



Research Report

Rights of Way Improvement Plan Consultation – Land Managers

Findings from a survey of land owners and managers within Warwickshire
about the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

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Introduction

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 ("CROW") placed a duty on the County Council to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), a 10-year plan for improving the provision of access to the countryside.

The plan will include the County Council's assessment of such things as;

- the extent to which Warwickshire's rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public,
- the opportunities provided by rights of way for exercise and open air recreation,
- the accessibility of the rights of way network to blind or partially sighted persons and those with mobility problems and
- targets for the future of the rights of way network.

In order to assess what should be included in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, consultation with interested parties was undertaken. Seven different questionnaires were designed and distributed to walkers / general countryside users, cyclists, horse riders, land managers, motorised users, Parish / Town Councils and Tourist Information Centres. The results in this report relate to the findings from the questionnaires returned by **land owners and managers**. The consultation was carried out in August and September 2004.

Key findings

- The majority of respondents (90%) were responding with agriculture as their main form of business. Nearly two-thirds of these were family farms up to 500 acres in size.
- In total, the consultation covered landowners who managed approximately 28% of the County's rights of way and unclassified county roads network.
- The greatest benefit that landowners identified with opening their land to public access was that it gave a greater appreciation and understanding of the countryside to more people. Getting the public reconnected with food production was also a common benefit that was associated with public access.
- 'Dogs running loose' and 'dog fouling' were identified as the greatest problems that landowners face when giving public access to their land.
- 'Working with schools and with the community' was popular with landowners as a way of making the public more aware of their responsibilities.
- The most significant factor persuading landowners to provide more public access, is exchanging 'new paths for old'.
- It appears that landowners would be discouraged from opening up more of their land because of the increased liability it would put on them.

Response rates

- Overall, 186 completed questionnaires were received from the land managers consultation, 172 paper copies were received and 14 land managers replied through the Warwickshire County Council website.
- Landowners from across the County were invited to respond to the questionnaire; Figure 1 shows the location of respondents from across the County, and beyond.

Figure 1: "Please indicate where you manage land."

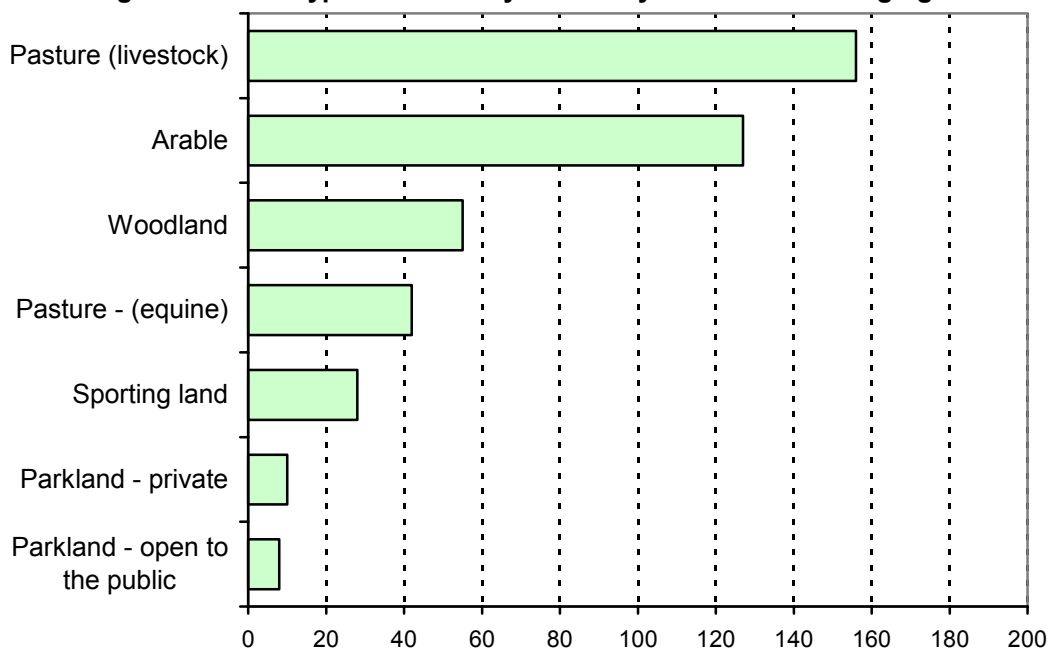
Location	No. of respondents
Coventry and / or Solihull	9
North Warwickshire	17
Nuneaton and Bedworth	11
Rugby Borough	56
Stratford-on-Avon District	86
Warwick District	34

- There were ten respondents who owned or managed land outside of the sub-region, they represent the areas of Leicestershire, North Wales, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Worcestershire.

