1B.2	Use condition survey to reinstate Best Value Performance Indicator to monitor the condition of the network.
		T1B.3	Survey the condition of the North Downs Way, England Coastal Path and Saxon Shore Way every three years, with the support of volunteers.
		T1B.4	Compile database of bridge structures and survey all bridges by the end of this ROWIP.

A rolling two year delivery plan will be created and reviewed to guide delivery of the actions above. Actions will be prioritised according to the level of need and resources at the time. The Local Access Forum will guide the content and implementation of the delivery plan.

THEME 2 – AN EVOLVING NETWORK

THE NEED FOR THE NETWORK TO EVOLVE

Although the public rights of way network is made up of legally defined routes it needs to evolve and adapt. It is important that the council strives to develop a network which meets both current and future needs. These needs include an increasing population and housing growth, more older people with potentially greater health needs and a more diverse population.

In addition, although the definitive map shows all legally recorded routes, there are sometimes public rights which are not recorded on the map. Any unrecorded historical rights that existed before 1949 but which were not recorded on the definitive map at that time (or subsequently) will be extinguished on 1st January 2026.[6] Sometimes routes which are already on the map have additional rights which are not recorded. Members of the public can bring these anomalies to the attention of the council. Landowners or the public may also ask for a public right of way to be changed. The council will assess these applications using procedures set out in law to decide whether they should go ahead. The process can be lengthy and there is a range of charges for these services (see also Theme 4 – Effective Delivery).

The council prefers that new routes are formally dedicated, rather than permissive paths with no legal status.

PRIORITIES

ENSURING HOUSING GROWTH IS POSITIVE

Around 28,000 new homes are planned for Medway by 2031. Although the locations of these new houses has not been determined at the time of this plan, the levels of planned housing growth will lead to changes which affect public rights of way. There will be an increase in population in Medway and new residents; and some development areas will create a new urban-countryside edge or affect public rights of way through changes to the road network.

Development also presents opportunities to improve access. Good access both within and linking to new developments is important for improving health, providing routes to walk or cycle for everyday journeys and for overall quality of life. High quality access provision can also improve the desirability of new housing to prospective homeowners. The council will therefore encourage developers of new housing to see rights of way as assets rather than restrictions and require them to include positive improvements in development proposals. The council will expect access which is high quality, which is suitable for a wide range of users and which supports ‘active travel’ to be set out early in development applications. Proposals should also address the needs identified in this ROWIP. When assessing development applications, the council will evaluate how well access proposals link to the existing public rights of way network, accessible green space and other routes such as footways and cycleways. The

[6] Under the CROW Act 2000 s.53.

Rights of Way Service will work with planning officers and seek developer contributions for both on- and off-site access improvements.

The council will develop a planning policy note setting out standards for public rights of way and access in new development. The Rights of Way Service will work alongside Medway Council planning colleagues as the location of development is determined to agree a set of priorities for areas of development. Section s106 contributions will be sought for public rights of way improvements.

There will be direct impacts on some public rights of way which are within the development area during construction. The council will expect developers to minimise disruption to access during construction through limiting closures and providing alternative routes where possible. Where a public right of way is affected by development, the recovery of all costs associated with re-instating, maintaining the integrity of access and any diversion of the route will be sought.

INCREASING ACTIVE TRAVEL

Choosing to walk or cycle for everyday journeys (known as active travel) helps to reduce harmful effects such as air pollution from traffic, as well as improving health. A well-designed, accessible environment can encourage people to walk or cycle. Conversely, a lack of routes, poor availability of information about routes, concerns over safety and the speed and convenience of motorised transport can all act as barriers to people choosing active travel.[7]

Development can unlock improvements to public rights of way, as here in Hoo.

[7] Lee, C., & Moudon, A. V. (2004). Physical activity and environment research in the health field: Implications for urban and transportation planning practice and research. Journal of Planning Literature, 19 (2) pp 147 - 181.

There are many urban public rights of way which are important for walking and, in some cases, for cycling. Public rights of way in urban areas are useful as they link with roadside pavements and cycle routes. There are also many rights of way which lead from towns to the countryside, providing ways for people to leave the town and explore the countryside or make longer journeys.

Medway Council's Local Transport Plan 3 sets out that active travel can contribute to the overall objectives of the transport plan, through supporting regeneration and economic growth and improving the natural environment, air quality and health.

The council will seek to increase the role of public rights of way in delivering both strategic routes and routes for short walking and cycling journeys. The council will also identify which routes link to shopping areas, to town or village centres, public transport hubs, schools, green spaces and other leisure facilities. Where necessary and possible, funding will be sought to improve these routes. New multi-user routes both within and connecting new developments to the surrounding network of active travel routes will be pursued. Funds will be sought from the Local Transport Plan for improvement projects.

A BETTER CONNECTED NETWORK

The council will seek to improve the network so that it better meets the needs of users. Priorities for new connections include urban-countryside paths, multi-user routes, routes to support the visitor economy and health and wellbeing and routes to work, school or local services. The council will identify new strategic links which could be progressed as opportunities allow. These will also help to meet the aims of other council strategies and policy, including the Local Plan, Green Infrastructure Strategy and Local Transport Strategy, and should be included within these documents.

Across the network there are routes which are dead-ends or which have missing links. The usability of the network can be improved through re-aligning these routes. If rights are removed, the council will expect alternative rights to be created and will seek higher status rights wherever possible.

There are several dead-end routes across the marshes on the Hoo Peninsula. This issue was raised by several parish councils. The new England Coastal Path will improve access along the coastline of the peninsula and the route will be made more accessible. However, some sections of the route cannot be easily reached from inland, with Cliffe and Cooling being the most disconnected from the coast. This reduces access choices for these residents and means they benefit less from the coastal path. It also means there are no routes inland from the coast, making circular routes impossible. The distance along the coast without any inland routes between Halstow Marsh to Cliffe is around 5.5 miles. There is a further distance of around 2 miles at both ends before a village is reached. This means that those who are physically less able are unlikely to be able to visit this section of the coast. The council will continue to seek to improve connections across the marshes to the England Coastal Path.

