



DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

PROPOSED INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITIES & TRANSPORT

TOPIC – HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON REVISED COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS PLAN

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other relevant overview and scrutiny committee. In addition, all Members are notified.

If five or more Members from those informed so request, the Leader may require the matter to be referred to Cabinet for determination.

If you wish to make representation on this proposed Decision please contact the relevant Portfolio Holder and the following Democratic Services Officer by 5.00pm on Friday 20 March 2015.

Contact Officers:

Case Officer: Simon Finch Assistant Director (Environment), 01962 848 271, sfinch@winchester.gov.uk

Democratic Services Officer: Nancy Graham, 01962 848 235, ngraham@winchester.gov.uk

SUMMARY

In 2008, Hampshire County Council published its first Countryside Access Plan which covered the period up to 2013. The Plan was needed in order to meet its requirements under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Plan was supported by 7 area plans covering the County, of which four relate to Winchester District (Forest of Bere, South Downs, Hampshire Downs and Test and Itchen).

Hampshire County Council is consulting on its draft Countryside Access Plan for the period 2015 - 2025. It is also proposed to retain the area plans but as reference documents only. The draft Plan can be viewed at <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/countryside/access-plans.htm>

The Plan is a strategic document which sets out the aims and objectives of HCC in relation to promoting and managing access to the countryside and will inform how the resources of its Countryside Service will be prioritised over the next decade.

The aims of the draft Plan are entirely consistent with the objectives of the City Council's Sustainable Community Strategy (see details below – reasons for the proposed decision).

The draft Plan says that countryside access describes largely off-road free to use networks of paths and open spaces which together connect people to the natural environment (footpaths, bridleways, byways etc).

Following public consultation last year the draft Plan retains the 8 county wide issues included in the existing document:

- Condition of the rights of way network
- Getting to the countryside from urban areas
- Using roads as part of the access network
- Connectivity of routes
- Impacts on land management
- Information provision
- Meeting the needs of all users
- Joint working with other countryside interests

Based on consultation responses it is proposed to prioritise two issues in the new Plan; maintaining and improving the condition of the ROW's network and improving connectivity. In addition the Plan recognises the need to develop financial sustainability for the network including possible sources of future funding and other means (planning permissions, partnership working, support from volunteer groups and the like).

The draft Plan goes on to define three policy areas with objectives:

- **DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO NETWORK MANAGEMENT**

Objective: to focus existing and future resources on those routes which provide the most benefit to residents, visitors and the local economy.

- **WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND WITH VOLUNTEERS**

Objective: to enable a greater response to local needs through working with others.

- **LISTENING, INFORMING, EDUCATING**

Objective: to ensure that information on finding paths and using them responsibly, and on managing public access, is widely available and easily understood.

Each policy area has a table which identifies specific actions designed to deliver these objectives.

Finally the Plan includes a table which explains the relationship between the county wide issues and three policy areas.

It is considered that the draft Plan is useful strategic document which sets clear policy objectives for the development of the PROW network over the next 10 years which will be used to prioritise the allocation of financial, staff and other resources within the County's Countryside Service. It is therefore recommended that the City Council supports the draft and also identifies the two following issues:

- It is noted that the area plans are to be retained only as reference documents. If the Plan is to achieve the best outcomes it will need a local dimension in order to help identify and deliver improvements on the ground in particular areas of the county. The Plan should therefore explain how this will be delivered if area plans are not being reviewed and up-dated.
- The Plan talks about partnership working and refers to parish/town and districts councils and the national parks. There may also be potential to work with other organisations such as the Forestry Commission or Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

PROPOSED DECISION

That the Portfolio Holder for Communities & Transport responds to the consultation on the draft Countryside and Access Plan as follows:

"It is considered that the draft Plan is useful strategic document which sets clear policy objectives for the development of the PROW network over the next 10 years which will be used to prioritise the allocation of financial, staff and other resources within the County's Countryside Service. The City Council therefore supports the draft Plan but makes the following comments:

- *It is noted that the area plans are to be retained only as reference documents. If the Plan is to achieve the best outcomes it will need a local dimension in order to help identify and deliver improvements on the ground in particular areas of the county. The Plan should therefore explain how this will be delivered if area plans are not being reviewed and up-dated.*
- *The Plan talks about partnership working and refers to parish/town councils, districts councils and the national parks. There may also be potential to work with other organisations such as the Forestry Commission or Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust."*

REASON FOR THE PROPOSED DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The draft Countryside Access Plan is consistent with Council's Sustainable Community Strategy and will specifically help to support Active Communities (encouraging healthy lifestyles and provision of sport and recreation) High Quality Environment (effective traffic management and support for transport provision) and Prosperous Economy (support the local economy). The latter is relevant because the draft Plan indicates that during 2012-13, in an average week, 41% of adults in England visited the natural environment and in over a quarter of these visits people spent money during their visit. In Hampshire this equated to £580 million and some of this money would have been spent within the District.

No alternative options were considered appropriate in this case.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

No implications.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE PROPOSED DECISION

None – this is a response to a consultation being undertaken by Hampshire County Council.

FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

n/a

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED

None.

DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

n/a

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision

Councillor Ernest Jeffs – Portfolio Holder for Communities and Transport