

Dorset's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026 to 2036

DRAFT



Foreword

As Leader of Dorset Council, I am proud to introduce Dorset's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

This plan is not just about paths and trails across Dorset's countryside - it is about connecting people, places and opportunities across our county. Dorset's public rights of way network is a vital asset that underpins many of our strategic priorities, from strong communities to economic growth and responding to the climate and nature emergencies.

The ROWIP helps ensure that our network of footpaths, bridleways and byways meets the needs of residents and visitors now and in the future. It supports active travel, reducing reliance on cars and contributing to our climate goals, while promoting healthier lifestyles by enabling walking, cycling and riding for both recreation and everyday journeys. It strengthens our local economy by improving access to the countryside, supporting tourism and benefiting rural businesses. It also plays a key role in community resilience and wellbeing, providing safe and inclusive routes for people of all abilities.

By aligning with Dorset Council's objectives - tackling climate change, supporting communities and enabling sustainable economic development. The ROWIP is a strategic investment in our county's future. It reflects our ambition to make Dorset a place where everyone can enjoy and benefit from our outstanding landscapes, heritage and natural environment; while ensuring these benefits are accessible to all and improvements are planned for the long term.

Together with partners, stakeholders and volunteers, we will deliver a rights of way network that is modern, inclusive and fit for purpose - helping Dorset to thrive socially, economically and environmentally.

Cllr Nick Ireland
Leader of Dorset Council



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1: Executive Summary

Dorset's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2026 to 2036 sets out how Dorset Council will develop a modern, accessible and better-connected network of public rights of way that supports everyday walking, cycling and access to natural green and blue spaces. This new ROWIP replaces the earlier ROWIP published in 2011.

Dorset Council, as the Local Highway Authority, has a statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This plan fulfils that duty while setting a broader and more ambitious vision for how Dorset's public rights of way (PROW) network will contribute to the county's communities, economy and environment over the next decade.

We are responsible for recording, maintaining and protecting 2,855 miles (4,594 km) of public rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways, byways and restricted byways. This work is primarily delivered by the Dorset Council Greenspace Ranger Team, alongside the Definitive Map Team. In addition, Dorset Council manages a wider countryside access network, including long-distance promoted routes, over 80 countryside sites, four country parks and other public greenspaces. Together, these form one of Dorset's most valuable shared assets.

Why this plan matters

The way people use Dorset's rights of way network has changed significantly in recent years.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a sustained increase in the use of local paths for both physical and mental wellbeing. Natural England's People and Nature Survey (March 2022) found that 39% of adults said that nature and wildlife had become more important to their wellbeing than before the pandemic. Therefore, access to greenspace is increasingly recognised as essential to quality of life, not simply a recreational benefit.

Public policy has evolved to reflect this shift. Access to nature is now embedded within public health thinking, with greenspace seen as a form of preventative healthcare. The Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (2025) [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP\) 2025 - GOV.UK](#) includes a commitment to ensure that everyone has access to green or blue space within a 15 minute walk of their home. Dorset's public rights of way network plays a key role in delivering this ambition.

At the same time, there is growing demand for safe, accessible routes that support everyday journeys, alongside increasing housing growth and the need to reduce reliance on private cars. Public rights of way are therefore no longer solely transport or recreational assets; they are essential infrastructure supporting health, sustainability, climate resilience and social inclusion.

What this plan will deliver

Over the next 10 years, this plan will:

- improve the condition and usability of the network, prioritising routes that are most important to local communities



- create safer, better-connected routes linking towns, villages, schools, services and green spaces
- increase accessibility by reducing physical barriers and promoting a range of clearly defined accessible routes
- expand traffic-free and multi-user routes, including trailways, to support everyday walking, cycling and riding
- improve waymarking and information, supported by digital tools such as Dorset Explorer, making the network easier to access and navigate
- support healthier and more active lifestyles by increasing participation and reducing barriers to access
- strengthen Dorset's economy by promoting the county as a leading destination for walking, cycling and outdoor recreation
- ensure new development protects and enhances the network through effective use of the planning process, Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions
- promote responsible use of the network and maintain positive relationships with landowners
- maintain an accurate and accessible legal record of public rights of way through the Definitive Map and Statement

A network with wide-ranging benefits

Dorset's public rights of way network deliver benefits far beyond recreation.

It supports the local economy by attracting walkers, cyclists and visitors. Contributing to Dorset's accommodation, food and retail sectors, particularly in rural and coastal communities. It also helps extend the tourism season beyond peak summer months, reducing reliance on seasonal income.

The network also contributes to wider economic benefits through improved public health outcomes, reducing long-term pressure on health services, and supporting sustainable transport by providing alternatives to short car journeys.

Public rights of way enable people to access Dorset's landscapes, heritage and natural environment, supporting community wellbeing, social interaction and a sense of place.

A strategic and partnership-led approach

This plan sets out how Dorset will ensure the rights of way network meets the current and future needs of residents and visitors between 2026 and 2036. It does not replace our statutory duties but builds upon them, setting out a clear framework for improvement and investment.

The plan has been developed through extensive consultation with council services, external organisations, stakeholders and the public. This feedback, alongside Dorset Council's strategic priorities, has shaped the approach and informed the development of 10 policies.

These policies are grouped around four key strategic themes:

- **a high-quality network** – maintaining, improving and connecting routes
- **accessible and inclusive access** – reducing barriers and improving usability
- **supporting communities and the economy** – empowering local involvement and promoting Dorset
- **connecting with wider priorities** – including health, sustainable transport, planning and climate objectives



Dorset Council's strategic priorities:

- provide high quality and affordable housing
- grow our economy
- communities for all
- respond to the climate and nature crisis



Figure 1: Dorset Councils strategic priorities

The 10 policy areas

The plan is delivered through 10 policies which together provide a comprehensive framework for improving the network:

1. Managing and delivering a high-quality public rights of way network
2. Improving information, promotion and awareness
3. Making the network more accessible
4. Empowering communities and stakeholders
5. Supporting the economy
6. Promoting responsible use and the Countryside Code
7. Using new development and the Local Plan to improve the network
8. Maximising health and wellbeing outcomes
9. Supporting sustainable transport and active travel
10. Maintaining the Definitive Map and legal record

These policies provide the focus for investment, partnership working and service delivery over the next decade.



Delivery and investment

The plan will be delivered through:

- strong partnership working with communities, landowners and stakeholders
- targeted investment through the Local Transport Plan funding, (this is the DfT allocation for Highway improvements for Dorset) external funding and developer contributions
- a coordinated, cross-service approach within Dorset Council
- ongoing monitoring and review to ensure the network continues to evolve in response to changing needs

This approach will place Dorset in a strong position to attract external funding and prioritise resources effectively.

This plan positions Dorset to develop a high-quality, accessible and well-connected rights of way network that supports healthier communities, sustainable travel and a strong rural economy, ensuring the county's landscapes remain accessible and valued.

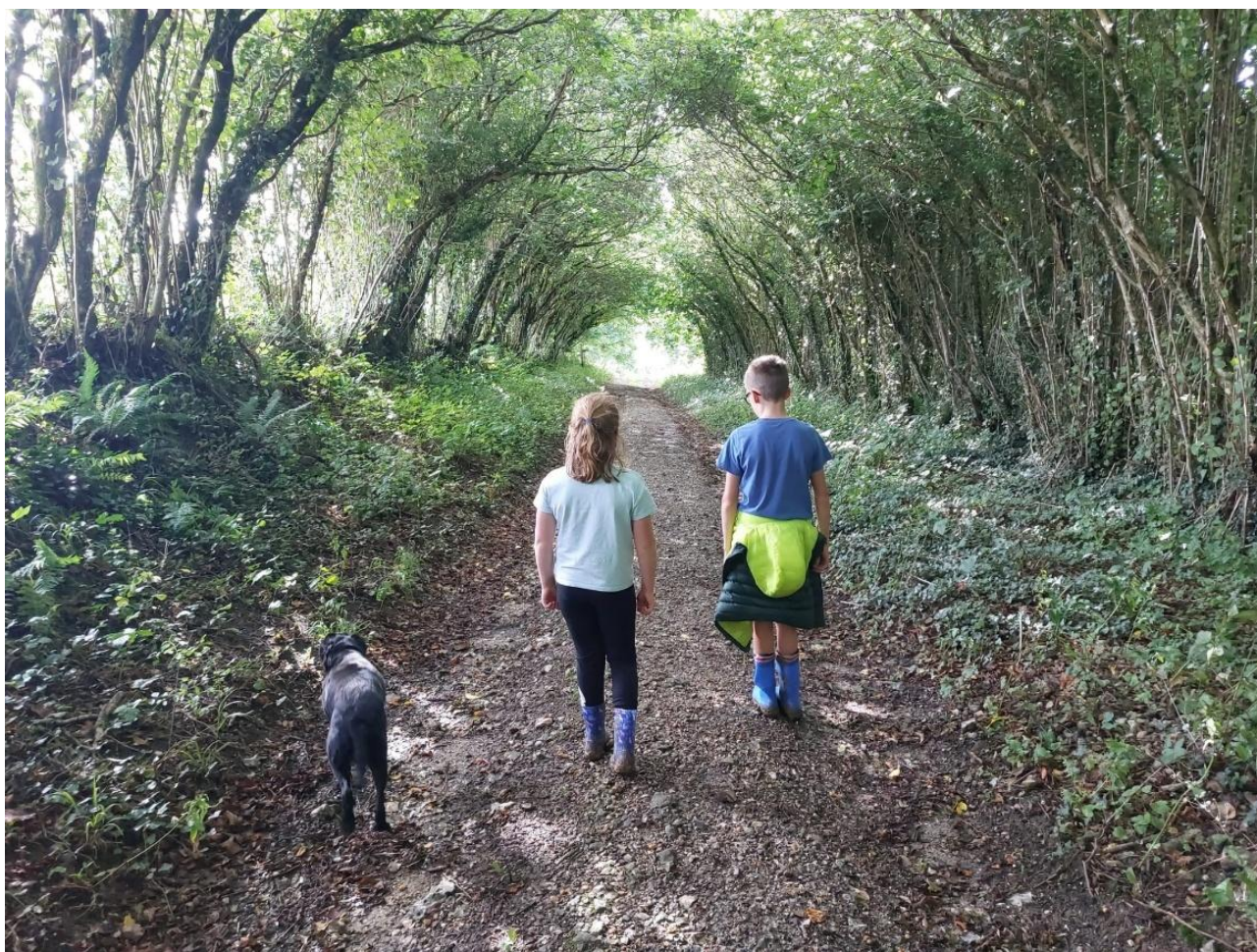


Figure 2: Bridleway in West Dorset.

2: Vision for ROWIP2

Dorset has a significant opportunity to refresh its Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP2) to support the Council's wider strategic objectives and maximise the value of one of the county's greatest assets: its natural environment.

Covering almost 1,000 square miles, Dorset has nearly 3,000 miles of public rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways, byways and former railway routes. This extensive network connects towns, villages and rural communities, providing opportunities for recreation, active travel, access to nature, improved health and wellbeing, and economic growth.

Dorset's outstanding landscapes, including the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and two National Landscapes, make it uniquely placed to become a leading destination for countryside access and outdoor recreation. The network allows residents and visitors to experience the county's rich natural, historic and cultural heritage while supporting nature recovery and sustainable travel.

ROWIP2 aims to establish Dorset as a flagship county for access to nature and one of England's premier walking destinations. The plan will support communities to create and promote local circular routes, improve infrastructure, signage and accessibility, and enhance digital route information through Dorset Explorer and GPS-enabled tools.

Improving access to the network will help people be more active, improve health and wellbeing, and provide free opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. The plan also seeks to make the network more inclusive and accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

The emerging Dorset Local Plan presents opportunities to incorporate high-quality rights of way infrastructure into new developments. Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding will help deliver sustainable transport and recreational routes that connect communities and strengthen the wider network.

ROWIP2 has been informed by engagement with the Local Access Forum, user groups, landowners and local communities. Feedback highlighted the importance of a network that is easy to use, well-maintained and supported by clear information and good infrastructure.

Through this plan, Dorset Council will ensure that the rights of way network remain accessible, relevant and resilient, maximising its contribution to health, wellbeing, sustainable travel, nature recovery and the local economy.





Figure 3: Walking route between Corfe Castle and Swanage.

3: Scope of ROWIP2 from 2026 to 2036

The ROWIP is a statutory strategy to improve and develop Dorset's public rights of way network and wider access to the countryside. It is a strategic document and does not identify improvements on a path-by-path basis. Instead, it sets out the priorities and framework that will guide future investment, decision-making and partnership working across the county. ROWIP 2 replaces ROWIP1 which was published in 2011.

The scope of the plan covers how people access and use Dorset's public rights of way network, and how that network should be improved over time.

The plan includes all public access routes and networks such as:

- public rights of way- footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways
- long-distance routes and promoted routes
- trailways and former railway paths
- permissive routes and cycle routes
- Open Access Land and Coastal Access Land
- other publicly accessible land

All user types

The plan considers the needs of a wide range of users including:

- walkers
- cyclists
- horse riders and carriage drivers
- motorised users (where lawful)

We will have due regard to the Equality Act 2010, recognising the needs of a wide range of users, particularly those with mobility challenges.

The relationship between the network and the people who use it has informed the development of the 10 policies set out in this ROWIP.

What the ROWIP delivers

The 10 year ROWIP provides a framework to:

- set long-term priorities for the network
- guide investment and funding decisions
- support partnership working across Dorset Council and with external organisations
- shape how the network evolves to meet future needs

It enables Dorset Council, including the Greenspace Ranger team, to work collaboratively with other services and partners to deliver shared strategic objectives.