Results – Type of land management

- The majority of landowners (90%) were responding with agriculture as their main business. Of the remainder 7% own an estate, 2% own an equestrian business and 1% a recreational business.
- Of the agricultural businesses, nearly two-thirds (65%) were family farms up to 500 acres in size. One-quarter (25%) were larger family farms or commercial enterprises, and one in ten (10%) were smallholdings or other small enterprises.
- Respondents were asked what type of land they are directly involved in managing, the various land types are detailed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: "What type of land are you directly involved in managing?"



- Respondents were asked what their responsibility was for the land, 82% were owner occupiers of land, 40% were tenants and 8% were estate / farm managers.

Results – Access for the public

- Respondents were asked how many miles of footpaths, bridleways and byways there were over land that they managed. Taking into account all of the respondents, this consultation has covered approximately:
 - 335 miles of footpaths (326 miles within Warwickshire or 23% of footpaths by length),
 - 115 miles of bridleways (all within Warwickshire covering 38% of bridleways by length) and
 - 45 miles of byways or unclassified country roads (41 within Warwickshire or 65% of unclassified country roads / byways by length).
- Respondents reported that they had other types of public access in the form of:

• Disused railways	15 respondents
• Other permissive access (free)	15 respondents
• Canals	14 respondents
• Countryside Stewardship Scheme (linear)	8 respondents
• Countryside Stewardship Scheme (area)	8 respondents
• Country park or land open to paying public	6 respondents
• Common land	4 respondents

Results – Advantages of public access

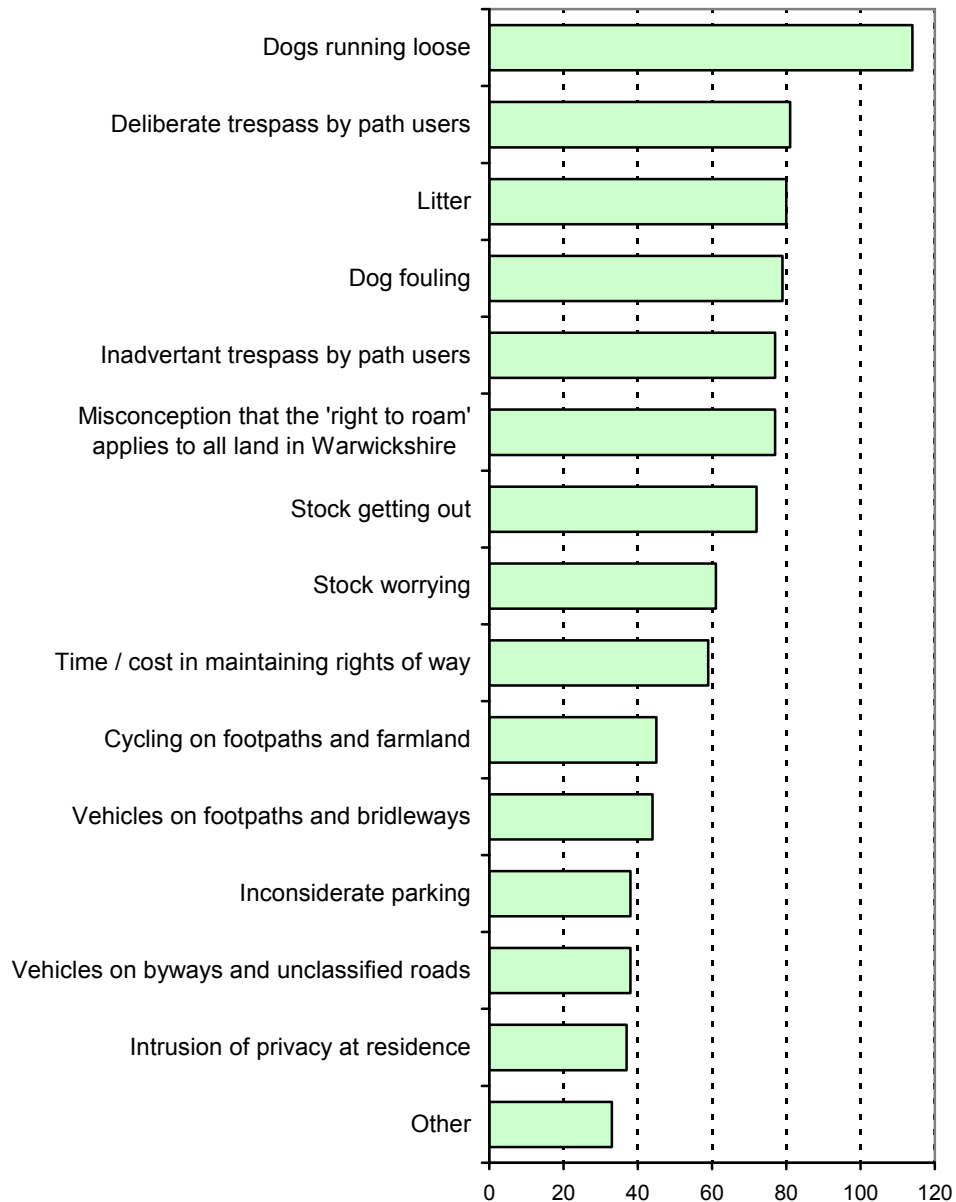
- Only 8% of land managers indicated that public access benefits their business directly, and a further 8% indicated that public access benefits their business indirectly.
- Approximately 14% of land managers thought that public access went a significant way to benefiting the local economy
- 12% of land managers thought that it helped to enable diversification.
- Nearly one-third of respondents (32%) said that opening their land up to the public reconnected people to food production, and nearly one-half (48%) said that it gave a greater appreciation and understanding of the countryside.
- Respondents were invited to say what other further potential benefits they associated with public access over their land; the results are detailed below.

