

Appendix 15: Suffolk County Council Green Access Strategy (Rights of Way Improvement Plan) (2020)

Suffolk Green Access Strategy

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)
2020 - 2030



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Part 1 - Setting the Scene



Foreword

The public rights of way network in Suffolk makes up almost half of the highway network. It is an essential asset to us all for our health and wellbeing, safe and sustainable travel, leisure activity and economic growth. The network forms part of a wider green access network.

Improving the quality of the experience on urban and rural rights of way has become increasingly important politically and strategically. This strategy represents our commitment as a council to make the very most of this asset and to provide our residents, our business community and our visitors with an array of different and innovative opportunities to use, enjoy and benefit from.

This plan, which is a statutory requirement under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) aims to identify changes that will “improve provision for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and those with mobility problems”. The plan is intended to last until 2030 but will be subject to periodic reviews to reflect new priorities and changing levels of investment. It will complement existing strategies including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Sustainable Modes of Transport Strategy and the Growth Strategy and will seek out opportunities to work collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders to deliver shared outcomes effectively.

Our plan builds on previous work, specific research and detailed consultation with a wide range of consultees, including the Suffolk Local Access Forum, parish councils, local businesses, landowners, users and non-user groups. We hope that people across these groups can identify with the priorities within the document and that it is adopted across the county. We hope that it is seen as a collective commitment to take action at a local level to protect, maintain and develop our right of way and green access network in the most efficient way possible and to optimise its wonderful and immense value across a range of agendas.

Cllr Andrew Reid

Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs



Introduction

Our Vision

“To get more people using and enjoying Suffolk’s green access network.”

Suffolk is a predominantly rural county: it contains no motorways; it has no cities. The 2011 Rural Urban Classification shows that 39% of the population lives in rural areas, compared with 21% for all of England.

Suffolk is also becoming a more populous county. Between 2016 and 2031, Suffolk’s population is expected to grow by 27% to over 800,000¹, one of the fastest growth rates in the East of England. Demand for housing will be met with an estimated 66,000 new homes to be built between 2019 and 2036². In addition, Suffolk has an ageing population with estimates that by 2039, 1 in 3 people will be over 65 (compared with 1 in 4 for England)³, representing a third of its population. Approximately 18% of its population has a limiting illness or a disability⁴.

Although Suffolk is generally described as an affluent and healthy county (it is ranked 101 out of 152 upper tier local authorities in England with rank 1 being the most deprived)⁵, there are pockets of severe deprivation with 32% of Suffolk residents described as either of moderate means or hard pressed⁶. Research reveals a socio-economic gradient between socio-economic groups and the use of green space: people in lower socio-economic groups access the natural environment less frequently than those in higher groups.

These statistics highlight the importance and the growing relevance of the public rights of way and green access network. The network provides the means for encouraging sustainable travel choices, such as walking or cycling to work, and enables people to live healthier lives by using the countryside for leisure.

The Suffolk Green Access Strategy details why green access is so relevant to Suffolk’s population and its visitors. It focuses on how green access can benefit our quality of life and how it can contribute to the council’s corporate priorities. It explains the impact that green access can have on growing and managing tourism, how it delivers initiatives that impact on people’s physical and mental health, how it sits alongside Creating The Greenest County aspiration and why it offers cost savings in delivering council services and meeting corporate aims and objectives.