Medway's public rights of way network has a lower proportion of paths with higher rights (bridleways, byways and restricted byways) than both the Kent County Council area and the national public rights of way network. The deficit is due to a lower proportion of bridleways. Priority areas identified by equestrians include areas around Upchurch, Rainham, Hoo St Werburgh, Cliffe and the Hoo Peninsula. Routes with higher rights not only provide access for horses, but can provide safe, traffic-free routes for cyclists. Where any new routes are proposed, routes providing higher rights will be sought as a preference.

Some of these routes link to major roads creating further barriers to their use due to safety issues. This is particularly the case around Hoo St Werburgh. Although other routes link to minor roads, with an increase in population, some of these routes are busy and are used as 'rat-runs'. Three of the routes on the Hoo Peninsular are also dead-end routes and do not link to roads or other rights of way.

The council will seek to improve the connections of routes with higher rights, either through new routes or upgrading footpaths to higher status routes. The council will seek to improve the safety of users through better connections, crossing and exit points and signage. It is also important that new development and any resulting changes to the road network and increased traffic does not further decrease the length of route available or make use of the routes less safe.

The council will continue to work with neighbouring authorities to improve cross boundary routes.

Additional funding will be needed to progress this area of work. The council will secure funding through working with partners and seeking contributions from developers. Volunteers and parish councils can support progress in this area through surveying and assessing routes and alternatives.

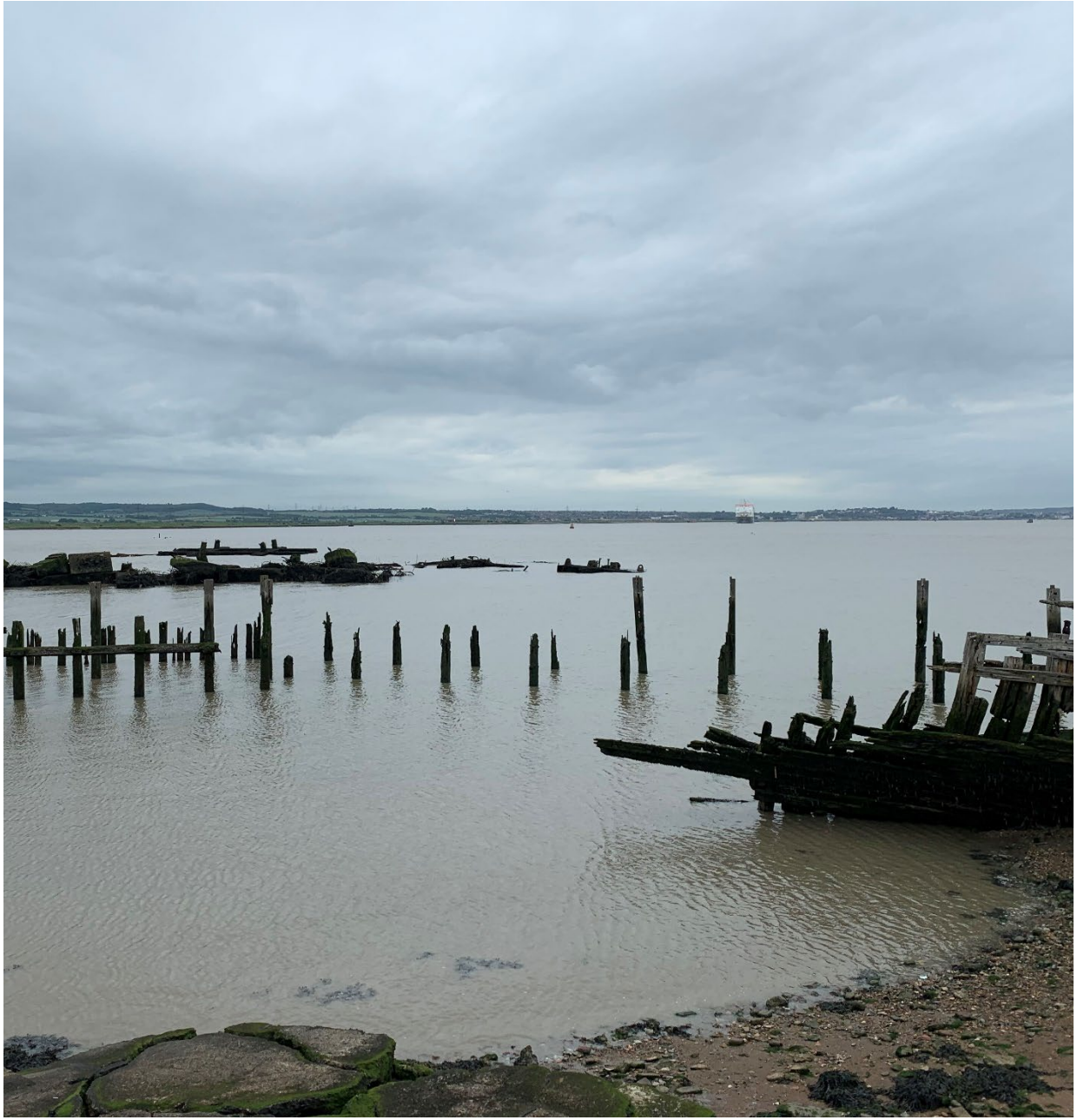
Improvements to public rights of way for equestrians – new rubber crumb path near Cliffe.

ENGLAND COASTAL PATH

Natural England is currently securing a long-distance national trail around the whole coast, known as the England Coast Path. When completed, the trail will form the longest continuous coastal path in the world.

The England Coastal Path is being progressed through Medway in two stages. The first section is from Grain to Woolwich. Proposals have been produced and consultation closed at the end of July 2019. The aim is to begin opening the route by late 2020. The second section is from Iwade to Grain. It is anticipated that this section will be open by the spring of 2021. Once both sections of the England Coastal Path are complete, The Thames National Trail will be extended to Grain creating a source to sea trail. This will bring three national trails to Medway.