While day-to-day maintenance and issue resolution remain important, this plan provides the strategic direction needed to develop a more connected, accessible and higher quality network.

Cross-cutting role of the ROWIP

ROWIP2 is a cross-cutting strategy and is not solely a countryside document. It contributes to a range of wider priorities, including:



- public health and wellbeing
- social inclusion and access for all
- tourism and the local economy
- rural businesses and land management
- climate change and sustainable travel
- green infrastructure and biodiversity
- transport and planning
- active travel, including walking and cycling
- safer, better-connected routes, including travel to school

Delivery and partnership

ROWIP2 will be delivered by Dorset Council in partnership with communities, stakeholders and external funders. It has been informed by the first round of public and stakeholder consultation and supported by gathered data and evidence and will be subject to ongoing monitoring and review. The draft will be formally consulted with the public during the summer of 2026, with the final version being published in late 2026.

Policies within this plan provide the mechanism for delivery over the 10-year period.

Stakeholder engagement

The plan has been developed through engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

External stakeholders including:

- South West Coast Path Association
- Natural England
- Parish and Town Councils
- Community groups
- British Horse Society
- Ramblers
- Members of the public
- Trail Riders Fellowship
- Green Lane Association

Internal stakeholders including:

- Sustainable Travel
- Environment and Greenspace
- Public Health
- Dorset Highways
- Definitive Map Team
- Equality and Diversity / Legal Services
- Visit Dorset
- National Landscape teams
- Planning and Development
- Culture, Sport and Tourism
- Local Access Forum statutory advisors to Dorset Council



4. Policies of the ROWIP 2026 to 2036

The following policies set out how Dorset Council will improve and manage the public rights of way network over the period of this plan. They have been informed by evidence, engagement with stakeholders and the priorities identified earlier in this document. They have not been placed in priority order, all ten are priorities.

Together, these policies provide a framework for decision-making, investment and partnership working. They guide how the Council will prioritise improvements, respond to changing needs and ensure the network continues to deliver benefits for communities, the economy and the natural environment.

Policy 1: Maintaining and improving the existing PRow network

The first public consultation for ROWIP2 told us that the most important issue for the public is to have a well-maintained network. Dorset will champion a rights of way network that is easy to use, accessible and ready for the future, helping people to be more active, spend time outdoors and choose practical alternatives to car journeys.

We will protect, maintain and improve the network, focusing investment on the routes that matter most to local communities and where it can make the greatest difference to everyday use. Through strong partnerships and the use of digital mapping and data, Dorset will take a targeted, evidence-led approach to maintaining the network and prioritising improvements across the county.



Figure 4: Staff and volunteers installing a new, accessible, self-closing gate.



We will:

- **resolve maintenance issues** reported by the public in a timely manner using reports generated on our online portal. You can [report a problem on a public right of way on the Dorset Council website](#)
- **protect and maintain access** by asserting and safeguarding the public's rights to use the network, supported by sustained investment in maintenance
- **use GIS and digital tools** to identify need, monitor condition and prioritise improvements, supported by mobile technology that enables staff to update information in real time while on site
- **maintain and develop our in-house GIS systems** to support efficient management of the network and provide the public with a simple way to report issues and access up-to-date information maximising the reporting simplicity for the public
- **enhance key routes** through surfacing improvements (mainly natural stone sourced locally) to support year-round use for recreation and sustainable travel
- **upgrade infrastructure** to improve durability and accessibility, including replacing stepped bridges with step-free designs wherever possible. Replace stiles with gaps or gates, using robust and inclusive designs that improve usability for a wide range of users
- **improve waymarking of the network** by increasing high-quality waymarking including signs with destinations and distances, to increase public confidence and usability
- **strengthen connectivity** by developing links between communities, services and green spaces, including investment in bridleways and multi-user routes
- **support delivery of trailways** that provide safe, attractive corridors for active travel using old railway lines
- **work collaboratively with town and parish councils, partners and landowners** to prioritise improvements and resolve issues locally

Looking after the network is about more than maintenance, it's about making it work better for people. By combining day to day care with targeted upgrades and a modern, data-led approach. Dorset will continue to unlock the full value of its rights of way: supporting healthier lifestyles, stronger communities and a more sustainable future.

Case Study 1: Upgrading infrastructure

Dorset Council is improving the quality and resilience of its public rights of way network by upgrading bridleway bridges to a more durable and accessible standard. Traditional pressure-treated timber bridges are being replaced with recycled plastic structures, which do not rot and offer a significantly longer service life.

The new bridge designs incorporate robust structural components and slip-resistant decking, providing a safe and reliable surface for a wide range of users, including walkers, cyclists and horse riders. They are designed to meet established standards for equestrian use, supporting the weight and impact of horses while offering wider, more stable crossing points.

In addition to improved safety and usability, these bridges are manufactured from recycled materials and require minimal ongoing maintenance, reducing whole-life costs and supporting environmental sustainability objectives.



All new bridleway bridges are now delivered to this specification, and the replacement of older structures is being accelerated through investment from the Local Transport Plan (LTP).

This programme directly supports Policy 1 by improving infrastructure quality, increasing durability, and delivering a safer, more accessible and user-friendly network.



Figure 5: Two recycled plastic bridleway bridges installed near Broadmayne, with sandbag headwalls forming a gentle, step-free ramp to improve accessibility for all users.

Policy 2: Raise awareness of Public Rights of Way

Dorset will make it simple for people to discover, navigate and enjoy the rights of way network. By combining clear on-the-ground information with accessible digital tools, we will help more people feel confident exploring the county, whether for everyday journeys, health and wellbeing, or visiting Dorset.

Dorset Councils free to use online mapping tool [Dorset Explorer](#) and locally produced 'Walkabout' leaflets will play a central role in this approach, providing reliable, easy-to-use



mapping and guidance, complemented by clear signage and local promotion.

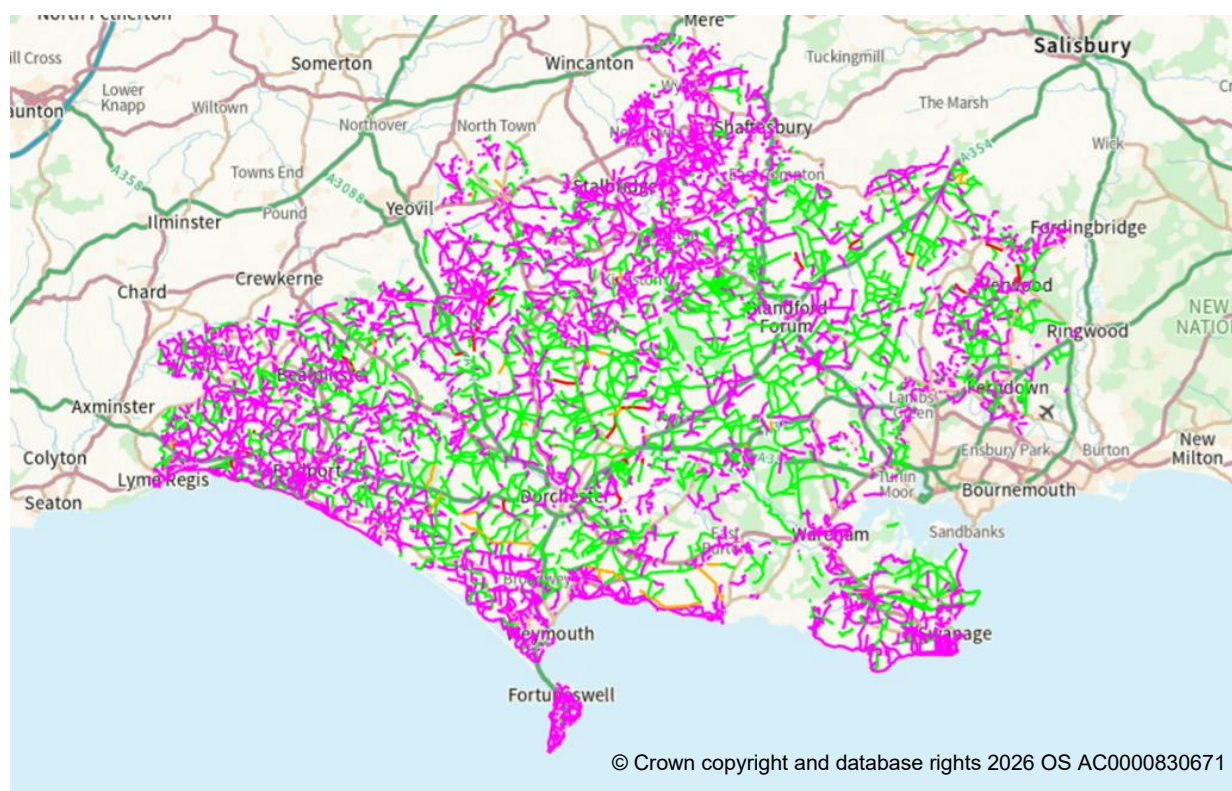


Figure 6: Screenshot from Dorset Explorer showing all Dorset's public rights of way. [DorsetExplorer](#)

We will:

- promote 'Dorset Explorer', with a comms campaign, helping people easily find and follow routes across the county using the built in GPS function using this link [DorsetExplorer](#)
- make digital tools simple to use, including short guides and videos to help people confidently access Dorset Explorer mapping and reporting network issues
- develop inclusive virtual 'walks' that allow people to experience Dorset's rights of way remotely, seeing the route, hearing the surroundings and getting a genuine sense of place. Improving access for those unable to visit in person
- improve confidence in the network by ensuring routes are clearly signed and easy to navigate, both digitally and on the ground
- work with town and parish councils to promote local routes, and improve signage, supporting communities to showcase easy to use walks and rides
- support the creation of local community led, 'Walkabout' routes, encouraging short, circular walks that are easy to use, well-connected and attractive to residents and visitors
- promote the network more widely, using social media, local networks and partners to highlight routes, encourage use and support local businesses
- encourage real time feedback from users, making it easy to report issues through an online portal and help keep the network up to date and well maintained
- encourage people to explore. Public feedback shows that people enjoy the rich natural and cultural heritage of Dorset, but many don't know how to access it
- encourage awareness and confidence through supported entry level activities, for example Dorset Councils [Health & Activity programme](#)
- work with schools, both for active travel to and from school and by educating young



people of the network of recreation and transport possibilities on their doorstep

People are far more likely to use the network when they know where to go and feel confident getting there. By improving signage, simplifying digital access and celebrating local and long-distance routes, Dorset will make its rights of way easier to use, better understood and more widely enjoyed.

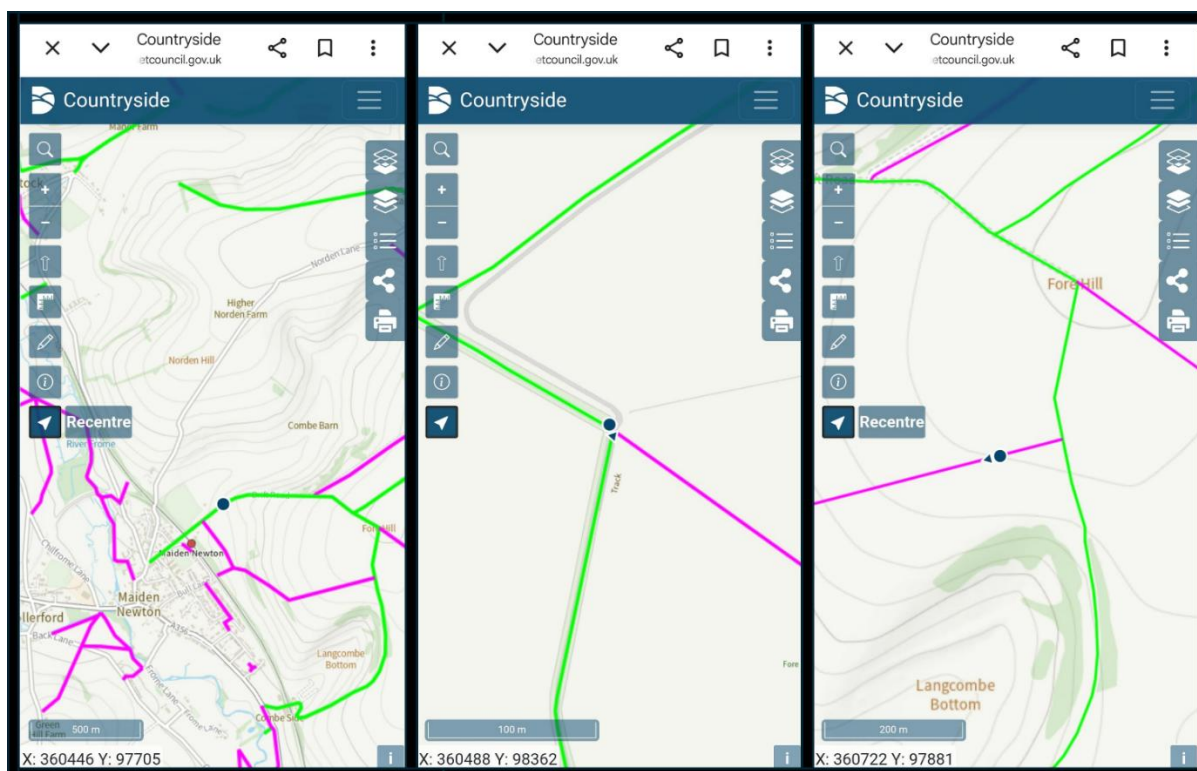


Figure 7: Dorset Explorer on a mobile device using the tracking function, helping users stay on public rights of way and giving them confidence to explore new routes.