• Let public see how hard it is to run a farm	3 respondents
• Village / residential benefits	3 respondents
• Get told about missing / injured animals	2 respondents
• So they can enjoy the countryside	2 respondents
- It was also mentioned by single respondents that it is a good public relations exercise for farmers and there is also an indirect benefit to horse grazing.

Results – Disadvantages of public access

- Respondents were given a list of 15 potential problems associated with the existence of public rights of way on their land. The most common problem that land owners associated with public rights of way running through their land was 'dogs running loose'.

Figure 3: "Which of the following are the most significant problems directly associated with the existence of public rights of way on land in which you have an interest?"

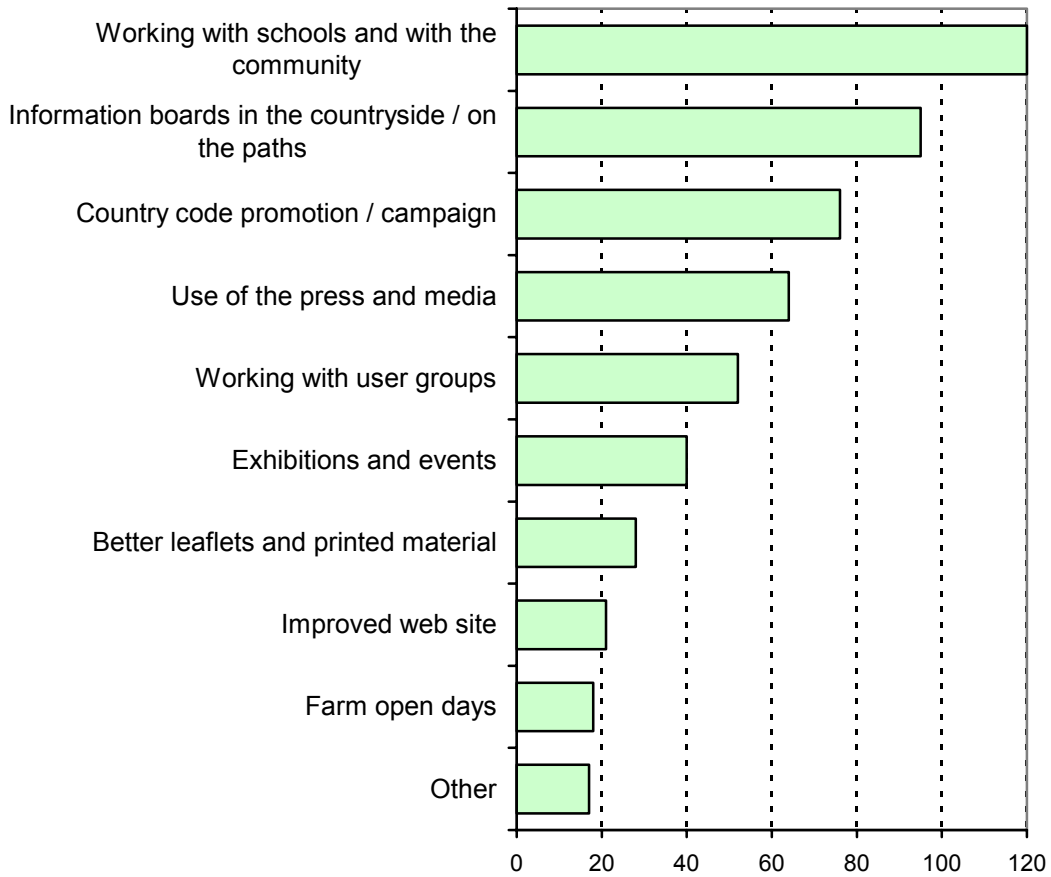