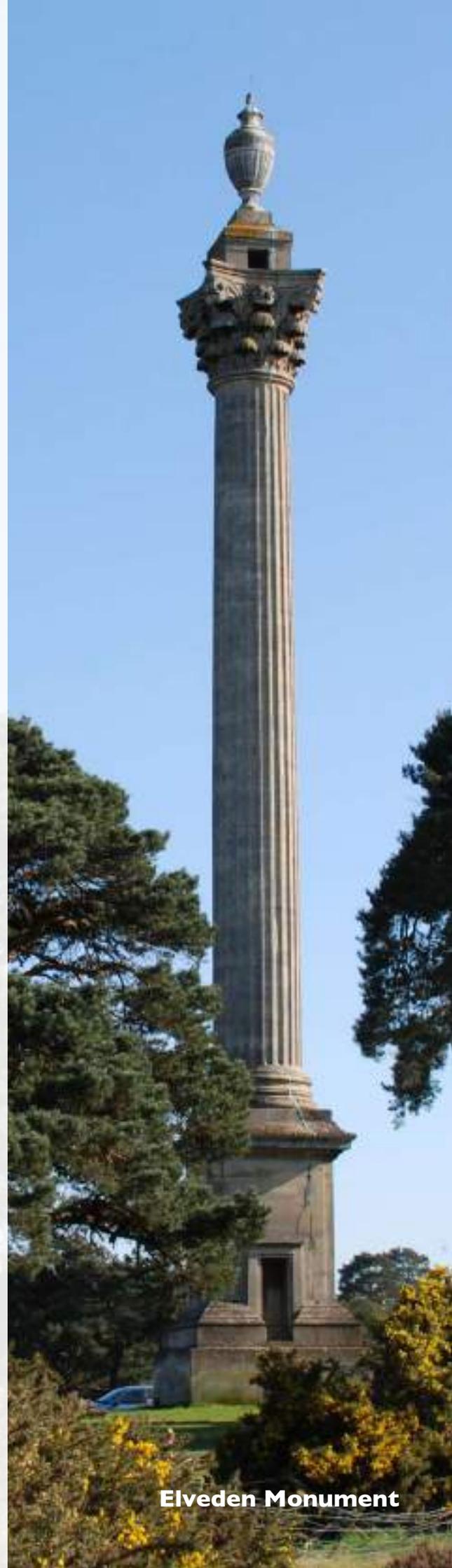
Accessing Suffolk's landscape

Suffolk has a rich and varied landscape boasting a heritage coastline, an undulating heartland of historic wool towns, and The Brecks, a landscape of open heaths and dense forests. Within this are market towns such as Bury St Edmunds and Bungay, picture postcard villages such as Kersey and Cavendish, the home of horse racing in Newmarket, and the county town of Ipswich.

Suffolk's landscape is the product of glaciation which moulded the countryside, deposited sediment and influenced land use. The north of the county is characterised by open arable fields whilst the south has traditionally been large private estates where forests were often untouched, resulting in today's ancient woodlands. The Brecks is an almost semi-arid landscape of sandy soils of low fertility, historically a land of rabbit warrens. Today, it contains a concentration of heathlands and forests.

Special features of Suffolk's landscape include:

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): Suffolk contains 2 AONBs. The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB spreads from Lowestoft to the Shotley Peninsular. The Dedham Vale AONB (Constable Country) and Stour Valley Project extends from Manningtree to Sudbury.
- Long distance trails: Suffolk is blessed with long distance trails including:
 - o The AONBs contain 4 long distance paths: the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Path, the Sandlings Walk, the Stour and Orwell Walk, and the Stour Valley Path;
 - o The Angles Way winds along the Waveney Valley;
 - o The St Edmund Way spans the county from the Essex border to the Norfolk border;
 - o The Ickniel Way is Britain's oldest road;
 - o The Lark Valley Path follows the River Lark from Bury St Edmunds to Mildenhall;
 - o The Gipping Valley Path stretches from Stowmarket to Ipswich.
- Open access: Open access allows people the freedom to roam on foot. Suffolk has one of the largest expanses of heathlands in England, concentrated between Woodbridge and Southwold, and between Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall. Complementing these areas are the public forest estates, including Thetford and Rendlesham Forests where there is access on foot, bicycle and horseback.
- National Trail: by 2021/22 Natural England will complete the England Coast Path, which will be Suffolk's only National Trail.
- National Park: part of the Broads National Park lies in north Suffolk and features a network of broads (lakes), waterways and wildlife.



Elveden Monument

Public rights of way (PRoW)

Suffolk contains one of England's most extensive networks of public rights of ways. The network exceeds 3,500 miles (5,700km), compared with approximately 4,000 miles (6,500km) of roads. In addition to public rights of way, there are long distance cycle routes (such as Sustrans' national routes) and permissive paths (where landowners allow informal access).