Case Study 2 - Priority Signaging

Dorset Council's Ranger Teams have worked in partnership with parish and town councils over many years to deliver enhanced public rights of way signage through a shared "Priority Signage" approach. (photo below). This partnership model combines local funding and council expertise to deliver higher-quality, more informative directional signage across the network. Improved signage includes clearer signs with named destinations and more consistent direction markers, making routes easier to follow and understand. This is especially important where routes leave the metalled carriageway, i.e. roads. Standard statutory signage does not show a destination, just the classification of the PROW, e.g. footpath or bridleway.

As a result, this approach helps reduce both physical and psychological barriers to using the network.

Users are more confident navigating routes, leading to increased use for recreation, everyday journeys and access to local services.

The success of Priority Signage demonstrates the value of working collaboratively with local councils to deliver practical improvements on the ground. Dorset Council will seek to expand this approach, working with all parish and town councils to extend high-quality signage



across a wider proportion of the network.

By improving route legibility and user confidence, this partnership approach supports increased use of the network while delivering wider benefits for health, wellbeing, local economies and sustainable travel.

Figures 8 and 9 show two different examples of the priority signage that currently exists on the network in North Dorset.



Figure 8: Staff member and a volunteer installing a 'priority sign' in north Dorset.



Figure 9: Oak 'priority' fingerpost in North Dorset.



Case Study 3: Sturminster Newton Walkabouts

Every community has its own well-loved local routes. By identifying, promoting and improving these, we can help more people discover and enjoy the rights of way network.

In Sturminster Newton, the Town Council has worked in partnership with Dorset Council's Ranger team to create a series of eight circular "Walkabout" routes. These routes start from the town and explore the surrounding Blackmore Vale, using a combination of Public Rights of Way and permissive paths.

The routes vary in length from 1.5 to 5.5 miles, offering a range of options suitable for a range of abilities and time commitments. They are supported by clear information, with downloadable maps and printed leaflets available locally through community venues or printable at home.

This approach makes it easier for residents and visitors to access and confidently use the network, removing uncertainty about where to go and how to navigate routes. By presenting simple, clearly promoted circular walks, the Walkabouts encourage regular use, support physical activity and help people connect with their local environment.

The Sturminster Newton Walkabouts demonstrate how working with town and parish councils can successfully promote local routes. Dorset Council will build on this model to support other communities in developing and showcasing their own "Walkabout" networks across the county.

[See the appendix for Sturminster Newton Walkabout leaflet 1.](#)

Find all of [Dorset Council's Walkabout leaflets on our website](#), including routes around our nature reserves. While some of these sites do not contain public rights of way, they are publicly accessible and connect to the wider rights of way network.



Figure 10: Walkabout leaflet for Thorncombe Wood Nature Reserve.



Policy 3: Making our network more accessible

Dorset will provide a rights of way network that is more accessible, inclusive and easier to use for a wider range of people. By improving physical infrastructure alongside the quality of information available, the council will enable more residents and visitors to confidently access and enjoy the network.



Figure 11: Offroad wheelchair or 'tramper mobility scooter' using a bridleway in East Dorset.

We will:

- **develop and promote accessible routes**, including creating a dedicated layer on Dorset Explorer showcasing at least 10 high-quality accessible circular routes across the county
- **improve physical accessibility** by removing or reducing barriers where possible, including replacing stiles with accessible gates, improving bridge access, and addressing restrictive infrastructure
- **promote inclusive access to the network**, working with communities and partners to understand and address barriers faced by underrepresented groups and encourage wider and more confident use of the rights of way network



- **provide clearer information to users**, including detailed route descriptions, gradients, surfaces, distances and potential obstacles, enabling people to make informed decisions about route suitability
- **improve links to supporting infrastructure**, including accessible parking, signage, and links to facilities such as toilets, seating and refreshment points
- **maximise the use of trailways and well-surfaced routes** to create accessible circular routes linking communities, services and green spaces
- **target investment in surfacing and infrastructure improvements**, using internal and external funding to support year-round use and expand opportunities for everyday journeys such as walking and cycling to school
- **work with partners and landowners** to improve access across the network, supporting practical, deliverable solutions that benefit a wide range of users
- **Improve access to Open Access land** working with Local Access Forum (LAF) to identify priorities

Accessibility is not just about physical infrastructure, it is also about information, confidence and choice. Dorset recognises that users have different needs and abilities, and there is no single definition of what makes a route accessible. Instead, we will focus on providing high-quality, accurate information so individuals can decide what works for them.

As part of this approach, we will develop a countywide accessible routes database, supported by user groups. These routes will include appropriate infrastructure such as improved surfaces, accessible gates, rest points and clear signage, and will be supported by photographs and route-level detail.

Dorset's extensive network of Greenspaces, Country Parks and Trailways provides a strong foundation for delivering accessible routes. These routes often already benefit from good access, facilities and proximity to communities, making them ideal starting points and examples for an expanded accessible network.

Dorset Council is committed to the principles of equality and will continue to meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010. Improving accessibility will help ensure that more people - regardless of age, ability or background, can enjoy the benefits of being active outdoors, supporting healthier, more independent lives.

While it is recognised that not every route will be accessible to all, the overall aim is to create a network that offers a greater range of accessible options, supported by clear information and improved infrastructure.

Trailways and former railway paths will play a key role in this approach. Their width, gradients and surface quality often make them inherently more accessible, and they provide valuable opportunities to create connected, multi-user routes linking towns and villages.

A consistent theme identified through consultation is the importance of circular routes. These routes are particularly attractive as they provide a complete experience, are easier to navigate, and naturally return users to their starting point. Dorset will work with Town and



Parish Councils to prioritise the development of well-designed circular routes that are accessible, engaging and connected to local communities.

Case Study 4: North Dorset Trailway

Improving accessibility and connectivity can support everyday journeys as well as recreation. Enhancing links between communities and nearby towns enables more people to walk, cycle and ride with confidence, reducing reliance on cars and supporting healthier lifestyles.

The North Dorset Trailway is a key example of this approach in practice. Following the former Somerset and Dorset railway line, the route provides an approximately 11-mile multi-user corridor suitable for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Its gentle gradients, wide paths and largely traffic-free alignment make it particularly accessible to a wide range of users, including families, less confident cyclists and those using mobility aids.

The trailway connects a number of rural communities, linking villages such as Shillingstone, Sturminster Newton and Spetisbury with the surrounding countryside and local services. It also provides access to heritage features, including the restored Shillingstone Station, helping to celebrate Dorset's history while encouraging visitors to explore the area.

Importantly, the accessible nature of the route means it can be used not only for recreation but also for everyday journeys. The trailway is used by local residents for walking and cycling between communities, including journeys to school and local facilities, offering a safer alternative to road-based travel. It is also used for organised health walks and informal exercise, supporting both physical and mental wellbeing.



Figure 12: Horses and bicycles sharing the path on the North Dorset Trailway.

The development of the trailway has been supported through strong partnership working, including Dorset Council, parish councils, community groups and volunteers. Local communities have played a key role in promoting and using the route, highlighting the importance of accessible infrastructure that meets local needs.

By providing a safe, attractive and inclusive route, the North Dorset Trailway reduces both physical and psychological barriers to accessing the countryside. Its design allows more people, including those who may be less confident or have mobility limitations, to enjoy the network and take part in outdoor activity.

The trailway demonstrates how investment in accessible infrastructure can deliver wide-ranging benefits. It improves connectivity between communities, supports healthy lifestyles, enhances access to heritage and green space, and contributes to a more sustainable transport network.

The development of the North Dorset Trailway has also supported wider promotion and partnership working. Visit Dorset has developed dedicated online content to promote the Trailway, alongside additional digital and social media content highlighting routes such as the White Hart Link.

These initiatives have helped raise awareness of the area as a visitor destination and provided a catalyst for the formation of the North Dorset Tourism Partnership. This partnership brings together towns and organisations across North Dorset to promote collaboration, increase visitor numbers and strengthen the local economy.

Dorset Council will continue to build on this approach, extending and enhancing trailways and similar routes to provide inclusive, accessible connections across the county.

Case Study 5: Electric Bikes and Expanding Access to the Network

The increasing use of electric bikes, also known as Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (EAPCs), is changing how people access and use Dorset's public rights of way network. Nearly 10% of new bicycle sales are now electric, reflecting a growing shift in how people travel and recreate.

E-bikes can make the network more accessible to a wider range of users, including older people, those with lower fitness levels, and those travelling longer distances or on more challenging terrain. This has the potential to increase use of the bridleway network for both leisure and everyday journeys, supporting healthier lifestyles and more sustainable travel choices.

In the UK, EAPCs are subject to specific legal requirements. To be used on public rights of way where cycling is permitted, such as bridleways, restricted byways and Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs), an e-bike must have pedals capable of propelling the cycle, a maximum continuous motor output of 250 watts, and motor assistance that cuts off at 15.5 mph (25 km/h). Where these criteria are met, the e-bike is legally treated as a bicycle and may be used in the same way under existing legislation.

However, non-compliant e-bikes - such as those with higher power outputs, throttle-only operation, or modified speed settings are classified as motor vehicles. These cannot be used on bridleways and are restricted to roads where legal requirements such as registration, insurance and licensing apply.



While the growth in e-bike use presents clear opportunities to widen access and encourage sustainable travel, it also requires careful management. Increased speeds and higher levels of use may create conflicts on shared routes, particularly where paths are narrow or heavily used by walkers and horse riders. This highlights the importance of maintaining high-quality infrastructure, clear signage, and promoting responsible behaviour through the Countryside Code.

Dorset Council will continue to support the appropriate use of EAPCs as part of a modern and inclusive access network, while ensuring that safety, shared use, and the character of the countryside are carefully managed.



Figure 13: Electric bike using a public right of way.

Case Study 6: Improving Routes with appropriate Surfacing

Dorset Council has improved the usability and accessibility of sections of the public rights of way network by introducing compacted stone surfacing. This cost-effective approach creates a firmer, more even surface that is suitable for a wide range of users, including walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

These improvements significantly enhance year-round access, particularly during wetter conditions when unsurfaced routes can become muddy and difficult to use. By carefully selecting appropriate materials and locations, we can balance accessibility with the rural character of the countryside.

The example below shows a bridleway where compacted stone surfacing has improved the reliability and inclusivity of the route.



Figure 14: Before and after pictures of a path where contractors used compacted stone surfacing to improve the network for all users.

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

Dorset Council will work in partnership with local communities to care for, improve and promote the rights of way network. By supporting parish and town councils, volunteers and community organisations, the Council will enable greater local involvement in shaping and maintaining the network.

Public rights of way will form part of the “Community Conversations”, helping to strengthen relationships between DC and parish / town councils and third sector organisations. This will support a more collaborative approach, encouraging co-design and co-delivery of services, including greenspace and access to nature.

This approach supports Dorset Council's commitment to working closely with communities, ensuring local knowledge and effort plays a key role in delivering improvements on the ground.



Figure 15: Local community volunteers working alongside Dorset Council rangers to open up a new section of bridleway, creating an important link within the wider network.



We will:

- **work in partnership with parish and town councils** to improve and promote local routes, including maintenance and capital improvements that reflect local priorities, including a “ROWIP road show” visiting PC’s and TC’s to engage and promote joint working and supporting each PC and TC to have a Rights of way Liaison officer (RoWLO) on the council.
- **support the role of Rights of Way Liaison Officers (RoWLO)**, strengthening links between communities and the Ranger Team and helping to identify issues and opportunities at a local level and engaging their help with condition surveys.
- **expand Service Level Agreements (SLAs)** and the development of local “walkabout” routes, enabling communities to take an active role in maintaining and promoting well-used routes
- **grow and support a strong volunteer network**, providing opportunities for people to contribute to path maintenance, vegetation clearance, waymarking and monitoring route condition. Volunteers currently work on PRoW across Dorset every day, this will be expanded to maximise the benefit
- **provide training, guidance and support** to volunteers, parish councils and community groups, ensuring work is delivered safely, effectively and to a consistent standard
- **encourage community-led improvements**, supporting local groups to identify missing links, enhance circular routes and develop projects that improve access and connectivity, such as removing stiles in favour of accessible gates
- **support access to funding and external grants**, working with partners to help communities bring forward deliverable projects that improve the network
- **promote local stewardship of the network**, encouraging a sense of ownership and pride in Dorset’s rights of way as a shared community asset
- **provide training opportunities** for volunteers and students - encouraging participation and supporting countryside access as a career path
- **Dorset Cllr and stakeholder webinar** – promotion of the ROWIP and the opportunities of joint working.

Community involvement is central to the long-term success of the rights of way network. By combining local knowledge with our support and professional expertise, Dorset will deliver a more responsive, better maintained and widely used network.

This approach also supports Dorset Council’s wider health and wellbeing ambitions. Through initiatives such as “Dorset Health Walks”, we will work with partners to enable more people to be active in their local area, with the rights of way network playing a key role in providing accessible opportunities for everyday movement.

Improving local routes, signage and surface quality, alongside supporting community ambassadors and volunteers, will help create places where being active is a natural and easy choice.

Case Study 7: Community Led Creation of a New Bridleway at Chideock

Local communities play a vital role in identifying opportunities to improve the rights of way network and helping to bring forward projects that meet local needs.

At Chideock, a new bridleway has been created following a request from the local



community group, supported by the Parish Council. The project identified the need for safer, off-road access for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other users, addressing a gap in the existing network.