Issues which land managers mentioned under 'other' include a lack of respect/bad attitude from users, trespass, crime/security and concern about wildlife. Many of the 'Other' comments emphasised the problems surrounding dogs and dog fouling and issues around gates being left open.

Several landowners said that a choice of three is not possible because many or all of the options are significant problems.

- Landowners were asked what would be most valuable to them in assisting with making the public more aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights. Respondents were given a list of ten possible options and were asked to select up to three, the results are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: “Which would be the most valuable in making the public more aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights?”

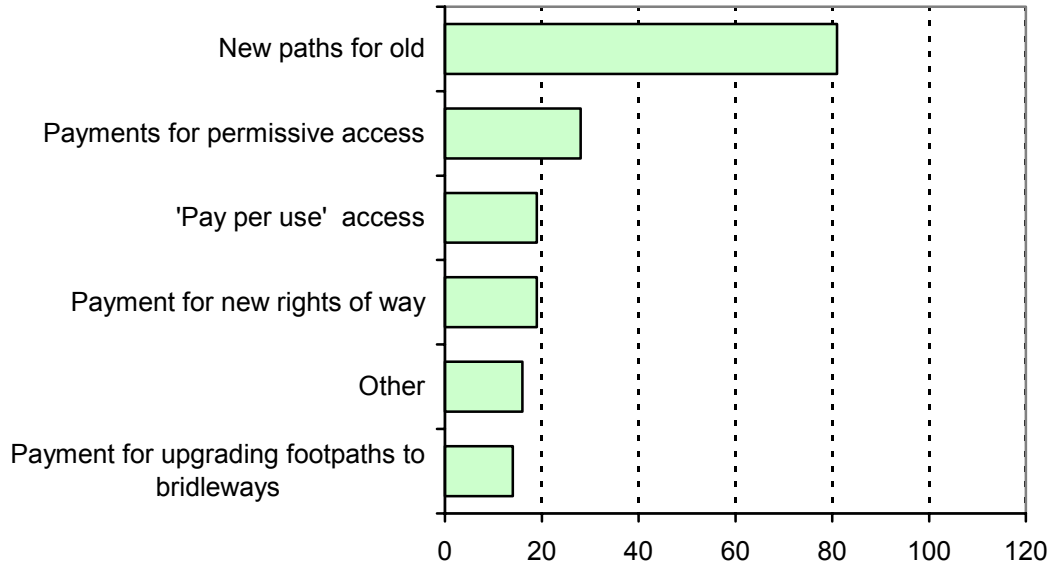


Issues which land managers mentioned under ‘other’ relate to control of dogs. Several landowners believe that the problems are caused by a problem minority and that they would be unlikely to become more responsible.