There are four types of PRoW:

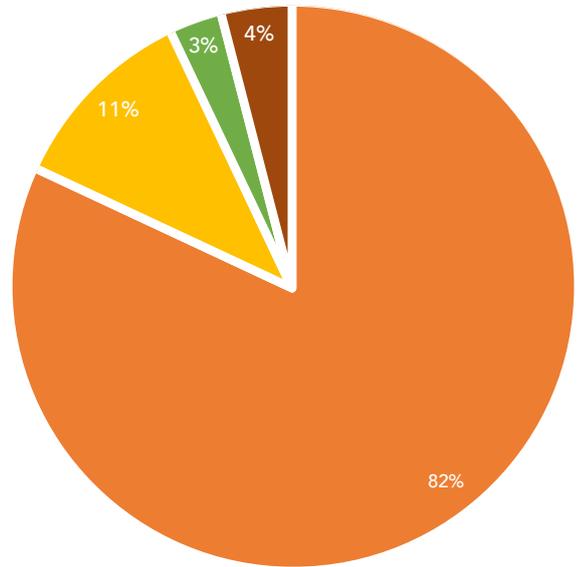
- Public footpath – these are for walking.
- Bridleway – in addition to walking, these are also for riding on either horseback or bicycle.
- Restricted byway – these are as bridleways with the addition of being available to non-motorised vehicles, such as horse drawn carriages or husky sledges.
- Byways open to all traffic (also referred to as BOATs) – as restricted byways but with the addition of being also open to motorised vehicles for off-road driving.

Most PRoW are natural surface routes. Where appropriate such as in urban locations or in high use areas, they can be surfaced with a compacted material such as crushed stone, a sealed surface such as asphalt, or with boardwalk or bridges to span wetlands and watercourses.

PRoW are protected but can change over time. New routes can be created, and existing routes diverted or extinguished through a legal process, or sometimes even lost where land has eroded into a river or the sea. A feature of Suffolk's PROW network is its fragmentation.

Usage of PRoW varies over time, but the general trend is increasing.

Suffolk's public rights of way by length (miles)



Footpath - 2870

Bridleway - 385

Restricted Byway - 105

Byway - 140



Thorpeness

What do we mean by green access?

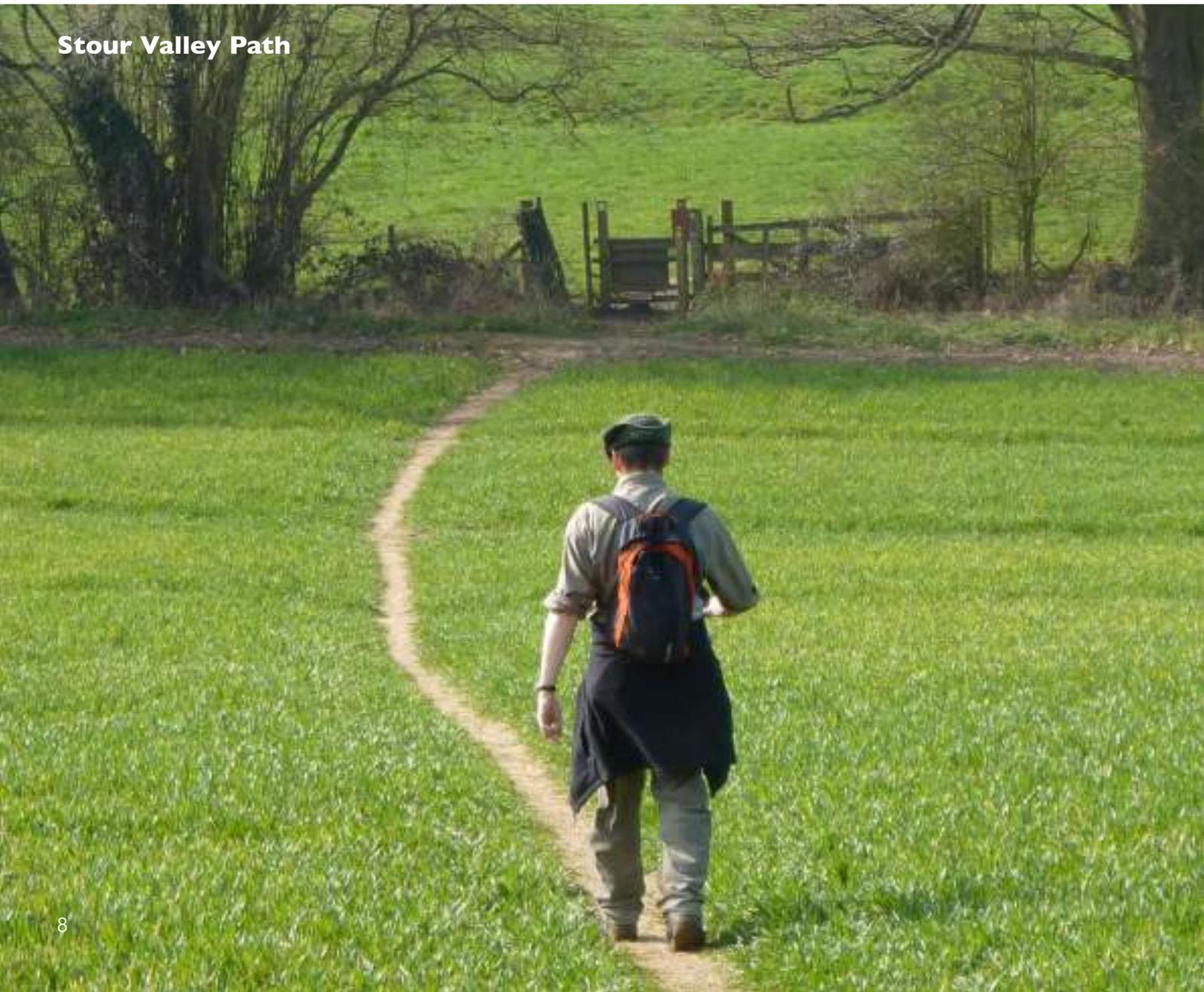
Green access includes public rights of way, open access and informal routes and moving about on foot, on bicycle or on horseback. It covers access to green space but also relates to accessing services, workplaces and schools. It is especially relevant to sustainable transport, health and wellbeing.

