

# **Your Countryside**

## **An Outdoor Access Improvement Plan – Update**

**Jonathan Woods – Access Development Team Leader**



**What is it all about?**

**More People Using, Exploring and  
Discovering  
the Countryside of Central  
Bedfordshire**



# Introduction - What is the Improvement Plan?

The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (OAIP) will form the guiding principles that will act as a cornerstone of green space and access management for Central Bedfordshire for the period 2012 >

The new plan will be linked with Central Bedfordshire's priorities, values and geographical area, integrating with the *Sustainable Communities Strategy*, the Local Development Framework, Local Transport Plan, the wider suite of new policies and strategies as well as with the changing and emerging national priorities for green space, health, fitness and exercise and localism.

This plan will have a key role in facilitating the Big Society helping people and communities to both explore and understand our varied landscapes and become involved in its management, increasing volunteering and generating an increased sense of ownership and pride.

# Introduction – cont'

It will develop a framework that will be publicly consulted upon, that will give us a mandate to steer the development of our annual service business plan and our work in future years.

It will set policy, priorities and establish new projects

It will set our position to influence the management of green spaces and access to the wider countryside, as an element of 'Place Making', ensuring that Central Bedfordshire is seen as a green and pleasant place to live and work.

Importantly it will more directly provide the expected Rights of Way Improvement Plan requirements that the previous plan did not.

# Structure of the Document

Public Issues  
assessment  
and  
identification of  
key issues

Assessment  
of the  
assets that  
we manage

How our  
outputs link with  
National and  
Local Priorities

Action Planning and Flagship Projects

Service annual business planning



# Key Public Issues

Our assessment has consistently identified the following themes/issues across the surveys we have assessed. In each case improvement of the present situation will encourage more visits and enjoyment of use:

- Dog fouling and control
- Provision of more and better information, generic and audience targeted
- Appropriate signage and way marking
- Network fragmentation
- Public transport provision including cost
- Signed and secure car parking facilities
- More circular/promoted routes
- Organised walks/events; picnicking facilities
- Accessibility for buggies/wheelchairs
- Volunteering
- Overgrowth and inaccessibility of routes

# National and Local Priorities

Our assessment has considered how the management of Outdoor Access can support:

- Planning and Managing for growth
- Health and Physical Activity
- Localism and local governance of green spaces
- Volunteering and Public participation
- Developing a strong rural economy
- Sustainable Travel
- Play and Learning within the Natural Environment

# What are the issues with the assets that we manage?

These have been split into three areas:

- Rights of Way and Linear Access
- Countryside Spaces - Sites, Access Areas, Commons and Village Greens
- Community Engagement, Participation and Promotion



# Rights of Way

Central Bedfordshire Council has a duty to assert and protect the rights of the public to use the 1010 kilometres of footpath, 331 kilometres of bridleway and 27 kilometres of byways open to all traffic within its area – 1368km Total

- 830 Bridges
- 559 Culverts
- 662 Stiles
- 1402 Gates
- 2005 Sign posts = In total over 11000 structures are recorded on our database

We receive over 1000 user reports per annum

We have an average figure of 69% easy of use for the whole network and 68% for Priority One Areas (taken from the last 3 years)

# Rights of Way and Linear Access

## Issues 1

- What targets do we have and how do we prioritise our Definitive Map work? TCPA, Mod orders, Anomalies, Public Path Orders?
- How do we inform people about the legal process involved, how can we make it accessible?
- How do we prioritise issues on the network and how quickly do we resolve them?
- How do we manage our access network, what are the priorities for spend? And time?
- What targets do we have for the management of the access networks?

