

APPENDIX 4

Setting future work in a policy context

- 1.1 The Improvement Plan has the potential to aid the delivery of a number of aspirations of the District Council, and there is also a wealth of work being carried out by other bodies, organizations and even individuals which complements this work. Cross references are made to the work of others in the Action Plan section of this document, and care has been taken to ensure that the objectives of this Improvement Plan serve to augment relevant work by others where possible. The necessity to work with partners in order to achieve certain objectives is essential.

Policies of West Berkshire Council

- 1.2 The **West Berkshire Partnership** brings together representatives from the District Council, the police, health services, voluntary and community services and the private sector, to work more closely and effectively to improve the quality of life of West Berkshire residents. Its **Sustainable Community Strategy, 'A Breath of Fresh Air'** sets a clear vision and direction for West Berkshire to 2026, focusing on improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the district, in partnership with key local stakeholders.
- 1.3 Under the key theme of 'Accessible', relevant priority outcomes are to seek to limit future traffic growth; improve accessibility in rural areas and ensure local services remain accessible to the population they serve. Under the 'Stronger' theme, a relevant priority is to reduce inequality in the health of local people, and under the 'Greener' theme, to protect the countryside; increase the diversity of local wildlife and encourage sustainable travel.
- 1.4 The **Council Plan** sets the Council's priorities for 2007 – 2011. Some relevant aims are to:
- Improve the condition of the district's extensive highway network.
 - Protect and enhance the natural environment of West Berkshire.
 - Promote well-being through the adoption of healthy lifestyles.
 - Engage communities and individuals through the encouragement of volunteering and community participation.
 - Support people with special educational needs or disabilities.
 - Increase access to services and opportunities for all.
- 1.5 The Rights of Way team at West Berkshire Council is part of the Planning and Countryside department. **Service Plans** provide information on how corporate plans are implemented. Service Plan objectives are agreed following consideration of the Council's corporate priorities, legislative demands and pressures on the service.
- 1.6 'The Time of Our Lives' is a **Cultural Strategy** for West Berkshire. It describes the contribution that cultural activities make to quality of life, and the actions that are needed to ensure that cultural activity continues to play a full role. It acknowledges the vital part that enjoyment of the rural environment via the district's rich access network plays in the leisure time activities of residents. Some relevant specific priority outcomes in the document are to:

- Increase the number of volunteering opportunities in cultural activities and projects that offer access to training in vocational skills and qualifications.
 - Ensure that local services remain accessible to the population they serve.
 - Ensure that access for those with restricted mobility is improved, and adapted equipment and technology is provided, to overcome the barriers to participation faced by those with sensory and mobility impairments.
 - Protect the countryside and increase the diversity of local wildlife.
 - Use historic characterization results to understand and protect the nature and value of the historic environment.
 - Protect vulnerable scheduled monuments.
 - Increase the range of opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the natural environment.
 - Increase the numbers of volunteers actively involved in conservation and management programmes.
 - Encourage sustainable travel.
 - Increase the number of voluntary clubs and societies organizing high-quality cultural activities across the district.
 - Target the most disadvantaged communities by cultural practitioners.
 - Improve links between secondary schools and community-based cultural organizations.
 - Reduce inequality in the health of local people.
 - Increase levels of physical activity.
 - Increase the numbers of people referred to cultural activity programmes, in order to benefit their physical or mental health.
- 1.7 The Government is encouraging Rights of Way Improvement Plans to be integrated into, or aligned with, authorities' **Local Transport Plans (LTPs)**, and a statement of the progress of the Improvement Plan has already appeared in West Berkshire's LTP2.
- 1.8 LTP2 sets out the Council's transport planning policy framework, covering a period of 5 years (2006/07 - 2010/11). West Berkshire's vision for transport is "to develop effective sustainable transport solutions for all". This means delivering a transport system which supports the economic vitality of West Berkshire, as well as providing opportunities for people to get to the services they need, in a way that does not harm the environment of the district and beyond. It also means that this has to be done in a way that makes the best use of the resources available. The effectiveness of the Council's and partners' actions is therefore critical in all areas of delivery.
- 1.9 Seven specific strategies have been identified as key to delivering LTP2: accessibility; road safety; passenger transport; walking; cycling; freight and travel planning. The approach to the District as set out in LTP2 recognizes the diverse characteristics across West Berkshire. As a result, three broad geographical areas have been identified: the urban areas of Newbury and Thatcham; the eastern urban area and rural West Berkshire. The strategies most important for the Improvement Plan are:
- The Walking Strategy – seeks to ensure that the pedestrian route network facilitates easy access to major destinations and addresses 'severance' on routes e.g. major roads and unclear routes between transport interchanges.
 - The Cycling Strategy – replicates the general aspirations of the Walking Strategy, to ensure permeability for cyclists across the urban environment. In addition the Cycling strategy aims to direct all new cycling infrastructure towards assisting the

network of strategic cycle routes, including the provision of good linkages to and from significant trip generators such as places of employment, residence, retail, education and leisure.