The Rights of Way and Access (ROW&A) team: Various Acts of Parliament, including the Highways Act 1980, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, places a statutory responsibility and power on Suffolk County Council to manage the public rights of way network.

The team with this specific responsibility is the Rights of Way and Access team. It works in partnership with others to manage the wider green access network which, in addition to public rights of way, includes other formal routes, such as cycle paths, less formal routes, such as permissive paths, and areas of open access.

The ROW&A team is split into area teams, who protect and maintain the PRoW and access network; the definitive map team, who maintain a legal record of PRoW; and the green access team who develop and promote green access.

Stour Valley Path



After 2026 (known as the '2026 cut-off') all historic routes not recorded on the definitive map will be extinguished (subject to certain limited exemptions).

Maintaining a legal record of all rights of way: the legal record of all rights of way is the definitive map and statement, managed by the definitive map team. The first maps were drafted in the 1950s when the network was recorded parish by parish. Over time, changes are made as new routes are identified, diverted, or extinguished. These changes are drafted by the definitive map team onto a working copy of the definitive map and periodically, changes are consolidated into a new definitive map, which is signed, sealed, dated and stored. This becomes the new legal record of the parish's network with a new working copy immediately created to accommodate any new routes, new diversions and new extinguishments.

After 2026 (known as the '2026 cut-off') all historic routes not recorded on the definitive map will be extinguished (subject to certain limited exemptions). In Suffolk many historic routes have already been added to the definitive map, but further scoping and evidential investigation is required to ensure any useful unrecorded routes are not lost.

Protecting and maintaining the rights of way network: area-based ROW&A teams have a wide-reaching role that involves working closely with the public, who report on the condition of the network, and with land managers and contractors, to ensure routes are easy to use. The ROW&A team has statutory duties and powers to make sure the 3,500 miles (5,700km) of the network are safe, fit and freely available for the public to use. This is achieved by:

- Signposting at the road to mark the start of every path;
- An annual programme of grass cutting on priority routes;
- Maintaining around 3000 bridges;
- Improving path surfaces using boardwalks, drainage schemes and surfacing materials;
- Using negotiation and legal powers to ensure paths are not deliberately damaged, ploughed up or obstructed.

The ability of the council to deliver these functions is, of course, dependant on budget and resources.