More >

# Rights of Way and Linear Access

## Key Issues 2

- How do we increase the connectivity of the network?
- How do we create connected bridleway networks and where?
- How do we manage rights of way close to where people live?
- What standards do we set for rights of way and access impacted on or incorporated into developments?
- How do we link the Rights of way network with the cycle network and the network of roads / rural roads?
- How do we manage our 'Excluded Areas', when will we resolve them

# Countryside Spaces - Sites, Access Areas, Commons and Village greens

We manage:

65 Countryside Sites

9+ Access Areas

45 Commons

31 Village Greens

But how and why do we manage these assets, what are our priorities, what standards do we have for our sites and are we meeting them?

How do we involve communities with these sites?



# Countryside Spaces

## Key Issues

- CBC need a range of sites of varying quantity and quality to satisfy local demand and the increasing growth area.
- SSSI on CBC sites should be managed in a favourable or favourable recovering status and we should safeguard, enhance and promote local and landscape distinctiveness, heritage, natural history, biodiversity and wildlife features of these sites
- Seek to address local issues effecting public enjoyment on our spaces i.e. dog control
- Develop existing partnerships with local community groups and trusts and forge new partnerships, seek to manage and develop new Friends Groups and User Forums (on the larger sites) and undertake surveys etc to gauge user and non - user opinion

# Countryside Spaces

## Key Issues

- Seek to develop Natural Play and exercise / health activity on our sites
- Ensure that people are aware of the location of Access Areas, Commons and Village Greens and ensure that people have access to information about do's and don't.
- Be clear on the processes to claim or dedicate land
- Ensure that the boundaries of AA, C and VG are monitored and action taken where needed
- Manage changes linked to new Commons Legislation

# Community Engagement, Participation and Promotion

These three areas are inherently linked..... We need to ensure that the work we do has a strong mandate from the people that we work for – the people of CBeds

We need to ensure that all the people of CBeds are aware of and have the opportunity to engage with the natural environment around them. As reinforced by the Localism Bill and Natural Environment White Paper.

We need to ensure that we have effective communication, information and promotional material to get these messages across.

# Engagement

Development and Consultation on master planning

Engagement with JLAF and Cycle forums

Involving communities and local councils in the decisions made and the management of Access and Spaces.

Attending events to inform and promote, engaging with the general public to listen and hear.



# Participation and volunteering

12 friends of groups with 2 more groups in development  
(300 people)

45 P3 Groups (360 people)

10 Health Walks numbers ranging from 10 – 29 people  
attending each walk – annually resulting in 2837 people  
walks each year

(Additionally we have GST, NT, BRCC and GWT volunteers operating on our  
spaces)

# Participation and volunteering Issues

Growth in new groups has slowed  
Numbers of volunteers is static (ish)  
Age of volunteers are getting older

How do we get new people involved?  
Do we use the Green Gym concept?

Can the development of Area master planning be used to energise and stimulate involvement?

# Promotion

- We have 10 Promoted Circular Walks (2 of which need re-developing).
- We have 7 Horse Riding Routes that we developed jointly with the British Horse Society.
- We manage the Greensand Ridge Walk and are involved with at least 8 other linear routes.
- We are launching in 2012 - 6 Circular Off-Road Cycle Routes, The Greensand Cycle route and 10+ Accessibility Trails.

# Promotion Issues

How do we promote what we do and how people can use and enjoy the countryside of Bedfordshire, how can they participate and what will get people volunteering?

How do we develop new audiences without losing our old ones and if we only have so much time / money, who should be target first?

Event attendance, Talks and Presentations but who is our audience?  
And which events do we attend?

Leaflets – put what is the future?

Web sites – CBC / Letsgo / Others?

GPS?

Apps?

Social Media?



# Plan Timeline

- We are expecting to complete text by end of Feb
- We are holding initial Action Planning / 2012-13 Business Planning staff meetings in Mid Feb
- Draft plan will be presented to the PFH and other stakeholders during March
- Consultation version will be finalised and consultation will begin in April.

The logo for Central Bedfordshire Council, featuring a large green circle on the right side of the slide. The text 'Central Bedfordshire' is written across the circle in white and dark green.

Central  
Bedfordshire



**Any questions?**