Crucially, the new route provides a safe alternative to the A35, allowing users to climb Quarr Hill without needing to use this busy and hazardous road. This has significantly improved safety and accessibility for local residents and visitors.

Dorset Council worked in partnership with the Parish Council, the Bridport to Lyme Link (BLLINK) group and other stakeholders to develop and deliver the project. Funding support was secured through the National Landscapes team, enabling the route to be brought forward.

A key element of the project was the generous donation of land by a local landowner, demonstrating the positive outcomes that can be achieved through strong relationships and collaborative working.

The new bridleway provides an important addition to the local network, offering a safer and more accessible route for riders, walkers and cyclists. It improves connectivity between existing paths, reduces reliance on road sections and enhances access to the surrounding countryside.

This project demonstrates how community-led initiatives, supported by partnership working and landowner cooperation, can deliver practical improvements to the rights of way network. It highlights the importance of local knowledge, collaboration and shared ownership in shaping a network that is safer, more accessible and better connected for all users.

The path was opened in 2025 and is dedicated to the memory of Winston 'Meash' Maskell who was the driving force behind making this ambition, a reality.



Figure 16: View from the newly surfaced and fenced bridleway looking towards Chideock, where the improved path and boundary fencing enable public access while protecting adjacent grazing land.



Figure 17: View west across the path and pasture towards the coast, demonstrating the scenic landscapes that the public rights of way network make accessible.

Case Study 8: Community-Led Upgrade of a Disused Railway Path between Portesham and Abbotsbury

In Abbotsbury a disused railway line forming part of the bridleway network had become difficult to use for many people. The uneven surface limited access for a wide range of users, including children on small bikes, people using pushchairs or wheelchairs, and older residents.

Following a request from the Parish Council, Dorset Council worked in partnership with the local community, the Dorset National Landscapes team and the landowner to develop and deliver improvements. The Ranger team designed an appropriate specification and installed a new, high-quality surface along the route, carefully considering the needs of both public users and farm vehicles that continue to use the route.

The enhanced path, approximately 1.2 miles in length, now provides a reliable and accessible route for everyday use. Seating has been installed along the route, allowing people to rest and use the path in shorter sections, making it more inclusive for a wider range of users.

The improvements provide a safe, off-road route for children travelling to school and improve access to local facilities such as the village shop, reducing the need to use the main road. The scheme also enhances connectivity within the local network, supporting both recreational and everyday use.

There is now an ambition to extend the route towards the coast, further improving connectivity and creating a longer, continuous corridor for walking, cycling and wider access.

This project demonstrates how community-led initiatives, supported by partnership working, funding and landowner cooperation, can deliver practical and lasting improvements to the rights of way network. It highlights the importance of local knowledge, collaboration and shared ownership in shaping a network that is accessible, relevant and well used.





Figure 18: New benches installed as part of the path work allow for rest, breaking long journeys into manageable segments.

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

Dorset will use its rights of way network as a key asset to support the local economy. By promoting high-quality routes, improving access to destinations and working with local businesses, the Council will help increase visitor numbers, extend stays and encourage spending across the county.

Dorset's landscapes, heritage and extensive network of paths provide a strong foundation for a thriving visitor economy. From the Jurassic Coast to the county's trailways and rural routes, the rights of way network enables people to experience Dorset in a healthy and sustainable way.





Figure 19: Walkers using the English Coast path in Dorset.

We will:

- **promote Dorset as a leading destination for walking, cycling and riding**, working in partnership with Visit Dorset and other organisations to showcase the county's network and landscapes
- **improve access to key destinations**, ensuring routes link towns, villages, visitor attractions and local businesses such as cafés, pubs and accommodation providers
- **encourage greater use of the network**, supporting local economies by increasing footfall in rural communities and market towns
- **develop and promote themed and circular routes**, including heritage trails, coastal walks and local "walkabout" routes that encourage visitors to explore and stay longer
- **support local businesses** by encouraging connections between the rights of way network and services that enhance the visitor experience
- **promote the network through digital and physical channels**, including Dorset Explorer, social media, printed materials and partnerships with tourism platforms
- **align with Policy 2 (raising awareness of public rights of way)**, ensuring consistent and high-quality information, mapping and signage to improve navigation and user confidence

Dorset already demonstrates the economic value of its rights of way network. The South West Coast Path attracts around 9 million visitors annually, generating approximately £500 million in visitor spend across the whole route. [Economy - South West Coast Path](#). Dorset's 89 mile section alone contributes an estimated 1 million visits and £55 million in annual spend, highlighting the impact of accessible, well-promoted routes. Visit Dorset's 2023 visitor survey found that 19% of visitors are motivated by outdoor activity, 70% go walking during their stay, while only 2% cycle, and 40% would like more free activities.

The Dorset coast path follows the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, providing almost continuous access to one of the UK's most significant natural landscapes. This combination of high-quality access and internationally recognised heritage creates a distinctive offer that supports tourism and the wider economy.

This approach aligns with the emerging Dorset Destination Management Plan for the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), which sets an ambition to establish Dorset as a flagship destination for access to the outdoors and one of the nation's premier walking



counties. The rights of way network will play a key role in delivering this ambition by improving access, promoting high-quality routes and supporting local businesses, contributing to economic growth, community wellbeing and sustainable transport.

Walking and outdoor recreation help extend the tourism season, attracting visitors throughout the year and supporting sustainable economic growth. Increased participation in walking and cycling benefits not only tourism, but also the wider economy through improved health, productivity and reduced pressure on public services.

Despite this strong offer, many residents and visitors remain unaware of the extent and quality of Dorset's rights of way network. Increasing awareness and improving access will help unlock further economic benefits, ensuring more people can easily discover, use and enjoy the network.

By combining effective promotion with targeted improvements to infrastructure and connectivity, Dorset will strengthen its position as a leading destination for outdoor recreation while supporting local businesses and communities across the county.

Case Study 8: South West Coast Path part of the King Charles III England Coast Path

Dorset's 89 mile section of the South West Coast Path, with some sections forming part of the King Charles III England Coast Path, represents one of the most economically significant assets within the county's rights of way network. These routes provide internationally recognised access to the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and play a vital role in supporting Dorset's visitor economy.

Walking tourism associated with long-distance routes such as the Coast Path is particularly valuable. Visitors tend to stay longer, travel between communities, and spend money on accommodation, food, transport and local services. This creates sustained economic benefits for coastal towns and rural areas, many of which rely on tourism income. Long-distance walking routes also help to extend the tourism season, attracting visitors throughout the year and supporting business viability outside peak summer months.

Investment in coastal access delivers strong economic returns. Evidence suggests that every £1 invested can generate up to £8 in wider economic benefit, demonstrating the value of continued investment in infrastructure, maintenance and promotion of the network (SWCPA, 2026).

Unlocking Funding through the King Charles III England Coast Path

The ongoing delivery of the King Charles III England Coast Path, a new 2,700-mile National Trail around the entire English coastline, presents a major opportunity for Dorset.

As new sections of the Coast Path are approved and opened, Dorset Council is able to work in partnership with Natural England to secure external funding for:

- route establishment and improvement (including surfacing, drainage and structures)
- signage and waymarking
- accessibility enhancements
- environmental mitigation and habitat improvements
- ongoing maintenance support

This funding, typically provided through DEFRA and Natural England, supports both the planning and delivery of coast path infrastructure. In many cases, the cost of developing and establishing new routes can be fully externally funded, reducing the direct financial burden on the Council while delivering significant improvements to the network.



Importantly, the Coast Path programme acts as a catalyst for wider investment. The process of bringing new sections into use creates opportunities to upgrade existing public rights of way, improve links to inland routes, enhance connections into towns and villages, and develop high-quality circular routes. These improvements benefit both residents and visitors and strengthen the wider network.

A Flagship Asset within a Wider Network

While the South West Coast Path part of the King Charles III England Coast Path represent one of the most significant contributors to Dorset's visitor economy, they are part of a much wider and equally important rights of way network across the county.

Dorset's extensive inland network of footpaths, bridleways and trailways plays a vital role in supporting tourism, connecting communities and distributing economic benefit beyond the coast. The Coast Path often acts as a gateway into Dorset, attracting visitors to the county, while the wider network enables them to explore further, linking coastal destinations with inland towns, villages and attractions.

Together, this combined network creates a diverse and resilient offer that encourages visitors to stay longer, return more frequently and explore more widely. This approach helps ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are shared across Dorset, supporting rural communities as well as coastal destinations.



Figure 20: Walkers enjoying a newly surfaced section of the South West Coast Path on Portland.

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

Dorset will promote responsible use of the rights of way network by encouraging all users to follow the Countryside Code and understand the importance of respecting landowners, the natural environment and other users.

We will take a balanced approach, combining education, engagement and proportionate enforcement to ensure the network is safe, welcoming and well managed.

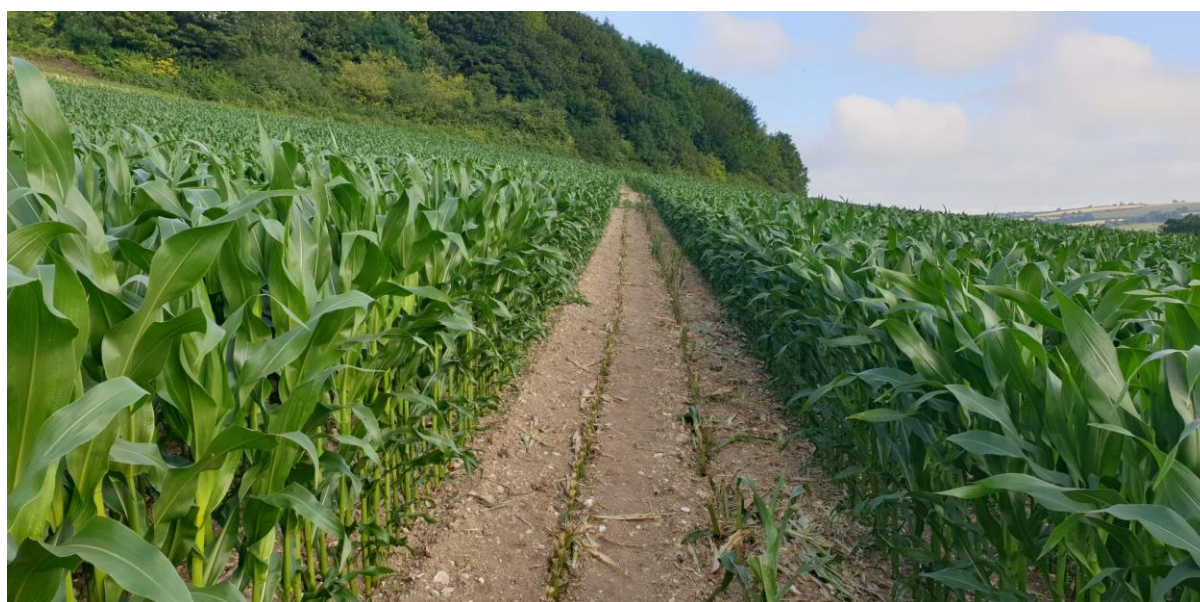


Figure 21: Public footpath maintained through a growing maize crop, demonstrating good land management and continued access for path users.

We will:

- **promote the Countryside Code**, ensuring clear, consistent messaging is available to residents and visitors through signage, digital platforms and promotional materials
- **provide simple, accessible guidance**, including a concise summary of the Countryside Code for users and landowners, supported by digital content such as videos and online resources
- **promote responsible dog ownership**, encouraging users to keep dogs under effective close control, particularly around livestock and wildlife, and to follow Countryside Code guidance including keeping dogs on leads where required and taking mess home.
- **work with schools, colleges and community groups** to raise awareness of responsible behaviour when using the network, helping to embed good practice from an early age
- **support positive relationships with landowners**, recognising their essential role in managing the landscape and maintaining access across the network



- **provide advice and guidance to landowners**, helping them understand their rights and responsibilities, including vegetation management, obstruction removal and maintenance of routes to the required standard
- **reduce conflict between users and land managers**, supporting appropriate diversions of routes away from farmyards, working areas and sensitive locations where this delivers clear benefits
- **work in partnership with the Police and other agencies** to address anti-social behaviour and misuse of the network, including illegal vehicle use and other forms of disturbance
- **use proportionate enforcement where necessary**, ensuring that rights of way are kept open, safe and available for public use
- **encourage shared use of the network**, promoting awareness of different user groups and supporting respectful behaviour between walkers, cyclists, horse riders and others

Promoting the Countryside Code and improving understanding of land management will help reduce issues such as littering, dog control, damage to crops, disturbance to livestock, and anti-social behaviour. It will also support the long-term sustainability of the network by encouraging users to care for the environment they are enjoying.

Landowners play a vital role in maintaining Dorset's rights of way network. We will continue to work collaboratively with farmers and land managers to ensure routes remain open and usable, while recognising the operational needs of working landscapes. In some cases, this may include working with landowners who wish to divert routes to more suitable alignments that improve safety and reduce conflict.

At the same time, we will ensure that legal standards are met across the rights of way network. This includes keeping routes free from obstructions, such as fencing, buildings or other barriers, and ensuring vegetation is cut back to maintain appropriate clearances.

We will also uphold requirements relating to the ploughing and reinstatement of paths, ensuring routes are restored to a safe and usable condition within the required timescales. Where standards are not met, the Council will work with landowners to resolve issues and use education as the first tool but, where necessary, take proportionate enforcement to maintain access.