This will greatly improve the existing coastal route and provide opportunities for promotion and for the creation of linking routes. Proposals aim to ensure the path is as accessible as possible, replacing stiles with gaps or gates where possible. It will also create a vital link across the Yantlet Creek near Grain. Natural England will make an annual contribution towards the upkeep of the trail. The council will seek to maximise the benefits brought by investment in the England Coast Path through seeking external funding opportunities to promote the trail and improve access links onto the trail.



View from public footpath at Cliffe.

THEME 2 ACTIONS – AN EVOLVING NETWORK

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
T2A	To ensure that access improvements are strategically planned to meet Medway's needs.	T2A.1	Work with partners to ensure that the forthcoming local plan, neighbourhood plans and green infrastructure strategy include a comprehensive assessment of access needs and contain robust policies to improve access for all users, ensuring that development has no detrimental impact and that access provision is improved.
		T2A.2	Progress strategic projects with partners where these address Medway's needs.
T2B	To ensure that housing growth brings access improvements to communities.	T2B.1	Work with partners to ensure that high-quality, highly accessible, multi-user access improvements are sought and included in new development proposals. Ensure that these routes support active travel and link the development to the wider public rights of way network, green spaces and the countryside.
		T2B.2	Develop and adopt access standards and specifications for routes in and arising from new developments.
T2C	To ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs and that connectivity is improved.	T2C.1	Assess the connectivity of bridleways and byways, considering road safety and areas for possible upgrade.
		T2C.2	Deliver new routes for equestrians, addressing fragmentation and improving safety.
		T2C.3	Seek to resolve dead-end routes and provide better connected access, particularly on the Hoo Peninsula and to connect to the England Coastal Path, as resources and opportunities allow.
		T2C.4	Support projects to increase walking and cycling for short journeys to reduce congestion, support health and wellbeing, reduce air pollution and support economic growth.
		T2C.5	Develop projects with Kent County Council to connect routes and promoted routes across the local authority boundary.
		T2C.6	Create a 'safer routes to schools and work' directory.
T2D	To ensure that the legal processes to enable the network to evolve are delivered.	T2D.1	Consider all applications for Public Path Orders and Definitive Map Modification Orders and determine these in line with any statutory timescales.

A rolling two year delivery plan will be created and reviewed to guide delivery of the actions above. Actions will be prioritised according to the level of need and resources at the time. The Local Access Forum will guide the content and implementation of the delivery plan.

THEME 3 – SERVING MEDWAY'S NEEDS

MEETING MEDWAY'S NEEDS

Medway's population is predicated to grow by just under 15% by 2035, reaching around 317,529, representing an increase of just over 40,500 people.[8] This will place more demand on the public rights of way network and green spaces as more people seek recreation and access to nature. There will also be an increased need for active travel so that air quality is improved and congestion does not increase. The population will also be ageing, resulting in more people with health needs and disabilities.

PRIORITIES

SUPPORTING THE NEEDS OF USERS

Supporting Existing Users

Walking is the most popular outdoor recreation activity in the country. People walk for many reasons - to get to work or school, to exercise and to enjoy the countryside. Nationally, walking for health and exercise benefits are the most common reasons; and this has increased over time. Walking is also important for the visitor economy. Walking has been described as "the nearest activity to perfect exercise", being the easiest, lowest cost and enjoyable way for most people to increase their physical activity and to enjoy the outdoors. This means that it is also inclusive – people can gain the benefits of walking wherever they live and whatever their level of income. The council will help to support more people to walk through health walks, promoted routes and good maintenance of public rights of way.

People also enjoy exploring the countryside with horses. Horse riding and horse carriage driving make a valuable contribution to rural life and the rural economy. However, the length of paths which can be used by horse riders is low when compared with walkers. These paths are often not well connected or end at busy roads. This means that horse riders must use roads, which are becoming busier with traffic. Medway has fewer bridleways than the neighbouring Kent County Council area. Motorised vehicles have even fewer paths and can only use byways ('BOATs'). The council will continue to work to address these issues, with the help of equestrian and other interest groups. Actions will include increasing the length of 'higher status' public rights of way and connecting them better, including designating more routes through upgrading footpaths. New routes coming from housing development should allow as many types of users as possible. The council will also seek to address other issues to improve access for equestrians, including working with other officers and agencies to tackle fly tipping, prioritising overgrown routes, improving access at busy and dangerous roads, including better crossing points or paths on verges, improving gates and surfacing.

Cyclists have a range of interests, including family cycling, mountain biking and road cycling. Each of these types of cyclists have different needs. Mountain bikers may want exciting off-road paths, for example. The leisure and family cycling market also supports the visitor economy. These cyclists prefer traffic-free routes with good

[8] Medway Council population projections 2016.

surfaces and promotion. The upgrade of some urban routes may be possible to support those cycling for everyday journeys.

People with Mobility or Visual Impairments

There is great diversity amongst people with a disability, taking different forms and having an impact on people's lives in many ways. The term covers a wide range of conditions. These include mobility difficulties, blind or partial sightedness, learning difficulties and mental health problems. Some disabilities are permanent; some affect people intermittently or temporarily. While some people have lived with their disability from birth, most people develop impairments in the course of their life or simply as they get older.

The 2011 Census recorded that 43,354 of Medway residents had a long term limiting illness; around 16.4% of the population. As age is a key factor in the prevalence of disability, the number of people with a limiting illness will increase as the proportion of older people in Medway's population increases.

There are a range of factors which deter or prevent disabled people from exploring the countryside and rights of way:

- Physical barriers, such as steps, steep gradients, stiles and gates;
- Lack of accessible information;
- Lack of accessible toilets;
- Lack of confidence, low expectations, not feeling welcome, fear over safety or of getting lost;
- Lack of convenient and accessible public transport;
- Lack of seating and opportunities to rest or take shelter;
- Cost of transport, parking fees and refreshments;
- Poorly maintained environment.[9]

Improving the physical condition of paths is important to enable greater use. Adopting the principle of 'least restrictive access' is important. For example, accessible pedestrian gates and kissing gates should be installed instead of stiles or narrow kissing gates. Surfacing is also important and other structures such as ramps, widths of bridges, gradients and steps can all be made more accessible through good design. Poor quality structures and overgrown paths create hazards and maintenance must therefore be a high priority.