Results – Providing greater public access

- Landowners were asked, from a list of options, what would encourage them to provide greater public access to land they own, results are shown below:

Figure 5: "Which of the following would most encourage you to provide greater public access to land owned by you?"

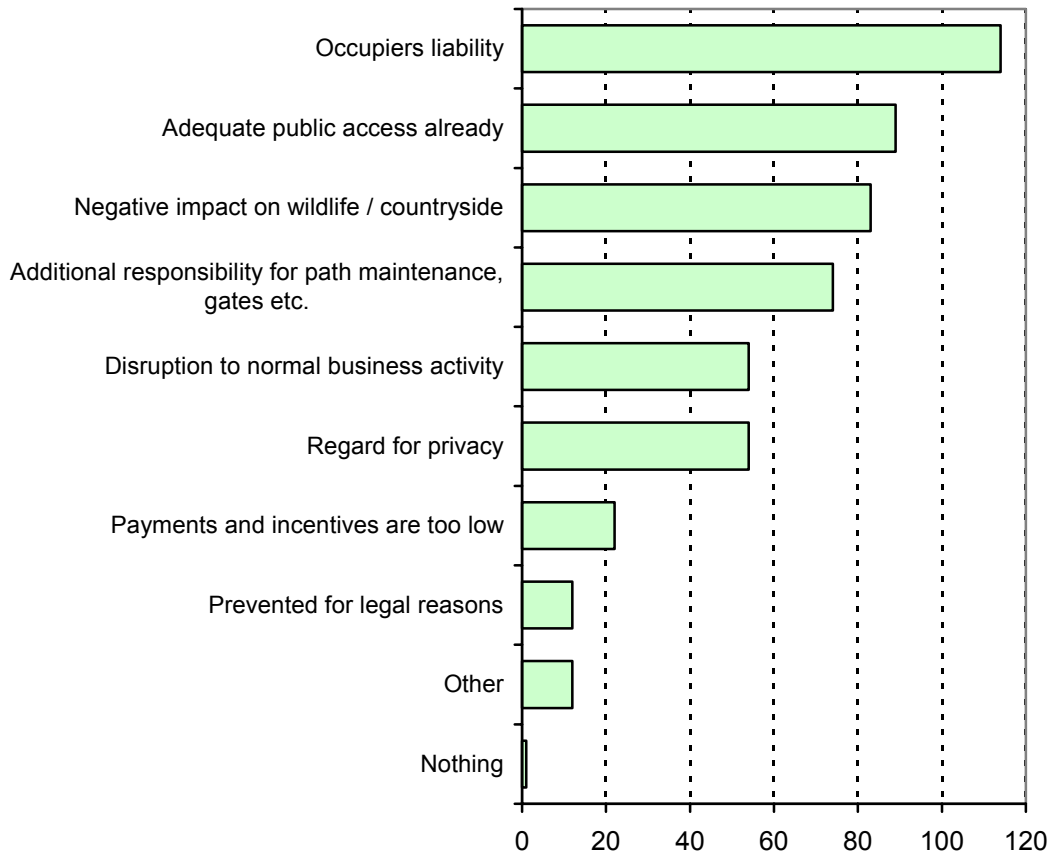


- However, two in five landowners said that there was 'nothing' that would encourage them to open up more of their land for public access.

Issues which land managers mentioned under 'other' include a responsible attitude from users, changes to occupiers liability, payments to cover existing access (stiles, reinstatement) and payment by users to use the existing rights of way.

- Respondents were also asked what would discourage them from providing greater public access. From a list of ten options, the most common responses were:

Figure 6: "Which of the following would most discourage you from providing greater public access?"



- Only one respondent stated that there was nothing that would discourage them from providing greater public access on their land.
- Landowners and land managers were also given the opportunity to tell us about anything else that should be considered in producing a Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the County. More than 50 respondents stated some further issues that should be considered, those that received the most support are detailed below:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| • Public need to respect others' land | 12 respondents |
| • Safety concerns | 6 respondents |
| • Insurance concerns | 4 respondents |
| • Curb vandalism | 4 respondents |
| • Conservation concerns | 4 respondents |
| • Litter concerns / fly tipping | 4 respondents |
| • Rights of way activities clash with farm activities | 4 respondents |
| • More dog control generally | 4 respondents |