By combining education, partnership working and enforcement, Dorset will support a rights of way network that is respected, well used and valued by all.



Case Study 9: Managing Increased Use and Promoting Responsible Behaviour



Figure 22: Keeping dogs under close control around livestock is essential to protect animal welfare and support positive relationships between users and land managers.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in the use of local outdoor spaces, as more people sought opportunities for exercise and wellbeing close to home. In Dorset, this resulted in a notable rise in the number of people using the rights of way network. While this brought clear health and wellbeing benefits, it also highlighted a range of challenges, including anti-social behaviour, increased pressure on sensitive landscapes, and concerns from landowners.

Feedback from public consultation and engagement with land managers identified dog-related issues as a particular concern. These included dogs not being kept under close control, disturbance to and chasing of livestock, and dog fouling. These issues were compounded by an increase in dog ownership during the pandemic, resulting in more dogs being walked on the network. This can have serious consequences for farming operations, animal welfare, and the relationship between users and landowners.

In response to these challenges, Dorset Council has taken a proactive approach to promoting the Countryside Code and improving understanding of how people are expected to behave when using the network, alongside raising awareness of the role of landowners.

We will continue to work with local communities, schools and partner organisations to promote responsible behaviour. This includes developing accessible and engaging resources, such as the Council's Guidance for Rights of Way booklet, available in print and online. Social and digital media will also be used, including videos such as [Follow Doggy Do Code - Dorset Dogs](#) to communicate key messages in a clear and relatable way, particularly around responsible dog ownership.



Alongside public education, strong working relationships with landowners have been maintained and will continue to be strengthened. The Council provides guidance and support to farmers and land managers, helping them manage access across working landscapes while ensuring routes remain open and usable.

Where appropriate, Dorset Council has supported the diversion of routes away from working farmyards and other sensitive areas. These diversions improve the experience and safety for users, reduce conflict, and provide greater security for landowners, while ensuring suitable alternative routes are maintained to the required legal standard.

This combined approach of education, partnership working and practical network management has helped to reduce conflict and improve understanding. By promoting responsible behaviour and supporting land managers, Dorset Council is helping to create a safer, more respectful and more sustainable rights of way network for both residents and visitors.

Case Study 10: Supporting Landowner Responsibilities

Most landowners and occupiers play an active role in maintaining public rights of way that cross their land, including cutting back hedges and vegetation to keep routes clear and accessible. This work is essential to ensuring that paths remain safe and usable for the public.

Where issues arise, such as overgrown routes or obstructed paths, Dorset Council will first seek to engage with the landowner to resolve the matter informally. This includes providing advice and guidance to help landowners understand their responsibilities. In most cases, positive dialogue and support are sufficient to achieve a timely outcome.

However, where problems persist and routes remain obstructed, the council may take further action. This can include the use of formal notices and, where necessary, enforcement powers to ensure that legal responsibilities are met and public access is protected.

This approach balances support and partnership working with the need to uphold access rights, helping to maintain a well-managed and accessible rights of way network.





Figure 23: Well-maintained field-edge vegetation helps keep public rights of way clear, safe and accessible for all users.

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

Dorset will ensure that new development protects, enhances and contributes positively to the rights of way network. By embedding high-quality access and connectivity into the planning process, the Council will secure long-term improvements that support sustainable travel, healthy communities and access to the countryside. Relevant planning officers will work together with the Ranger team to maximise the opportunities of the Planning system.

We will:

- **protect existing Public Rights of Way**, ensuring they are retained and appropriately integrated within development proposals, in accordance with Public rights of way and new development: a guide for developers - Dorset Council
- **require a Public Rights of Way Management Plan** for developments above an agreed threshold, ensuring that access is considered at an early stage of design and not treated as an afterthought. The Management Plan will include:
 - existing definitive and permissive routes within and adjacent to the development site
 - quality and appropriate temporary diversions during construction



- proposals to retain, improve or divert existing PRow
- minimise road severance and aim to resolve historic severance where possible
- measures to ensure user safety where routes remain open during works
- details of temporary route provision, including surfacing, signage and management
- landscaping proposals affecting or enhancing PRow
- design and construction of new routes, including dedication of new public rights of way where appropriate
- path width, surfacing and long-term maintenance standards
- timescales for closures, diversions and legal processes
- **ensure developers understand that** planning permission does not grant rights to alter or obstruct public rights of way, and that separate legal processes are required for diversions or closures.
- **secure appropriate financial contributions (S106 / CIL)** to protect, improve and extend the rights of way network, ensuring investment is directed to routes that serve both the development and the wider community.
- **provide clear design standards and specifications**, ensuring routes delivered through development are fit for purpose, durable, accessible, designed for long-term use and made PRow where appropriate.
- **require strong connectivity**, ensuring new developments link directly to the existing rights of way network, local services, schools, employment areas and green spaces, supporting everyday walking, cycling and riding.
- **promote sustainable travel**, using the rights of way network to reduce reliance on private cars and support healthier, more active lifestyles.
- **use digital tools and mapping (as set out in Policy 2)** to help developers identify opportunities to connect into the wider network and understand local access priorities.
- **support the delivery of multifunctional green infrastructure**, ensuring that rights of way form an integral part of wider green infrastructure networks, delivering benefits for recreation, biodiversity, climate resilience and community wellbeing.
- **Heathland Mitigation programme and the Stour Valley Park project** can help PRow where integrated delivery can maximise benefits for access, biodiversity, and community wellbeing

New development presents a significant opportunity to improve Dorset's rights of way network. With planned housing growth across the county, there is strong potential to embed high-quality walking, cycling and riding routes into new developments, connecting communities and creating lasting infrastructure.

Public Rights of Way are a key component of green infrastructure. They support accessible recreation, active travel and connections between places, while also contributing to climate change mitigation and environmental enhancement. Well-designed access networks can make developments more attractive, improve quality of life for residents and support long-term sustainability.

By ensuring that rights of way are considered from the earliest stages of development, Dorset will secure a network that is better connected, more accessible and aligned with the needs of both existing and future communities.

Case Study 11: Planning contributions supporting the rights of way network





Figure 24: A new footpath connecting communities created through developer contributions secured via a Section 106 agreement.

New development can place additional pressure on the rights of way network, both where routes pass directly through sites and through increased levels of use. Dorset Council works to ensure that development contributes positively to the network by securing funding for improvements and future maintenance.

Planning applications in Stalbridge demonstrate how developer contributions can support delivery of new and improved routes. At Thornhill Road (Application 2/2017/1095/OUT), funding of £55,585 has been secured towards the delivery of new sections of the North Dorset Trailway, extending north towards Henstridge in Somerset and south towards Sturminster Newton. This funding will support a range of works, including legal processes, vegetation clearance, fencing, surfacing, and any necessary diversions. A further £11,970 has been secured to enhance public rights of way within the parish, including surfacing improvements, replacing stiles with gates, and improved signage.

At Lower Road (Application 2/2017/0741/OUT), £79,367 has been secured towards delivery of the North Dorset Trailway, along with £23,449 for improvements to public rights of way within the parish. These enhancements will improve accessibility and provide greater opportunities for people to explore the surrounding countryside.

The Dorset Council Local Plan consultation in 2025 identifies a number of potential housing allocations across the county. Many of these sites either include existing rights of way or are likely to increase use of nearby routes. Securing appropriate developer contributions will help ensure that the network, including Trailways and public open spaces, is enhanced and maintained to meet future demand.

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

Dorset will use its rights of way network to support healthier, more active communities. By improving access to high-quality routes, encouraging everyday movement and reducing barriers to use, the council will help people of all ages and abilities to be more active as part of daily life.

This approach aligns with Dorset's Physical Activity Strategy, *"A Movement for Movement"*, which aims to make movement easy, normal and accessible for everyone by creating environments where people naturally walk, cycle and use green spaces more often.

We recognise that increasing physical activity delivers wide-ranging benefits, including improved physical and mental health, reduced pressure on health services, stronger communities and a more productive local economy. Enabling more people to use and benefit from rights of way will contribute to the council's wider support for delivering the NHS 10 Year Plan objective to shift from treatment to prevention.



Figure 25: Dorchester Strollers - a volunteer-led group offering free guided walks with trained leaders to help people explore the local area.

We will:

- **improve access to high-quality routes and greenspaces**, ensuring the network is well maintained, clearly signposted and usable throughout the year
- **reduce barriers to participation**, prioritising improvements in areas with poor access to greenspace or higher levels of health inequality
- **promote everyday use of the network**, encouraging walking and cycling for journeys to school, work and local services
- **support targeted engagement**, working with communities and partners to increase



- use of the network by all members of our community
- **embed the network within health and wellbeing initiatives**, including social prescribing and community-based activity programmes to reduce barriers and support residents to move more such as Dorset Councils [Health and Activity programme](#)
- **support community-led activities**, such as walking groups, wellbeing routes and local challenges that encourage regular use of the network
- **integrate with wider strategies**, including the Local Transport Plan, Active Travel Infrastructure Plan and public health programmes, to support a joined-up approach to increasing physical activity
- **improve access to information**, using digital mapping and tools to highlight routes suitable for everyday use and physical activity
- **work with schools and employers**, promoting the use of the rights of way network for active travel and daily movement
- **develop a better understanding of usage and barriers**, working with partners to gather data, improve monitoring and target interventions effectively

Dorset's Public Rights of Way network plays a vital role in supporting health and wellbeing. It provides access to nature, opportunities for exercise, and connections between communities, services and local facilities. These functions help prevent ill health, support people to live well, and contribute to reducing health inequalities across the county.

Physical activity is essential for maintaining good health. While many residents are active, a significant proportion of adults and children remain inactive, and increasing activity levels across all ages remains a key priority. The rights of way network provide a free, accessible and flexible way for people to incorporate movement into their daily lives through recreation and everyday journeys.

Contact with nature is also strongly linked to improved mental wellbeing. In Dorset, 51% of residents are estimated to have good access to nature within 300 metres walk of their home. In many parts of Dorset, particularly rural areas, the rights of way network provides the primary means of accessing nature. Increasing the accessibility and use of the network will help more people experience the mental health benefits associated with time spent outdoors.

The network also supports social connection by enabling people to meet, interact and take part in shared activities such as walking groups and volunteering, e.g. the [Dorset Health Walk programme](#). These interactions help strengthen communities and improve overall wellbeing. However, access to these benefits is not equal. Some groups - including older people, those with poor health, and individuals from underrepresented communities are less likely to access natural spaces. Improving the accessibility, quality and connectivity of the network will help address these inequalities and ensure more people can benefit from Dorset's natural environment.

By improving infrastructure, promoting use, and working with partners to reduce barriers, Dorset will create a rights of way network that supports healthier, more active and more connected communities.



Case Study 12: Supporting Health and Activity Through the Rights of Way Network

Dorset Council's Health and Activity team promotes accessible, entry-level activities across the county, many of which make use of the rights of way network. These activities are designed primarily for people aged over 50 and those living with long-term health conditions, providing opportunities to become more active in a supportive and welcoming environment.

Activities are delivered close to local communities, offering an important first step into physical activity. Participants can then be supported to progress to further opportunities as their confidence and ability develop.

A key example is the "Get Back in the Saddle" cycling programme. Rides delivered in locations such as Shillingstone, Weymouth and Ferndown make use of the North Dorset Trailway, the Rodwell Trail and the Castleman Trailway. These well-maintained, traffic free routes provide a safe and accessible environment for participants to build confidence while exercising as part of a group.

Volunteer led health walks also make extensive use of the rights of way network across Dorset, from sections of the South West Coast Path to rural footpaths in North and West Dorset. These walks provide regular opportunities for people to improve their physical health while enjoying the natural environment.

In addition, a programme of Nordic walking sessions uses rights of way to support both physical and mental wellbeing. These sessions are inclusive, catering for a wide range of abilities, including individuals referred through healthcare services and those living with conditions such as Parkinson's. Being outdoors in a supportive, informal group setting helps to reduce barriers to participation and encourages more people to engage with the network.

Through these initiatives, the rights of way network plays a vital role in supporting healthier communities, improving wellbeing, and enabling more people to access and enjoy Dorset's countryside.



Figure 26: Nordic walking sessions use Dorset's rights of way to support physical and mental wellbeing.



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

Dorset will maximise the potential of its rights of way network to support sustainable and active travel. By aligning the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) with the Active Travel Infrastructure Plan (ATIP) and the Local Transport Plan (LTP), the Council will create a more connected network that enables people to walk, cycle and ride for everyday journeys.



Figure 27: 'Get Back in the Saddle' group in Shillingstone using the connected Trailway network, supporting links to sustainable transport routes.

We will:

- **integrate the rights of way network with active travel routes**, linking footpaths, bridleways and trailways to walking and cycling corridors, including those delivered through programmes such as the Transforming Cities Fund and ATIP
- **create continuous, safe and attractive routes**, connecting housing areas with schools, workplaces, town centres and public transport hubs
- **improve accessibility and connectivity**, upgrading surfaces, drainage and signage to support a range of users, ensuring routes are appropriate for their most frequent use
- **develop green corridors**, connecting rural and urban areas, reducing reliance on the private car and delivering wider benefits for biodiversity and climate resilience
- **promote sustainable travel**, encouraging more short journeys to be made on foot or by cycle through a well-maintained and connected network
- **support active travel to school and work**, embedding rights of way within school travel plans and commuter routes to reduce congestion and emissions
- **provide high-quality digital tools and mapping**, enabling users to identify routes that connect with cycle networks, public transport and key destinations, including accessibility information where available
- **align delivery with wider transport and climate strategies**, ensuring rights of way improvements contribute to reducing car use and supporting Dorset's environmental objectives
- **secure funding and partnerships**, making effective use of external funding opportunities such as Active Travel Fund and partnership working with health and transport organisations



- **work with communities and stakeholders**, supporting co-designed routes, encouraging local use and promoting walking and cycling initiatives to increase uptake
- **Explore opportunities for Unclassified County Roads (UCR's) to help link the PRow network** where they can link communities.