The council will develop new partnerships with organisations who represent people with mobility and visual impairments in order to develop projects and to learn how best to support these users. A place will be available on the Local Access Forum. The council will seek to provide information and to identify routes which can be improved to support these users.

Encouraging Under-Represented Users

Research shows that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, those living in deprived communities and older people visit the countryside less than the general population.[10]
Medway is becoming more ethnically diverse and has an ageing population. Those living in deprived areas may also visit natural areas less. Local links and routes are important for these people.

Older people tend to visit the countryside less due to health reasons. Therefore, it is important to address health and disability issues as set out previously, through improving accessibility and supporting people in using public rights of way.

[9] Countryside Agency (2005), By all Reasonable Means – Inclusive Access to the Outdoors for Disabled People.

[10] E.g. Natural England's Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE).

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

In the survey of residents carried out for this ROWIP, 95% of people thought public rights of way were important to support health and wellbeing.

There is a wealth of evidence that having access to the natural environment helps people increase their physical activity. How active a person is can vary due to their distance from a greenspace, whether there are good connecting routes and the attractiveness of the environment.

Health and exercise is one of the main motivators for spending time in the natural environment. On the other hand, poor health is becoming a more common reason for not visiting the outdoors.

Rights of way can improve health and wellbeing in many ways:

- Providing access in areas of poor health and areas where other green space is lacking;
- Increasing 'active travel' through safe walking and cycling routes for short journeys;
- Enabling access beyond urban areas;
- Providing routes for activities, such as walking for health;
- Providing free-at-the-point-of-use opportunities for exercise.

The Medway Joint Strategic Needs Assessment states that although life expectancy in Medway has been increasing it is still significantly worse than the England

Medway Health Walks - Health benefits can be increased through contact with nature.

average and that quality of life has been falling. There has been an increase in the number of people experiencing physical and mental disabilities. Evidence suggests that the recent increase in disability in the population is due to the impact of preventable, chronic, long term health conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. People living in the most disadvantaged areas, such as central Medway, have higher premature mortality and disability than those living in more affluent areas. Taking more exercise can help to improve health in several of these areas.

Poor air quality can also cause poor health and premature death. The latest estimates from Public Health England suggest that in Medway there are 125 deaths each year that are attributable to particulate pollution. Medway currently has four Air Quality Management Areas, declared because levels of the pollutant nitrogen dioxide emissions, which is present in vehicle exhausts, exceeds prescribed levels.

Helping more people to become more active can improve health and wellbeing. The council will seek to provide information, including promoted routes, so that people can use their local public rights of way for recreation and for their everyday journeys. This will also help to reduce air pollution. To help reduce health inequalities, access improvements will be targeted to areas where there is less greenspace and where health is poorer. Links to green spaces, schools and community hubs will be prioritised in these areas. Access within and linking to new development will be a high priority, to encourage walking and cycling and to ensure that the development is well-connected to the public rights of way network beyond. Where possible, paths will be made more accessible so that more people can use them, including the removal of stiles.

The Rights of Way Service will develop new partnerships to take forward this priority, including Public Health and Safer Communities within Medway Council and other partner organisations.

Medway Council's 'Get Active' scheme includes cycling and Nordic walking groups. There are also several Health Walks. The Rights of Way Service supports these through prioritising maintenance on the paths they use. A set of urban route guides will be produced which will support these groups as well as encouraging more people to walk.

PROMOTION AND INFORMATION

National Trails

There is a section of the North Downs Way National Trail within Medway. The national trail is listed as the highest priority in the rights of way maintenance matrix due to its importance as strategic routes both for local people and visitors. The council will continue to work with the North Downs Way National Trail Partnership to make sure the route is well-maintained and help to deliver projects and priorities. These include improving accessibility through removing stiles, traffic-free sections for equestrians, cyclists and mobility vehicle users, development of circular routes and protecting the trail from illegal use.

The England Coastal Path is also being developed through Medway in two stages and is due to open by 2021. This route will also have the status of a national trail when complete. On completion of the England Coast Path, the Thames Path National Trail will be extended from Woolwich to Grain resulting in three National Trails within the Medway area. This is expected to bring additional visitors to the area and Thames Path will be marketed as a 'Source to Sea' trail. The opening of these trails will be used as a catalyst to improve routes which support the visitor economy, along with improvements to the connectivity of the network.

Other Promoted Routes

The 160 mile Saxon Shore Way trail begins at Gravesend and follows the former Roman coastline to Hastings in East Sussex. The route enters Medway at Higham Marshes near Cliffe, then passes through Cliffe, Cooling, High Halstow and Hoo St Werburgh, before following the estuary to Rochester and beyond through Riverside Country Park.

Medway Council has also produced promoted routes, although these are now quite old. These were originally printed, but some have been converted to pdf. Medway Council routes are ‘Walking the Saxon Shore Way through Medway’, ‘Circular Walks around Cuxton and Halling’, ‘Circular Walks on the Hoo Peninsula’ and ‘Tranquil Treks in Medway’.

Kent County Council has also produced circular walks mainly as part of grant funded projects. This includes several in the Medway Valley Rail Trails series[11]) and the ‘Cuxton Lost Landscapes Trail’. Kent County Council has also produced an easy access trail along the seafront at Grain. Kent County Council also promotes the Pilgrim’s Cycle Trail, which starts at Rochester Cathedral.

<u>Improving Information Provision</u>

Promoted routes and providing information on where to go are important to support health and wellbeing, the visitor economy and people with mobility or other disabilities. In the public surveys carried out for this plan, people were asked if they had followed any of these promoted routes Medway. In the Citizens Panel, half had not followed any of the routes and in the online survey, nearly 40% had not followed any route. The Saxon Shore Way was the most used promoted route in both surveys.

Saxon Shore Way

Matt Bradford-Aunger

[11] ‘Cuxton Rail Trail – Coppice and Corncockles’, ‘Strood Community Walk’, ‘Halling Rail Trail – Farming and Ferries’ and ‘Strood Rail Trail – Knights and Kingfishers’.