Developing and promoting the network: the areas, definitive map and green access teams work closely together when there are opportunities to develop the network. This may be in response to a new development or a funding project which can enable new routes to be created or routes resurfaced. The green access team leads on promoting the network. It works with community groups to create new walking guides, deliver the annual Suffolk Walking Festival, and promote green access through the Discover Suffolk website, the media and social media sites.





Fynn Valley Walk

Suffolk County Council's (SCC) priorities

In Suffolk, green access is relevant to each of SCC's three corporate priorities: Inclusive Growth; Health, Care and Wellbeing; and Efficient and Effective Public Services.

Inclusive Growth: Tourism in Suffolk is valued at £1.9 billion per year, employing nearly 40,000 people⁷. A third of Suffolk's residents say the countryside is the best thing about living in Suffolk⁸, making green access a key driver in growing the visitor economy. The ROW&A team works closely with tourism organisations across the county, including Visit Suffolk, destination management organisations and tourism action groups, to promote Suffolk's varied countryside locally, regionally and nationally. In addition, some PRoW maintenance is undertaken by small and medium sized local enterprises, benefitting the local economy.

Health, Care and Wellbeing: Green access is key to developing people's health and wellbeing. Inactivity is one of the top 10 causes of disease and disability in England and accounts for as many deaths as smoking. It costs the UK economy £7.4billion per year, including £0.9billion to the NHS alone.

Natural England's annual Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) shows that in England, 58% of people (25m) visit the countryside weekly, with an estimated 1.3 billion visits in 2015-2016. The research shows behaviours are changing with people visiting the countryside more frequently. For 47% of these visits, people are motivated by health and exercise (up from 34% in 2011) and 31% state these visits make them feel calmer and more relaxed (up from 25% in 2011).

Access to open countryside has a significant impact on how people feel physically and mentally. More and more research is highlighting the additional health benefits of being in the natural environment. Research by Outdoor Recreation Network⁹, a UK and Republic of Ireland network of countryside organisations, highlights the role countryside access plays in reducing anxiety and depression, whilst boosting self-esteem.

Rural populations are often more prone to health inequalities due to poorer access to health and care services, lack of public transport and isolation¹⁰. In Suffolk, the ROW&A team works in partnership with public health to promote health, care and wellbeing through Suffolk's green access network.

Efficient and Effective Public Services: Green access schemes provide value for money projects that address the corporate objectives of developing the economy and improving health, care and wellbeing as well as making Suffolk the greenest county. Working with external funders and local planning authorities, the ROW&A team draws in external investment from developers to enhance green access and provide sustainable travel options for commuting to work and school.