The rights of way network plays an important role in Dorset's transport system. While traditionally used for recreation, it already provides valuable connections between communities and local services.

Strengthening these links will enable more people to choose active and sustainable modes of travel, helping to reduce congestion, improve air quality and support healthier lifestyles. By improving connectivity, infrastructure and awareness, Dorset will create a network that supports both everyday movement and longer-distance journeys, contributing to more sustainable and resilient communities.

Case Study 13: The Castleman Trailway as a Commuter Route



Figure 28: Senior Ranger Sophie Isaacs on one of the many new recycled plastic bridges on the Castleman Trailway, helping future proof access for years to come.

The Castleman Trailway provides a strong example of how the rights of way network can support everyday journeys as well as recreation. Running between Poole and Ringwood, the Trailway follows a former railway line and offers a largely traffic-free, well-surfaced route connecting communities, employment areas and local services.

While popular for leisure use, the trailway is increasingly used for commuting and utility trips, enabling people to travel by foot or cycle between residential areas and nearby towns. Its alignment, consistent gradients and separation from traffic make it particularly suitable for regular journeys, offering a safe and attractive alternative to car travel.

Importantly, the trailway links into a wider network of cycle routes and active travel



infrastructure across East Dorset, including on-road cycle routes and urban walking and cycling corridors. These connections help integrate the route with the highway network, allowing users to continue journeys into town centres, workplaces, schools and public transport hubs.

This demonstrates the wider potential of Dorset's railways and rights of way network to form part of a connected, multi-functional transport system. By supporting both leisure and utility use, the Castleman Trailway contributes to increasing levels of active travel, reducing reliance on private vehicles, and delivering benefits for health, congestion and the environment.

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

Dorset will uphold its legal duty to maintain and provide access to an up-to-date Definitive Map and Statement of public rights of way, in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The Definitive Map and Statement form the legal record of public rights of way in Dorset. They are essential in protecting public access, providing certainty for landowners and supporting planning, development and land management decisions.

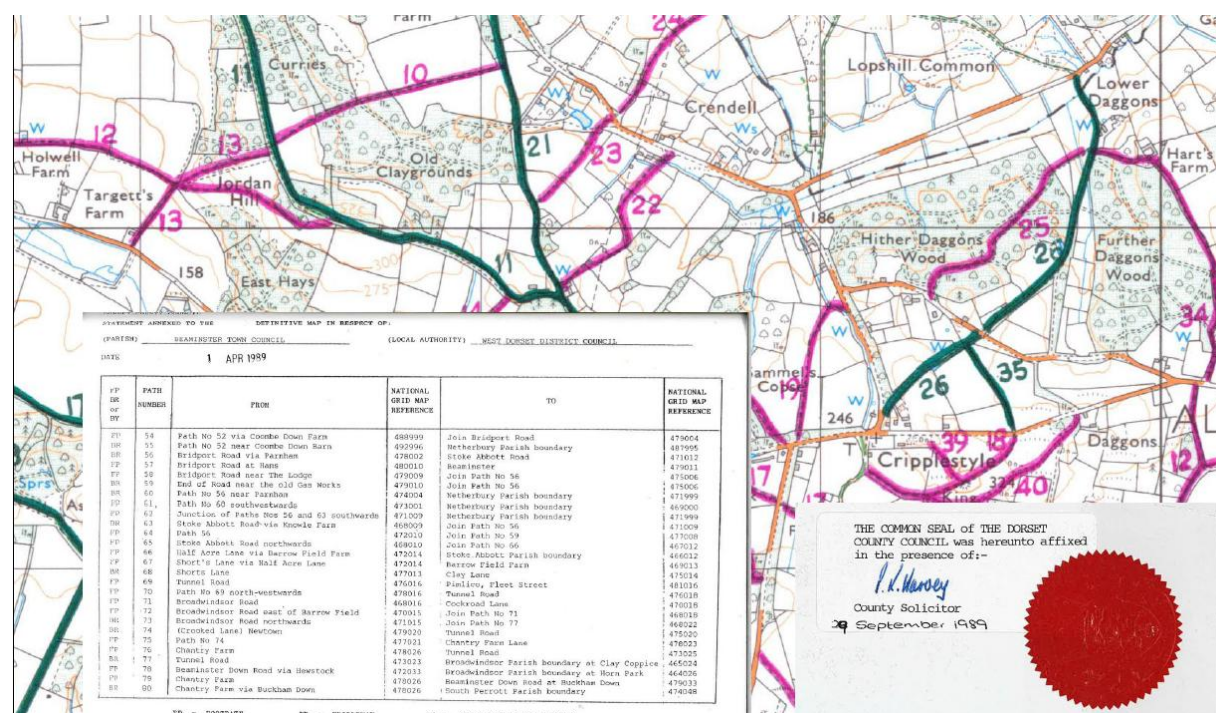


Figure 29: Extract from the definitive map.



We will:

- **maintain the Definitive Map and Statement as the legal record of public rights of way**, keeping it under continuous review and updating it through statutory processes
- **process Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs)** to record changes such as additions, deletions or amendments to the status of routes, based on user or documentary evidence and aim to reduce back log by increasing capacity within the team where possible.
- **process Public Path Orders (PPOs)** to manage diversions, creations and extinguishments of routes where appropriate
- **ensure the Definitive Map and Statement are accessible to the public**, including:
 - Physical access at County Hall, Dorchester, by appointment
 - Digital access through Dorset Explorer, providing an up-to-date working copy for general use (not legally conclusive)
- **provide a transparent and accountable service**, publishing legal orders and decisions and maintaining a public register of applications
- **investigate applications and claims in accordance with statutory requirements**, ensuring a fair and evidence-based approach
- **provide clear guidance and support**, helping members of the public, applicants and landowners understand legal processes and their rights and responsibilities
- **consult with stakeholders and the public** on proposed changes to the network, ensuring appropriate engagement in decision-making
- **continue to improve digital access and usability**, making it easier for people to view and understand the rights of way network
- **work to manage applications efficiently**, recognising the importance of maintaining an accurate and up-to-date legal record
- **provide guidance to landowners on protecting their land from public rights of way claims**, including advice on legal mechanisms such as landowner deposits helping to ensure clarity and prevent unintended dedication of routes

The Definitive Map and Statement were sealed in 1989 and have been updated since through ongoing legal processes. Maintaining an accurate and accessible record is essential to ensuring that public rights are protected and that the network can continue to respond to changing use, evidence and development pressures.

By maintaining a clear, accurate and accessible legal record, Dorset will ensure that its rights of way network remain robust, transparent and fit for the future.



5. ROWIP Implementation and investment Plan 2026 to 2036

This implementation plan sets out how the ROWIP will be delivered over the period 2026 to 2036. It provides a clear and flexible framework for improving Dorset's public rights of way network, ensuring it meets the needs of residents, businesses and visitors. The programme will support access to the countryside, healthier lifestyles, stronger connections between communities, and increased opportunities for sustainable and active travel.

Delivery Approach

Delivery of the ROWIP will be ongoing and responsive, reflecting local priorities, available funding and partnership opportunities. We will focus on:

- maintaining and improving the condition of the existing network
- addressing priority maintenance and accessibility issues
- delivering infrastructure improvements, including bridges, surfaces, signage and access points
- strengthening connections between communities, services and transport links
- progressing strategic projects, including Trailways and key connectivity routes
- supporting increased use of the network for everyday journeys as well as recreation

A pipeline of projects will be developed and progressed as opportunities arise, including schemes supported through external funding and new development.

Local Priorities

Delivery will reflect the differing characteristics, pressures and opportunities across Dorset. While all policy objectives apply across the county, the following areas highlight where particular emphasis is likely to be placed:

- **West Dorset:** Managing high visitor use and improving coastal access, including delivery of the King Charles III England Coast Path, alongside infrastructure and resilience improvements
- **Central Dorset:** Improving access around key settlements, supporting everyday use such as travel to school, and enhancing links to green spaces
- **North Dorset and Purbeck:** Strengthening rural connectivity, extending the North Dorset Trailway, and improving links between communities and local services
- **East Dorset:** Integrating rights of way with urban walking and cycling networks, supporting commuter routes, and managing higher levels of use and development pressures



Greenspace Service Areas

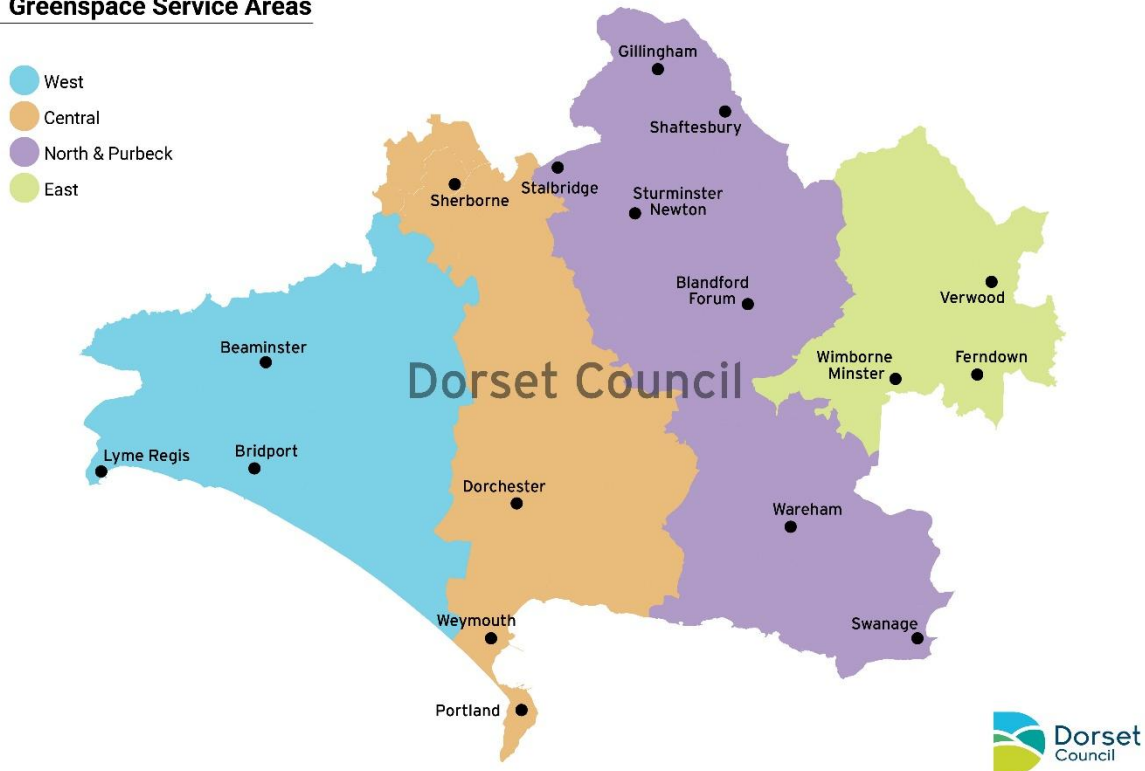


Figure 30: Dorset Greenspace team areas.

Funding and Resources

Delivery will require sustained investment and strong partnership working. Funding will be secured through a combination of:

- Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding
- Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions
- DEFRA and Natural England programmes, including coastal access funding
- external grants and partnership funding

Over £2 million is expected to be invested in the first five years, with ongoing annual Local Transport Plan funding anticipated to exceed £300,000 per annum, supplemented by additional external funding.

The Dorset Council Ranger service plays a central role in delivery, providing day-to-day management and maintenance of the network and working closely with landowners, communities and stakeholders to keep routes open, safe and accessible.



Monitoring and Review

Progress will be monitored to ensure the ROWIP delivers measurable improvements.

Indicators will include:

- condition of the network
- infrastructure improvements delivered
- accessibility improvements (for example, replacing stiles with gates)
- usage levels where data is available
- customer feedback and reported issues
- PC/TC engagement

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

Investment Programme (Year 1: 2026/27)

Initial priorities include:

- Bridleway bridges: £250,000
- Footpath bridges: £180,000
- Surfacing improvements: £300,000
- South West Coast Path capital investment: £517,000
- Natural England maintenance funding: £40,000

Further detail is provided in [Appendix 7.2](#) and will be updated as delivery progresses.



6: Conclusion

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2026 to 2036 sets out Dorset's approach to developing and maintaining a high quality, well connected and accessible rights of way network. It recognises the vital role the network plays in supporting health and wellbeing, strengthening communities, protecting the environment, and contributing to the local economy.

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

This is a long term, flexible strategy that will be delivered through partnership working, targeted investment and ongoing engagement with communities, landowners and stakeholders. Dorset Council will continue to meet its statutory duties as Highway Authority, while also taking a proactive approach to improving and promoting the network.

By maintaining what we have and strengthening connections across Dorset, this plan will help create a rights of way network that is fit for the future - supporting residents and visitors to access, enjoy and benefit from Dorset's outstanding natural spaces.



7. Appendices

Consultation Findings and Strategic Responses

The findings below have directly informed the development of the policies within this plan. Each finding is addressed through one or more policies, which together form a coordinated response to the needs identified through consultation. The findings reflect consistent themes across users, landowners and stakeholders and provide a strong evidence base for the policies set out in this plan.