The surveys show that there is a need to improve access to information. Only two routes are available on Medway Council's website and these are not easy to find.[12] Explore Kent hosts the Kent County Council routes. In addition, the routes themselves are dated. There were no routes on Visit Medway.

The resources to improve, update or provide additional promotional material are limited. Efforts must therefore be directed to where actions will make the greatest impact and directly meet identified needs.

All promotion needs to be easy to find. An easily accessible web page, giving information on routes, distances, suitability and downloadable resources is needed.

In the short term the council will improve the promotion of those existing circular routes which are of sufficient quality to promote. It will explore options on the Medway Council website,[13] through Visit Medway, Visit Kent and Explore Kent.

In the longer term, the council intends to create new promoted routes. The priorities for these will be routes which will support local people in exploring the countryside or green spaces near them, in both rural and urban areas. The council will work with local communities to develop these community trails. The council will also seek to develop promoted routes which support those with additional needs, such as mobility or visual impairments, to access the countryside. The Rights of Way Service will work with partner organisations and Medway country parks and green spaces teams to develop access for all routes, as well as providing more information for these users. The council will seek to provide more information for specific users, including cyclists and equestrians.

Additional funding will be required to develop this area of work.

Information is also important to support responsible use of the countryside. Access rights come with responsibilities and new promotional material will actively encourage responsible use of the countryside. The Countryside Code will be included on the council's website.

Hoo St Werburgh

[12] Strood Community Trail and Circular Walks on the Hoo Peninsula.

[13] A range of improvements to the public rights of way pages on Medway Council's website are proposed, see Theme 4.

VISITOR ECONOMY

Walking and other recreational pursuits in the countryside are an important component of the visitor economy offer. Medway has internationally important and culturally important natural habitats and countryside. The arrival of the England Coastal Path will provide a new attraction and draw new visitors.

Medway does not currently have a destination management plan. The focus of the Cultural Strategy is on built heritage, for example the dockyards and surrounding assets. Better promotion of the countryside would support ambitions to grow the visitor economy and would support high value markets, for example the London market, to convert a short trip to a weekend stay, bringing more value to the area. This is an area which Medway is not currently capitalising on, but which could bring economic benefits particularly to rural areas.

45% of international visitors to the South East between 2006 and 2011 walked in the countryside, compared with 24% for the whole UK; the second highest of any UK region. 25% of international visitors to the South East walked by the coast, compared with 8% for all the UK. Outdoor activities, especially walking, were highlighted as being popular in the South East.

BDRC Continental for Visit England. (2016). Discover England: Summary Insights on Overseas Visitors to England's Regions.

The Rights of Way Service will work with Visit Medway to improve the outdoor recreation offer of Medway. New promotional material will also support the visitor economy, especially routes linking to the North Downs Way, the England Coastal Path and the Saxon Shore Way.

Cliffe Pools

Ted and Jen

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Some public rights of way pass through areas which are environmentally sensitive. These include the North Kent Marshes. With additional homes, the number of recreational visitors to the coastal areas will increase. Research has suggested that the increasing numbers of visitors will have a negative impact on designated bird species. The ‘Bird Wise’ scheme will mitigate the effects of increased recreational activity through information provision and encouraging visitors to act responsibly. The Rights of Way Service will work with Bird Wise and other partners to help address and manage issues which may result from high levels of use at sensitive sites.

The environmental impact of public rights of way maintenance will also be minimised. Major vegetation clearance during the bird nesting season will be avoided. Before carrying out major work, checks will be made for the presence of protected or vulnerable species and to protect buried archaeology. The council’s established working party volunteers will be equipped with a phased replacement of mechanical equipment from fuel to electric strimmers, reducing the need for servicing, fuel costs and emissions.

Sustainable materials with a longer lifespan will be sourced where possible. Contractors working on the council’s behalf will also be expected to minimise environmental impacts.

In some cases some rights of way may need to be managed through Traffic Regulation Orders to prohibit use for a set period of time to protect environmental features.

Chris Child

The north Kent coast is internationally important for bird life. Near Riverside Country Park.

THEME 3 ACTIONS – SERVING MEDWAY'S NEEDS

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
T3A	To support the National Trails.	T3A.1	Support the North Downs Way National Trail Partnership Board. Work in partnership with the Trail Officer to meet national guidance objectives on trail standards and progress projects.
T3B	To provide new promotional resources which support residents in accessing their public rights of way, the visitor economy, people with disabilities or other under-represented users.	T3B.1	Improve how the public can access promotional material. Improve the online platform for downloadable information and work with partners to improve the reach and co-ordination of promotion.
		T3B.2	Review current publications, update as necessary and make available on Medway Council's website.
		T3B.3	Produce urban route guides, for Chatham, Rochester, Strood and Gillingham.
		T3B.4	Develop parish promoted routes with parish councils, for High Halstow and St Mary Hoo, Cliffe and Cooling, All Hallows and Stoke, ensuring routes are accessible.
		T3B.5	Develop themed promoted routes for residents and to support the visitor economy, including a river nature and history trail and bird trail.
		T3B.6	Provide promotional material to benefit from the England Coastal Path and Source to Sea route, including for Grain Coastal Park, working in partnership with Kent County Council where appropriate.
		T3B.7	Work with partners to increase the profile of and fully capitalise on Medway's public rights of way asset to support the visitor economy – targeting new markets, attracting spend to rural business, increasing lengths of stay and strengthening Medway's brand.
T3C	To support more people with disabilities and under-represented groups in using public rights of way.	T3C.1	Seek to create routes with high levels of accessibility, working with partners to deliver and secure funding, and provide promotional material.
		T3C.2	Support partners working with people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups or other under-represented users, to understand barriers to accessing public rights of way and develop projects to increase use.
T3D	To support improved health and wellbeing.	T3D.1	Work with the council's Public Health Team to support Get Active and Health Walks, providing easily accessible routes and prioritising maintenance requests.
T3E	To ensure that environmental impacts are reduced.	T3E.1	Work with partners and support measures which limit or mitigate negative impacts from visitors on sensitive sites.
		T3E.2	Set out processes to reduce the environmental impact of operations, including advice to landowners and volunteers, and standards for contractors. Source construction materials which reduce environmental impact.