- The Accessibility Strategy – this has many links to the Walking and Cycling strategies, but in particular aspires to support all sustainable modes of transport (walking, cycling and public transport) and optimize the uptake and use of these modes.
- 1.10 The next LTP is currently being developed and will be in place by April 2011. It will link with the authority's Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The new LTP will provide a longer-term vision for transport across the district, in line with the Local Development Framework, to 2026. The long-term vision will be supported by 3-year implementation plans.
- 1.11 The new LTP needs to take account of the priorities coming from Central Government through 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport System' (DaSTS), 2008. These new priorities will help to direct the development of the new LTP and update the current LTP objectives. The main DaSTS priorities are:
- To **support** national **economic** competitiveness and **growth**, by delivering reliable and efficient transport networks.
 - To reduce transport's emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, with the desired outcome of **tackling climate change**.
 - To **contribute to better safety, security and health**, and longer life-expectancy, by reducing the risk of death, injury or illness arising from transport and by promoting travel modes that are beneficial to health.
 - To **promote** greater **equality of opportunity** for all citizens, with the desired outcome of achieving a fairer society.
 - To **improve quality of life** for transport-users and non-transport-users, and to promote a **healthy natural environment**.
- 1.12 The **Berkshire Structure Plan 2001 to 2016** is a document that provides a broad strategy for Berkshire. The present plan advocates the use of Council powers to promote alternative modes of travel than by car, including in relation to major developments.
- 1.13 The **West Berkshire District Local Plan** precedes the future Local Development Framework. One relevant aim is that the transportation needs of new development should be met through the promotion of a range of facilities associated with new transport modes, including walking and cycling. Its recreational aims include safeguarding public rights of way, and also to seek improved access to the countryside, in a manner which conserves its landscape and wildlife value, is sustainable in the long-term, and which minimizes the conflict between users, landowners and local residents.
- 1.14 The **Highway Maintenance Plan** provides guidance on delivery of best value highway maintenance, consistent with the aims of the Council Plan. It seeks to attain this by providing a safer highway network, improving travelling conditions for all highway users, and ensuring greater care of the local environment. A 'sister' document, the draft **Network Management Plan**, has also been developed to define the strategy for managing use of the road network. These both form part of the Council's draft **Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP)**. Public rights of way have been incorporated into these two plans.

Other relevant policies and work

- 1.15 The **Mid and West Berkshire Local Countryside Access Forum** was set up in 2003. It is run jointly by West Berkshire District Council, Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council. It is a statutory body which must advise the three Councils on improvement to public access to land and linear access for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area. It must comprise representatives of access users, land managers and others with relevant interests. It meets three times per year and to date has advised on many matters, including via working groups addressing encouragement of responsible behaviour and improved access for those with restricted mobility.
- 1.16 The Local Countryside Access Forum has proved invaluable, not only through guiding the work of West Berkshire Council but also through imparting a wide perspective and combined experience to the advice that is given.
- 1.17 As well as formal policies, there is much relevant work being carried out within various departments of the Council with which the Improvement Plan must be incorporated.

Parish plans

- 1.18 A Parish Plan gives local people the opportunity to engage with their fellow residents, community groups, service-providers and others in setting out a vision for how they want their village or town to develop over the next 5-10 years. It examines all aspects of local life and uses consultation with the community to provide the foundations for an action plan, which prioritises local issues, identifies key partners for delivery and sets target dates for the completion of projects. Several relevant themes have repeatedly emerged from Parish Plans to date:
- Improve cycleways and footpaths.
 - Protect and preserve the countryside.
 - Promote areas of historic and local interest to improve the economy.
 - Increase and improve information for the community through web sites, newsletters, booklets etc.

National Trails Management Strategies

- 1.19 Two National Trails pass through West Berkshire, The Ridgeway and the Thames Path, both of which utilize public rights of way. National Trails provide a nationally and internationally-recognized series of walks and rides. In West Berkshire, the Thames Path is promoted for use by walkers and The Ridgeway for use by walkers, equestrians, cyclists and carriages.
- 1.20 The delivery of high-quality National Trails depends on a partnership between many organizations, including Natural England, local authorities, voluntary bodies, landowners and occupiers, private sector companies and local individuals and communities. Proposals for specific projects and long-term ongoing management are contained in the Ridgeway and Thames Path Management Strategies, endorsed by the National Trails Management Group, of which West Berkshire Council is a member.
- 1.21 West Berkshire Council contributes to the upkeep and management of its two National Trails. The work is based on three main principles:

- To enable as many people as possible to enjoy access to the National Trails.
- To protect the ecological, cultural, and landscape features of the areas through which each Trail passes.
- To provide sufficient information about the facilities and services that people need in order to enjoy the routes, however long they wish to stay.

North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2009-2014

1.22 The vision for the North Wessex Downs AONB is of ' vast, dramatic, undeveloped and locally-distinct chalk downlands, with extensive areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage; a landscape that stands apart from the increasing urban pressures that surround it; where people live, work and relax; and where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy'.

1.23 The Delivery Plan includes several objectives relevant to the access network:

- To encourage diverse and viable agriculture, forestry, horseracing and other land-based enterprises that support the delivery of a wide range of public benefits, including the conservation and enhancement of the area's special qualities and features; the provision of access opportunities, and support for local markets.
- To provide transport that is more sustainable and meets the needs of residents of, and visitors to, the North Wessex Downs.
- To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access and enjoy the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs, whilst minimising the impacts of visitors.
- To promote a recreation and tourism sector that is well-managed, sustainable, and adds value to the local economy, whilst respecting the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs.

Forestry Commission

1.24 The Government, through the Forestry Commission, is by far the largest owner of woodlands nationally. Its policy is to allow access to all its woods on a permissive basis, provided there are no legal or management constraints.