Finding 1: Maintaining the existing network is the highest priority

Across all user groups, maintaining the existing network was identified as the top priority. The most common issues raised were vegetation overgrowth, poor path surfacing, deep mud, and the condition of structures such as gates and stiles.

Overgrown vegetation was consistently identified as the biggest barrier, preventing access particularly for those with lower mobility. Poor waymarking and missing signs were also widely reported, making routes difficult to follow and reducing user confidence. The network is also used frequently, with many respondents accessing it daily or several times per week, highlighting the importance of keeping routes open and usable at all times.

These findings demonstrate that improving the quality and usability of the existing network will deliver the greatest immediate benefit to the largest number of users.

This finding is addressed through [Policy 1](#) and [Policy 2](#).

Actions to deliver this:

- target maintenance activity on routes with the highest user demand and greatest reported issues
- work with town and parish councils to develop Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to improve service delivery for priority routes
- continue to replace and improve the condition and specification of path infrastructure, including gates, bridges and surfaces
- improve the usability and responsiveness of reporting systems to ensure issues are addressed more efficiently
- work with parish and town councils, landowners and volunteers to support maintenance activities
- work with landowners to improve understanding of their responsibilities for path maintenance, particularly in relation to vegetation management such as hedges and trees



Finding 2: Not everyone is able to access or benefit equally from the network

The consultation identified clear differences in how people access and benefit from Dorset's rights of way network. People with disabilities, those with mobility impairments, and some groups within the community were less likely to use the network. The proportion of respondents identifying as having a disability or from ethnic minority backgrounds was significantly lower than the wider Dorset population, suggesting that these groups may face barriers to access and participation.

Barriers identified included poor path surfacing, vegetation overgrowth, lack of accessible infrastructure, and limited links to local facilities. Older users and those with mobility challenges also highlighted difficulties with stiles and uneven surfaces.

These findings indicate that while Dorset has an extensive network, it is not equally accessible to all users, and targeted improvements are required to create a more inclusive network.

This finding is addressed through [Policy 2](#) and [Policy 8](#).

Actions to deliver this:

- identify and prioritise routes where accessibility improvements will deliver the greatest benefit to users with mobility needs
- continue the programme of replacing stiles with gaps or gates to improve accessibility
- improve path surfacing where appropriate to support a wider range of users
- work with partners in public health and community organisations to promote inclusive access and increase participation

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

The consultation highlighted road severance as a barrier to using the network. Many users identified that routes are disconnected, with unsafe or difficult crossings preventing continued journeys.

This affects all user groups but is particularly significant for vulnerable users such as walkers, cyclists and horse riders, who are at greater risk when interacting with traffic. A lack of safe connections between routes also limits the ability to use the network for everyday journeys, such as travelling to school, work or local services, despite a significant proportion of users already relying on the network to access these destinations.

Improving connectivity and reducing the impact of road severance is important to unlocking the full potential of the network.



This finding is addressed through [Policy 3](#) and [Policy 7](#).

Actions to deliver this:

- identify and prioritise locations where improved crossings and connections will address the greatest need
- develop traffic-free and safer routes to connect communities and improve access to existing safe road crossings.
- work with National Highways and Dorset Highways teams to improve integration between the rights of way network and the wider transport network
- support the development of routes that enable sustainable travel and reduce reliance on private vehicles
- work with developers to address road severance and integrate safe crossings and route connections within new developments

Finding 4: Demand exists for new and improved routes

The consultation identified demand for improvements to the network, including new routes, better connections, and enhancements to existing paths. Over 300 suggestions for improvements were submitted, with a strong emphasis on connecting routes, reducing road use and improving accessibility.

Users expressed a desire for more circular routes, better connections between communities, and routes that link to key destinations and services.

This demonstrates that, alongside maintaining the existing network, there is a clear opportunity to enhance and expand it in a targeted and strategic way.

This finding is addressed through [Policy 3](#), supported by [Policy 5](#) and [Policy 7](#).

Actions to deliver this:

- prioritise improvements that create better connections between existing routes
- develop circular and multi-user routes that meet a range of user needs
- align network improvements with wider transport, planning and green infrastructure strategies
- use external funding and developer contributions to deliver larger-scale improvements
- work with developers to ensure there is a net gain in access provision at a local level

Finding 5: Responsible use and land management



Both landowners and users identified issues relating to behaviour on the network. Landowners reported concerns including dogs not being kept under control, disturbance and chasing of livestock, dog fouling on paths and agricultural land, gates being left open, littering, and other anti-social behaviours.

At the same time, users highlighted the importance of clear waymarking and information to help them stay on the correct routes and understand their responsibilities. These issues have become more pronounced following increased use of the network, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw a significant rise in people accessing the countryside.

Improving awareness and promoting responsible behaviour is essential to maintaining good relationships with landowners and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the network.

This finding is addressed through [Policy 6](#), supported by [Policy 4](#).

Actions to deliver this:

- promote the Countryside Code and responsible use of the network, with a particular focus on responsible dog ownership
- improve signage and waymarking to reduce confusion and unintentional misuse/trespass
- work closely with landowners to manage routes effectively and reduce conflict
- support appropriate diversions where they improve safety and reduce impacts on land management
- work with partners, including the Police, to address anti-social behaviour where necessary
- make greater use of social media and communications campaigns to promote responsible use of the network.

Finding 6: Information, signage, and awareness.

The consultation identified that many users lack confidence in navigating the network. Issues included unclear or missing signage, lack of waymarking, and limited awareness of how to report problems or access information.

There is also a shift in how different groups access information, with younger users more likely to rely on digital tools, while older users tend to use traditional maps and local knowledge. This highlights the need to provide information in a range of accessible formats.

Improving the availability, quality and accessibility of information will help users to better understand and use the network.

This finding is addressed through [Policy 4](#), supported by [Policy 6](#).

Actions to deliver this:



- improve waymarking and signage across the network, particularly at key locations such as path intersections and from the metalled highway
- enhance digital information, including mapping and route planning tools, and promote their use through the Dorset Council website and social media
- provide information through non-digital channels, including printed materials, to reach those with limited digital access
- improve awareness and usability of reporting systems
- promote the network through targeted communications and campaigns, including engagement with schools and younger users
- work with parish and town councils, partners, and volunteers to support local knowledge and promotion

Finding 7: Access to the Definitive Map and legal records is not well understood

The consultation found that many users were unaware of how to access or use key legal information such as the Definitive Map and Statement. Only a limited proportion of respondents felt that these records were well publicised or easy to use.

This lack of awareness limits the ability of users to understand their rights and responsibilities and reduces engagement with the legal record of public rights of way. Improving access to and understanding of the Definitive Map and Statement will support better use of the network and more effective long-term management.

This finding is addressed through [Policy 10](#), supported by [Policy 4](#).

Actions to deliver this:

- improve information and understanding of the Definitive Map and Statement through the Dorset Council website
- promote Dorset Explorer as a publicly accessible digital mapping tool showing the rights of way network
- improve communication and awareness of the purpose and value of the Definitive Map and Statement

Finding 8: Improve awareness of the online reporting system

The consultation identified that many users were unaware of how to report problems on the rights of way network. A significant proportion of respondents did not know how to use the Council's online reporting system, and those who had used it indicated that feedback and resolution times could be unclear.

This reduces the effectiveness of the reporting process and can lead to unresolved issues,



reduces user confidence, and missed opportunities to address problems quickly and efficiently.

Improving the usability, accessibility and responsiveness of reporting systems will support better maintenance of the network and improve the overall user experience.

This finding is addressed through [Policy 4](#), supported by [Policy 1](#).

Actions to deliver this:

- improve awareness and promotion of the reporting system for rights of way issues
- enhance the usability and accessibility of the online reporting tool
- improve communication and feedback to users on the status of reported issues
- use reporting data to better inform maintenance priorities and decision-making



Rights of Way Implementation Plan

Below is an extract from the implementation and delivery plan. This plan is updated regularly and underpins the Council's strategic approach to directing resources and investment where they will have the greatest impact.

Linking Communities

Project	Lead and Partners	Cost	Timeframe
Portesham to Abbotsbury	Dorset Council, National Landscapes	£50k-£100k	2026/2027
Piddle Path	Dorset Council	£50k-£100k	2027-2029
ND Trailway Stalbridge to Henstridge (Somerset)	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	£100k-£150k	2027-2029
ND Trailway Stalbridge to Sturminster Newton	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	>£500k	2027-2029
ND Trailway Spetisbury to Sturminster Marshall	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	£100k-£150k	2030-2032
ND Trailway Sturminster Marshall to Corfe Mullen	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	£200k-£300k	2032-2034
SWCP Lulworth to Kimmeridge (through the MOD Ranges)	Dorset Council, SWCPA and MOD	£100k-£150k	2029-2031
West Dorset Trailway – Completion of route from Maiden Newton to Bridport	Dorset Council and PC/TC and private landowners	>£250k	2026-2032
Upton Trailway	Dorset Council and NDTN	£30k-£50k	2027-2029
Pimperne to Blandford (France Firs)	Dorset Council and private landowners	£50k-£100k	2029-2031



Creating (at least) 10 Accessible Routes

Project	Lead and Partners	Cost	Timeframe
Re-surface the South West Coast Path on the west coast of Portland to link communities to the coast and to facilities – such as Atlantic Academy	Dorset Council, South West Coast Path Association, Court Leet, Natural England	£50k – £100k	2026/2027
Linking Portesham to Abbotsbury	Dorset Council, National Landscapes	£50k-£100k	2026/2027
ND Trailway Stalbridge to Henstridge (Somerset)	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	£100-£150k	2027-2029
ND Trailway Stalbridge to Sturminster Newton	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	>£250k	2027-2029
ND Trailway Spetisbury to Sturminster Marshall	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	£100-£150k	2030-2032
ND Trailway Sturminster Marshall to Corfe Mullen	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	£200-£300k	2032-2034
Pimperne to Blandford (France Firs)	Dorset Council and private landowners	£50-£100k	2029-2031
Purbeck Park to Corfe Castle	Dorset Council and NDTN and private landowners	£100-£150k	2029 - 2031
Wareham River path	Dorset Council, EA and private landowners	£100 - £150k	2027 - 2029
NT RoW across Purbeck	DC-SWCP-NT	£100-£150k	2017-2029



Improving and Investing in Bridleways and Trailways

Project	Lead and Partners	Cost	Timeframe
Bridleway Bridges being upgraded from softwood specification to long lasting GRP bridges.	Dorset Council	>£250k	2026/2027
Improve access from Abbotsbury to the Coast via non-road route	Dorset Council	£50k - £100k	2026/2027
Horse box parking for ND Trailway	Dorset Council NDTN	>£250k	2026 - 2030
Alners Gorse (Hazlebury Bryan)	Dorset Council and private landowners	£80k-£100k	2028-2030
Clay Lane (Bourton)	Dorset Council and private landowners	£30k-£50k	2027-2028
Gypseys Drove (Sturminster Newton)	Dorset Council	£30k-£50k	2026-2027
Dolmans Hill (Lytchett Matravers)	Dorset Council and private landowners	£20k-£30k	2028-2029
UCR's County wide	Dorset Council (Greenspace and Highways)	>£250k	2027-2030

Glossary and Definitions

Public Path

A route that anyone can use on foot. This includes footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways.

Footpath

A path where the public has a legal right to walk. It may cross fields, woods, or urban areas.

Bridleway

A path open to walkers, horse riders, and cyclists. Motor vehicles are not allowed.

Restricted Byway

A route open to walkers, cyclists, horse riders, and non-motorised vehicles (like horse-drawn carriages). Motor vehicles are not allowed.

Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)

A rural track or lane where people can walk, cycle, ride horses, and drive vehicles. Often used by farm traffic or off-road vehicles.



Open Access Land

Countryside areas where the public has a right to roam freely on foot, such as open moorland or downland. In England and Wales, open access land was created by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). This Act gave the public a legal right to walk on mapped areas of mountain, moor, heath, down, and registered common land.

Definitive Map

The official legal record of public paths in Dorset. It shows where footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways are located.

Rights of Way

Paths and tracks that the public has a legal right to use. These include footpaths, bridleways, and byways.

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

A formal term for public paths. In this plan, we use simpler terms like “public paths” or “walking routes” to make things clearer.

Permissive Path

A path that landowners allow the public to use, but it’s not a legal right. Access can be withdrawn at any time.

Stile or Gate

Structures that help people cross fences or walls while keeping livestock in. Where possible, these should be accessible and easy to use and removed once they no longer serve the purpose of stock control.

Waymarking

Signs or markers that help people follow a path or trail. These are often colour-coded or use symbols.

Green Lane

An unsurfaced rural track, often used for walking, horse riding, or off-road driving.



Dorset's Public Rights of Way network.

PRoW Type	For Use By	Symbol	Sign	Total Length	Number of Paths
Footpath	Walkers			1,745 miles (2,809 km)	4,951
Bridleway	Walkers, horse riders, and cyclists			1,090 miles (1,754 km)	1,754
Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)	Walkers, Horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn carriages, and motor vehicles			20 miles (48 km)	48
Restricted Byway	Walkers, horse riders, cyclists, horse drawn carriages			30 miles (48 km)	31

Figure 31: Summary table showing Dorset public rights of way types, permitted users, route lengths and number of paths.

Promoted Routes

Dorset has a wide range of promoted routes used by residents and visitors. These include local circular routes as well as longer-distance trails, many of which are managed by the Dorset Council Ranger team.