A rolling two year delivery plan will be created and reviewed to guide delivery of the actions above. Actions will be prioritised according to the level of need and resources at the time. The Local Access Forum will guide the content and implementation of the delivery plan.

THEME 4 – EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

THE PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY SERVICE

The Public Rights of Way Service consists of 1.6 members of staff. It is a statutory service area for Medway Council, and the council is legally obliged to record and keep public rights of way open. To fulfil this legal duty, the Rights of Way Service must ensure that public rights of way are maintained. The council also has many duties around how public rights of way are recorded.

The council has the following duties in respect of maintaining public rights of way:

Highways Act 1980, Section 41
A duty to maintain all footpaths, bridleways and byways, for which it is the highway authority, which are maintainable at the public expense.

Highways Act 1980 Section 130
A duty to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of any highway for which it is the highway authority. This includes preventing the stopping up or obstruction of the highway.

The preceding chapters show clearly how public rights of way are an asset for Medway. They are an integral part of the quality of life for the area. They should be capitalised upon for the benefit of all residents.

However, as with most other local authorities, the resources available to the council to fulfil its PROW duties remain tight. Therefore the delivery of actions in this plan will be considered in a separate action plan that will be prioritised to short, medium and long term delivery.

The delivery of its statutory duties will remain a priority for the council. To achieve this position the Rights of Way Service will need to work with even greater efficiency and effectiveness, engaging volunteers, parishes, landowners, developers and funding streams.

PRIORITIES

DUTIES AROUND THE DEFINITIVE MAP AND STATEMENT

The Definitive Map and Statement is the legal record of public rights of way. The map shows all types of recorded public rights of way. The statement gives further details of the routes, which might include widths or limitations to the rights of the public. The map and statement must be available for the public to view.

The council has the following duties in respect of the Definitive Map and Statement:

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Section 53

A duty to keep the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way under continuous review and to make modification orders to the map (MMO's) where events require this.

Many areas of law set out how the duties around the definitive map and statement must be carried out. The map and statement must be continuously reviewed so that they are up to date. A new 'consolidated' version of the map and statement includes all the changes that have been made since the last updated map and statement. The last consolidated update of Medway's Definitive Map and Statement was

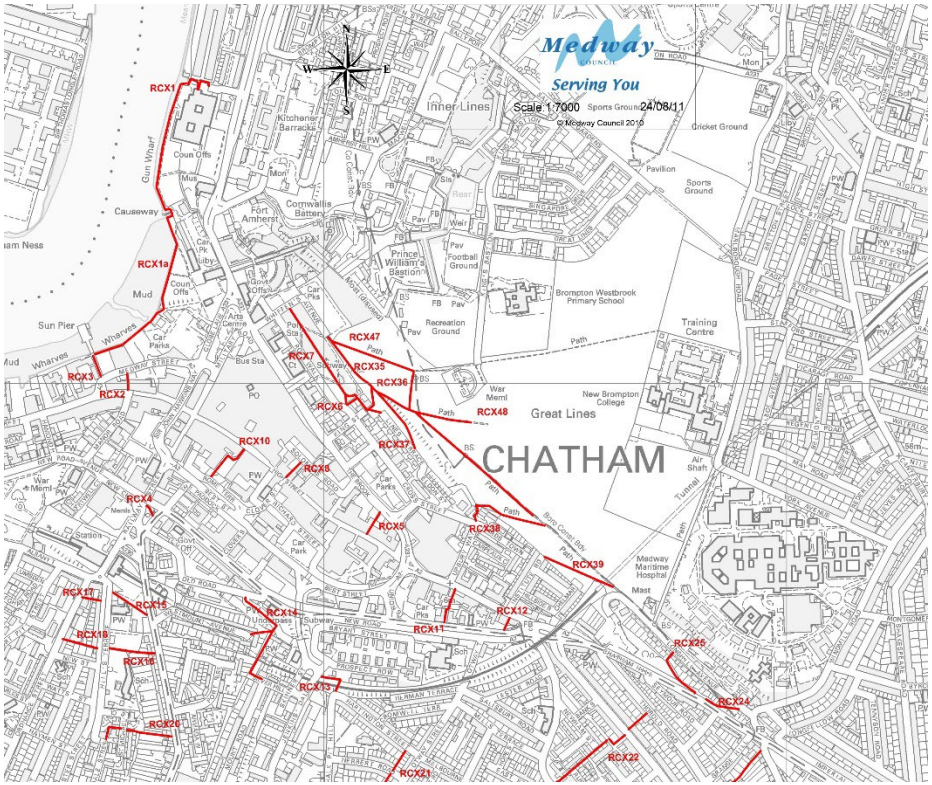
made in April 1987. The production of an updated map and statement must therefore be a priority during the lifetime of this plan. This update will require additional resources. As part of this update, the council will improve the availability of the map and statement for public viewing.

The council is also responsible for creating, diverting or extinguishing public rights of way in the interests of landowners, the public or due to development. The Deregulation Act 2015 will affect the delivery of services in these areas. Future changes, when the law has been enacted, will include more streamlined procedures for unrecorded rights and simplified procedures for the Definitive Map Modification Order process. Due to the revised timescales proposed under the legislation, and the limited resources of the council, work in these areas may need to be prioritised over other service areas when applications are received. Any applications for unrecorded rights before the deadline of 1st January 2026 will also need to be prioritised over other work areas.[14]

CUSTOMER FOCUS

The main way the public comes into contact with the Rights of Way Service is through registering complaints about problems with paths.

The public can currently report problems through Medway Council's telephone contact centre, through direct email or phone calls with rights of way officers or through the Rights of Way Service Facebook page. Some reports are passed to the service through other council departments. There is no facility on Medway Council's website through which members of the public can report issues and no guidance for them on how to do so. If reports are received through the call centre or some council departments they are logged onto Medway Council's 'Confirm' system.



Extract from Chatham excluded area map. The base mapping of the definitive map needs to be improved and made easier for the public to view.

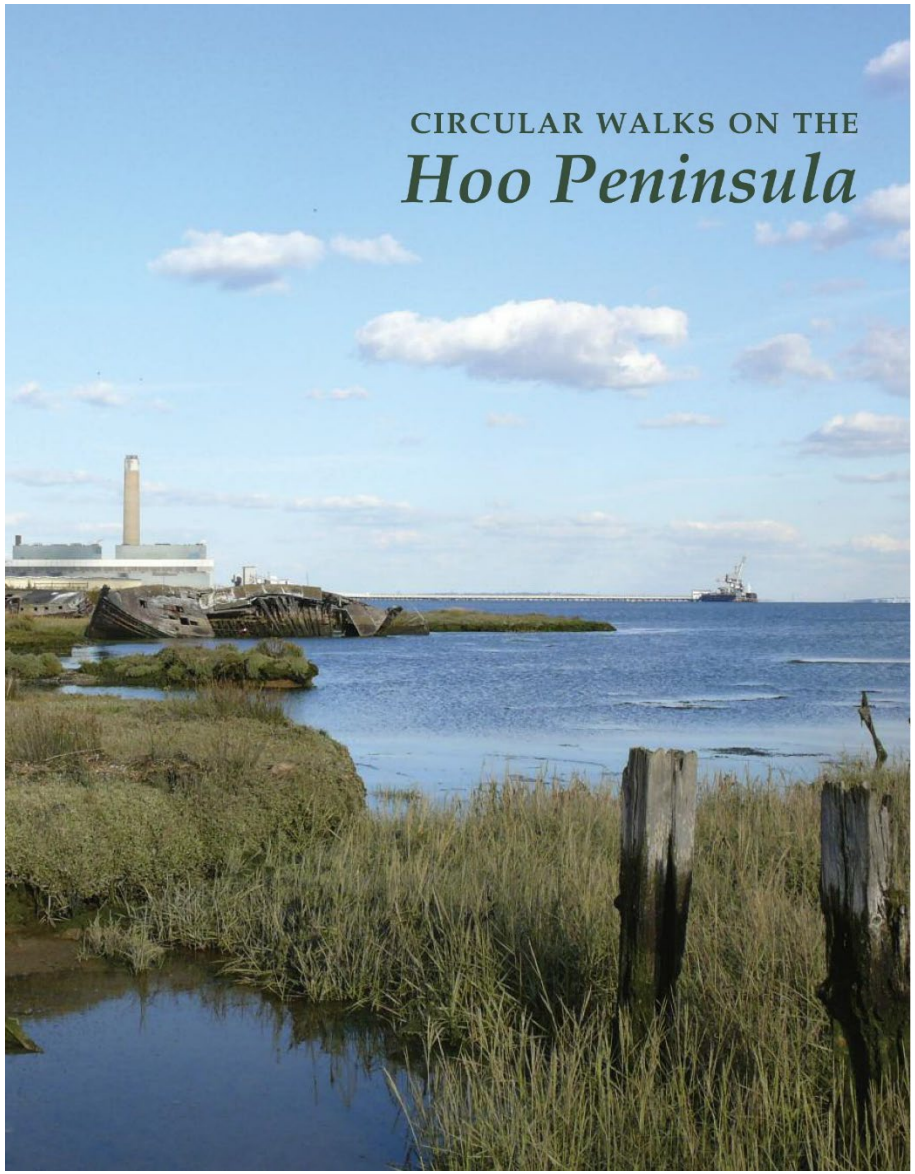
Confirm is a highways asset management system designed to manage street works and is not a bespoke rights of way complaints system. Not all problems are logged onto Confirm as the system does not provide additional benefit to the service. Improvements to Confirm, for example through allowing more categories to support analysis and monitoring of rights of way complaints, would allow more effective delivery of the needs of customers.

[14] National organisations are running campaigns to record these rights, including the Ramblers' Association (Don't Lose Your Way) and the British Horse Society.

It would also support the implementation of the problem prioritisation matrix and the allocation of resources to the highest priority problems. It is also necessary to monitor paths for which a high volume of complaints are received and to modify the vegetation cutting contract.

The council will examine whether the Confirm system can be enhanced to enable more informative recording of complaints and if it can be modified to support the development of a problem prioritisation approach. In the short term, information on reporting problems on public rights of way will be added to Medway Council's website. During the course of this plan, a facility will be developed through which members of the public can report complaints online through Medway Council's website. The Medway Council web pages also offer an opportunity to provide better information. This would help the public to find more information without needing to contact the council, both improving the service the council offers and releasing officers from day-to-day enquiries. The web pages will be reviewed and updated. As well as existing content, the following are examples of areas which could be improved:

- Improved interface for promoted routes;
- Improved guidance on how to report issues, ideally with an online facility;
- Mapping of public rights of way – currently only excluded areas maps are provided (requires new consolidated definitive map);
- Information for landowners and standards required for structures on public rights of way;
- Fees and charges;
- Policies, including on new routes on developments, problem matrix and enforcement policy;
- How to view the Definitive Map and Statement;
- Countryside Code
- Medway Canine Code



Circular Walks on the Hoo Peninsula – existing promoted routes which will be publicised more effectively.

INCOME

Additional funding will be sought to deliver this ROWIP.

There are grant sources available which could help support public rights of way. New sources of funding will be sought through working with a wider range of partners.

Contributions from developers will also be secured through s106 requests and s38 policies to ensure rights of way are improved and communities not disadvantaged

Some public rights of way services are already chargeable. Due to the limited resources, the council will consider moving towards full cost recovery for delivery of chargeable services. The schedule of fees and charges will be reviewed and additional services will be chargeable. The schedule will be reviewed annually. The schedule of fees and charges will be posted on Medway Council's website.

The Rights of Way Service will also continue to seek funding from additional sources including the Local Transport Plan, National Lottery or through other sources and projects.