Key examples include:

- the 89 mile Dorset section of the South West Coast Path / King Charles III England Coast Path
- The Wessex Ridgeway (62 miles)
- The Stour Valley Way (64 miles)
- Dorset Walkabouts – locally developed circular routes
- The Jubilee Trail

These routes help promote the network, support tourism and encourage wider use.

Trailways

Trailways are routes developed from former railway lines and represent a significant opportunity to provide high-quality, multi-user access across Dorset. Their gentle gradients, durable surfaces and separation from traffic make them particularly suitable for walking, cycling and horse riding, supporting both everyday use and recreation.

As well as providing accessible routes, Trailways help to preserve and celebrate Dorset's industrial and transport heritage. Former railway features such as bridges, stations and signage can be retained and enhanced, contributing to the character of the route and creating a distinctive user experience.

Where former railway alignments remain intact, they offer valuable opportunities to connect communities, services and visitor destinations. In many locations, however, routes are fragmented. Ongoing work with landowners and partners is therefore essential to secure permissive or permanent access, and to identify alternative alignments where gaps exist.

Trailway development also provides opportunities for wider benefits, including links to local businesses, visitor facilities such as cafés and cycle hire, and improved access to green



space. As such, they form a key component of Dorset's long-term access and sustainable transport network.

Access Land

Access Land was introduced under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and provides a right of access on foot for open-air recreation. It includes areas of "open country", such as heath, moor, downland, and registered common land.

Unlike public rights of way, access is not restricted to defined paths, allowing people to move more freely across the landscape, subject to certain restrictions and land management considerations. This is sometimes referred to as a "right to roam", although access is controlled and not unrestricted.

In Dorset, Access Land covers over 9,000 hectares, much of it associated with heathland and downland landscapes. These areas provide important opportunities for informal recreation and connection with nature.

There is ongoing potential to improve access to, and awareness of, Access Land, particularly in areas close to towns and larger settlements, where it can support health and wellbeing and reduce pressure on more heavily used routes.

Coastal Access

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 introduced a long-term programme to improve public access to, and enjoyment of, the English coastline. This is being delivered through the creation of the King Charles III England Coast Path, providing clear and consistent public rights along the coast for walking and other forms of open-air recreation on foot.

The programme secures and enhances existing coastal access while also creating new routes in locations where access did not previously exist. It includes the ability to realign routes inland where coastal erosion occurs, ensuring a continuous and resilient route over time.

In Dorset, one of the first sections to be established was the 'Weymouth Bay' stretch, between Portland and Lulworth, completed in time for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic sailing events. This created approximately 30 km of coastal path, together with associated access land.

Over time, coastal access rights will be extended to cover the full Dorset coastline, creating a continuous route around the county. This approach ensures long-term access along a dynamic and evolving coastline, allowing routes to adapt where necessary while maintaining public access.

ROWLO

Rights of way Liaison Officer – a parish or town council volunteer with a particular remit for PROW in their area and liaison with the DC ranger team and landowners.

Cycling

Cycling access in Dorset is provided through a combination of dedicated cycle routes, shared-use paths and public rights of way, particularly bridleways. While some areas (especially in the south east of the county) have more developed infrastructure, provision across the county is generally fragmented.

Not all bridleways are suitable for cycling due to surface condition, gradient or drainage, which can limit usability for some users. Improving the quality and connectivity of routes is therefore an important opportunity to support cycling as both a recreational activity and a form of everyday travel.



Better integration between rights of way, Trailways and local transport networks will help create more coherent and accessible cycling opportunities for people of all ages and abilities.

Unclassified County Roads (UCRs)

Unclassified County Roads (UCRs) are highways that are not designated as A, B or C roads. They are recorded on the highway authority's "List of Streets" and may be surfaced or unsurfaced, ranging from tarmac to gravel, grass or natural surfaces.

UCRs are highways maintainable at public expense; however, the exact public rights associated with them are not always formally recorded. In practice, many UCRs are used by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and motor vehicles, but the level of public access can vary depending on the legal status of each route.

In Dorset, UCRs often function as important links between public rights of way, helping to extend off-road access and improve connectivity across the wider network. The condition and usability of UCRs varies considerably depending on surface type, levels of use and available maintenance resources. As a result, they present both an opportunity to enhance network connectivity and a challenge in terms of long-term management and maintenance.

Countryside Code

The Countryside Code provides guidance for everyone enjoying the outdoors in England and Wales. It promotes responsible access to the countryside and helps balance the interests of visitors, local communities, landowners and the natural environment.

The Code is based on three simple principles:

Respect everyone

Users should be considerate of people living and working in the countryside, leave gates and property as they find them, follow local signage and share routes responsibly with other users.

Protect the environment

Visitors should leave no trace of their visit by taking litter home, keeping dogs under effective control, disposing of dog waste responsibly, avoiding disturbance to wildlife and livestock, and helping to protect Dorset's landscapes and habitats.

Enjoy the outdoors

People should plan ahead, follow local safety advice, take responsibility for their own actions and enjoy the countryside responsibly so that it remains welcoming and accessible for everyone.

These principles support Dorset Council's aim of promoting responsible use of the public rights of way network and maintaining positive relationships between users, communities and landowners.

A simple way to remember the Countryside Code is:

Respect everyone, Protect the environment, Enjoy the outdoors.



Review of previous ROWIP

In 2011, ROWIP1, was based upon what people told us were the most important issues and priorities for the ROWIP network in the future. The objectives of ROWIP1 were designed to be aspirational and conveyed the optimism and ambitions of that time. It helped raise the profile of our PROW work, secure funding for improvements, encourage partnership-working and generate a greater appreciation of the network. The successes of ROWIP1 can be found below.

Partnership Working

The last fifteen years have seen strong partnerships help deliver important projects and improvements to the PROW network across the County. Partnerships include, Dorset, and Cranborne Chase - National Landscape teams, Ramblers Society, British Horse Society, Natural England, South West Coast Path Association, (SWCPA), and housing developers. Dorset Council Sustainable Transport Team and Parish and Town councils.

PRoW and New Development

The Ranger Team have begun securing Section 106 & Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for new and improved paths as part of new planning applications. The Team is now fully integrated into the development management and design process and when new developments are being designed, they are much more likely to respect existing or new PROW routes in housing developments. In addition, policies in the Dorset Plan and its supporting documents (including Policy 7 in this ROWIP) place requirements on developers to ensure PROW are prioritised in new developments. This has enabled the Team to take a more proactive approach to planning applications.

PRoW Infrastructure repair and maintenance

The Rights of Way Team have replaced hundreds of signs, changed stiles to gates and increased accessible surfacing in locations across Dorset, improving access to the countryside. A good example of a project in which this occurred was at Child Okeford where a network of stiles was replaced with more accessible gates. In Child Okeford and elsewhere across the County, negotiating with landowners was a key part of the process which enabled a satisfactory outcome for all users. This has ensured the PROW network is accessible for a wider range of users. Policy 3 of this Plan seeks to continue to improve accessibility for a wider range of users by creating 10 accessible routes in 10 years.

ROWIP2 will reflect the successful elements of the previous council ROWIP but will be brought up to date and have a long-term strategic vision by reflecting the current and future needs of stakeholders and local communities. Whilst preparing the first draft, we have carried out extensive external stakeholder engagement to ensure that ROWIP2 is a plan for the County, not just for the Council.



Other relevant strategies

Local Strategies

ROWIP2 supports a range of Dorset Council strategies and local partnerships, contributing to wider objectives including public health, sustainable travel, environmental management and economic growth.

Dorset Council Plan

The Council Plan sets out Dorset Council's overall vision and priorities, including creating stronger, healthier communities and protecting the natural environment. ROWIP2 contributes by improving access to green space, supporting active lifestyles, and helping connect communities to services and opportunities.

Local Transport Plan (LTP)

The Local Transport Plan promotes sustainable and integrated transport, with a focus on walking, cycling and reducing reliance on private vehicles. ROWIP2 supports these objectives by improving connectivity between settlements, enhancing access to services and enabling more journeys to be made on foot, by bike or on horseback.

Dorset Local Plan (emerging)

The Local Plan sets out the framework for future development, including housing growth and infrastructure provision. ROWIP2 supports this by ensuring that high-quality rights of way infrastructure is designed into new developments, improving connectivity and integrating new communities with the wider network.

Dorset Destination Management Plan (LVEP)

The Destination Management Plan establishes Dorset as a leading visitor destination, with an ambition to become a flagship area for access to the outdoors and a premier walking destination. ROWIP2 plays a key role in delivering this ambition by improving access to key destinations, promoting high-quality routes and supporting local businesses and the visitor economy.

Movement for Movement (Public Health Dorset)

Movement for Movement is Dorset's place-based approach to increasing physical activity, focusing on making it easier for people to move more in their everyday lives and addressing health inequalities. ROWIP2 directly supports this approach by providing free, accessible opportunities for walking and outdoor activity, particularly close to where people live, and by reducing barriers to participation through improved infrastructure and information.



Public Health Strategy / Physical Activity Frameworks

Local public health priorities focus on increasing physical activity, reducing health inequalities and supporting healthier lifestyles. ROWIP2 contributes by providing free, accessible opportunities for everyday physical activity, particularly close to where people live, helping to address inactivity and improve wellbeing.

Dorset Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy

The council has declared a climate and ecological emergency and is working to reduce carbon emissions and enhance biodiversity. ROWIP2 supports these objectives by encouraging sustainable travel, improving access to green infrastructure and promoting responsible use of the natural environment.

Green Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategies

These strategies aim to enhance access to green space and improve the quality and connectivity of green infrastructure across Dorset. ROWIP2 contributes by linking rights of way with parks, open spaces and the wider natural environment, helping to create a more connected and accessible network.

National strategies

ROWIP2 supports a range of national strategies and policy frameworks that promote physical activity, sustainable travel, improved access to nature and public health outcomes.

Sport England - Uniting the Movement

Sport England's 10-year strategy aims to transform lives and strengthen communities through increased participation in sport and physical activity, with a focus on tackling inequalities. ROWIP2 contributes to this vision by improving access to safe, attractive and accessible routes that support everyday physical activity, particularly walking and cycling.

Office for Health Improvement and Disparities - Everybody Active, Every Day

This national framework sets out an evidence-based approach to increasing physical activity levels through creating environments that make it easier for people to move more in their daily lives. ROWIP2 supports this by improving local access to green space, enabling people to be active close to where they live, and reducing barriers to participation.

Department for Transport – Active Travel Strategy / Gear Change

National transport policy promotes walking and cycling as viable alternatives to car travel, particularly for short journeys. ROWIP2 contributes by improving connectivity between communities, services and green spaces, helping to support safer and more convenient active travel routes.



Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) – 25 Year Environment Plan

The 25 Year Environment Plan sets out a commitment to connect people with the natural environment to improve health and wellbeing, while protecting and enhancing landscapes and biodiversity. ROWIP2 plays a key role by enabling access to Dorset's natural environment in a managed and sustainable way.

Natural England – England Coast Path Programme

The creation of the King Charles III England Coast Path is a nationally significant project to improve access to the coastline. ROWIP2 supports its delivery within Dorset, helping to maximise the benefits for recreation, tourism and local communities.



Front cover of the Sturminster Newton Walkabout Leaflet.

POINTS OF INTEREST

The area around **Gotts Corner** was occupied by Flemish refugees, who established the textile industry here, having been driven from their homeland by religious persecution.

At the top of the field, before turning to cross Bath Road, there is a **splendid panorama** of the river and its valley.

With such a variety of **bird and insect life** here, occasionally you may see a Kestrel, Buzzard or Heron flying overhead.

The **Butts Pond Meadows** were given to the Town in 2004, and are now managed as a Nature Reserve and amenity area.

The low-lying area is home to all **three species of British newt** – including the protected Great Crested Newt.

The path from the Meadows back to the car park, which passes the site of the **Old Creamery**, is the 'Jubilee Path', created as a traffic-free route for walkers and cyclists.

Photo credits: Helen Baggott, John Lewis, Giles Nicholson, Sturminster Newton Museum, Jan Wardell, Wildstock

STURMINSTER NEWTON WALKABOUTS

WALKABOUT 1

Gotts Corner / Honeymead Lane / Butts Pond Meadows

A varied walk with features of interest in Sturminster Newton, both past and present (approx. 1.5 miles).

This is one of a series of circular walks from Sturminster Newton which take in the surrounding area of the Blackmore Vale. They are mainly on Public Rights of Way, with some on paths with access permitted by the landowners.

These walks are intended to encourage exploration and appreciation of the variety and beauty of the countryside in this locality, on foot. Cyclists are not permitted to ride on public footpaths and by law must give way to walkers and horseriders on bridleways.

When walking, please remember the Countryside Code, particularly:

- respect the local community, farmland and others enjoying the countryside
- leave gates and property as you find them
- leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- keep dogs under effective control
- keep to the marked paths and cause no damage to crops, livestock or wildlife

Appropriate footwear is recommended, since wet or muddy conditions can be encountered at any time.

The Sturminster Newton Walkabouts have been developed by the Sturminster Newton Town Council in association with Dorset County Council and are available from Sturquest Community Office, Sturminster Library, the Museum and Sturminster Mill or can be downloaded from www.dorsetforyou.com/walkabouts

Further information can be obtained from the Town Council on 01258 475136.



Sturminster
Newton
Town Council





STURMINSTER NEWTON WALKABOUTS

Gotts Corner / Honeymead Lane / Butts Pond Meadows





Back cover of the Sturminster Newton Walkabout Leaflet.