DEVELOPING WIDER PARTNERSHIPS

The profile of public rights of way and the benefits which they bring needs to be raised both within the council and with partners. The Rights of Way Service also needs to widen the range of partners with whom it works in order to deliver the actions in this plan. Better joint working both within and outside the council will help to ensure that public rights of way are properly included in policy and strategy. It will help to make sure that projects are developed and funding sought which align with the priorities of this ROWIP.

The council will seek to develop existing and form new partnerships to progress projects and funding opportunities in the areas shown below:

- Green and Blue Infrastructure – Public rights of way are a crucial component of green infrastructure. They should feature strongly in Medway's Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan and Local Plan policy and should be included in green infrastructure projects;
- Health and Wellbeing – A better understanding is needed of those with mobility and visual impairments and projects need to be developed to improve disabled access provision. Work is also needed with new and existing health partners to understand further how public rights of way can contribute to health and wellbeing targets;
- Active Travel – The Rights of Way Service will seek to increase its role in delivering both strategic routes and routes for short walking and cycling journeys. New multi-user routes in new developments will be pursued;
- Visitor Economy – There is a lack of recognition of the potential of public rights of way to support the visitor economy. The opening of the England Coastal Path and Thames Path extension offers an opportunity to capitalise on this investment to attract visitors to Medway. The Rights of Way Service will work with others in the council and Visit Medway to develop the countryside offer in Medway.
- Economy – Public rights of way are part of what supports Medway's high quality of life, making it a desirable place to work and live.

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

The Local Access Forum (LAF) is an independent statutory consultee whose remit is to provide advice to the council and other organisations. LAFs can set their own priorities depending on local issues. It has the aim of improving public access in Medway and its duties are set out in law. Medway Council provides support to the LAF. Members are volunteers and primarily represent user groups.

The LAF will be essential in helping to ensure the actions in this plan are delivered. The council will provide regular progress reports to the LAF throughout the lifetime of this ROWIP. It will also continue to seek their advice on strategy and policy. Whilst membership of the LAF and its priorities are matters for the LAF itself, in order to address the issues identified in this plan, the council would encourage a wider membership of the LAF to include representatives from groups supporting people with disabilities, parish councils and landowners. It will also encourage the LAF to support delivery of this plan through taking forward projects.

VOLUNTEERS AND COMMUNITY ACTION

A group of volunteers, supported by Medway Council, carry out maintenance, repairs and vegetation clearance. Other community groups provide practical and other support to help maintain and improve public rights of way.[15] Rights of Way volunteers already provide 500+ hours of work each year with an estimated value of £17,600 on maintenance and clearance works. The council recognises and values highly the work these groups and individuals carry out.

If the action in this plan are to be delivered there is a need for greater community action. Parish councils and local volunteers could, for example, assist in carrying out condition surveys of their rights of way and implementing simple repairs, vegetation clearance and waymarking. Local promoted circular routes could encourage people to explore their local countryside or to improve health. The council would encourage such promotion but will need local communities to take a lead in developing this. All but one parish council attended the workshops which took place to support the development of this ROWIP, showing that there is a high level of interest in public rights of way. The discussions highlighted a range of improvements that were needed. The council will explore with parish councils how this interest can be developed into practical support to deliver this plan.

Landowners are also important partners (also explored in Theme 1 – A Well-Maintained Network). Medway council will continue to provide advice and assistance to landowners so that they can fulfil their duties. The PROW service recognises the needs of landowners and the importance of striking a balance between their needs and those of network users whilst meeting our statutory duties.

Volunteers, such as this group from the Medway Towns Footpath Group, provide many hours of work every year to maintain public rights of way.

[15] For example the Medway Towns Footpath Group, Medway Ramblers, Cuxton Countryside Group, British Horse Society and others.

THEME 4 ACTIONS – EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

Ref	Objectives	Ref	Actions
T4A	To uphold our duties to provide an up-to-date Definitive Map and Statement.	T4A.1	Consolidate the Definitive Map and Statement.
		T4A.2	Improve how the public can view the Definitive Map and Statement.
		T4A.3	Reduce the number of map anomalies.
		T4A.3	Improve the online, publicly viewable, registers for DMMOs, PPOs and Landowner Deposits.
		T4A.4	Ensure GIS mapping of the public rights of way network is updated, including mapping of promoted routes, and make available to the public.
		T4A.6	Ensure any claims for unrecorded rights are processed within the legal deadline (currently 2026).
T4B	To deliver a customer focused service, maximising efficiency and income generation	T4B.1	Improve the recording of problems to enable tracking and analysis of problems and reduce time spent by public rights of way officers. Investigate whether 'Confirm' will allow accurate logging of problems to support implementation of the problem matrix. Consider other systems if improvement through Confirm is not possible.
		T4B.2	Develop an online facility for the public to report problems with public rights of way.
		T4B.3	Upgrade public rights of way pages on Medway Council's website.
		T4B.4	Ensure fees and charges fully reflect the costs involved in work. Review and update fees and charges schedule annually and publicise on Medway Council website.
		T4B.5	Seek developer contributions for paths and projects.
		T4B.6	Improve the social media presence and responsiveness of the Rights of Way Service, through Facebook and Medway Council social media sites.
T4C	To form better partnerships with existing, new and community partners, the Local Access Forum and volunteers.	T4C.1	Form working partnerships with a range of internal and external partners, including transport, health and wellbeing, visitor economy and groups representing people with disabilities to raise the profile of the benefits of public rights of way and to develop projects and funding bids.
		T4C.2	Continue to support the Local Access Forum. Support the forum in widening membership to include, e.g. people with disabilities, parish councils and landowners.
		T4C.3	Continue to support and seek to expand the maintenance team of public rights of way volunteers. Support with training, tools and work plans and recognition of the valuable work they undertake.
		T4C.4	Encourage parish councils to be more involved in surveying and maintaining public rights of way.

A rolling two year delivery plan will be created and reviewed to guide delivery of the actions above. Actions will be prioritised according to the level of need and resources at the time. The Local Access Forum will guide the content and implementation of the delivery plan.