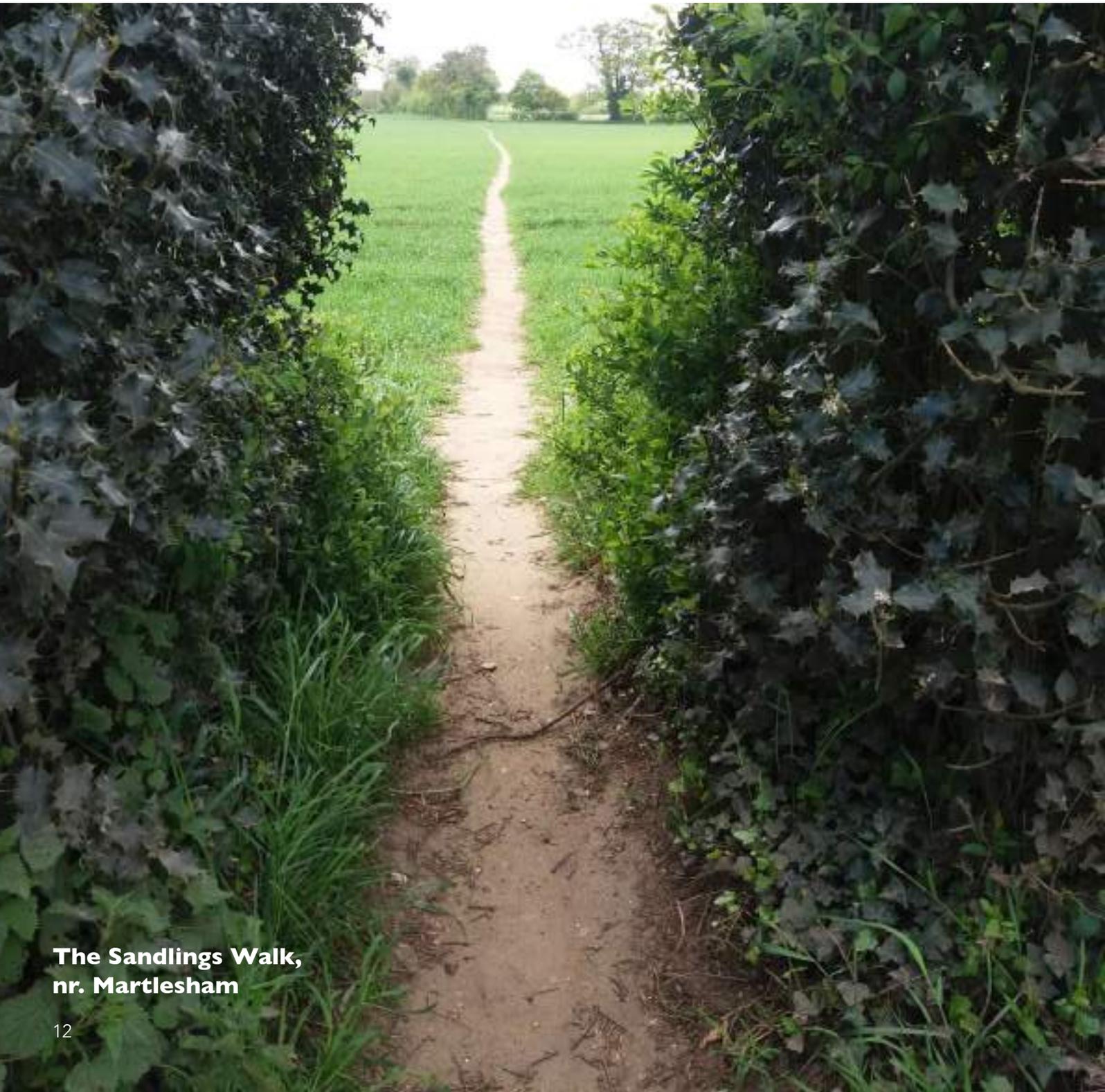
Suffolk County Council's key plans and strategies

Green access supports many of Suffolk County Council strategic commitments, including aspirations of Creating the Greenest County. Actions within this plan will also support outcomes in the following strategies:

- Suffolk Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2019.
- Suffolk Prevention Strategy.
- Local Transport Plan 2011-2031.
- Economic Strategy for Norfolk and Suffolk.
- Active For Life Suffolk Walking Strategy 2015-2020.
- Suffolk Cycling Strategy.
- Suffolk Nature Strategy.



Part 2 - In Step with Suffolk



**The Sandlings Walk,
nr. Martlesham**



St Edmund Way, Sicklesmere

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) – Suffolk Green Access Strategy

What is a ROWIP?

Each local highway authority in England is required to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 (Sections 60 and 61) places this duty on each such authority. It asserts that the purpose of the ROWIP is to provide a clear direction as to how the rights of way and access network is managed, maintained and improved to meet the needs of all users. The ROWIP is aimed at a wide group of people which includes the general public, community groups, local authority officers and developers, as well as policy and decision makers.

The Suffolk Green Access Strategy is SCC's second ROWIP – its first, published in 2006, was titled 'In Step With Suffolk'. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) provides statutory guidance on developing a ROWIP which states that a ROWIP needs to be reviewed every 10 years, and that it must explain how improvements to the public rights of way network will provide a better experience for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, carriage drivers, people with mobility problems and people using motorised vehicles. The Suffolk Green Access Strategy goes further than this statutory guidance as it also addresses open access sites, informal access arrangements, and access for walking and cycling on the wider highway network, including footways and quiet lanes.

Defra guidance requires the local highway authority to consult user groups and interested parties, assess the current state of the PRow network, devise the plan and prepare a statement of action before publishing a draft plan for comment before the final plan is published. The same guidance has been followed in the preparation and publication of the Suffolk Green Access Strategy.

This strategy replaces the previous ROWIP and reviews the achievements, then sets out objectives and actions for the rights of way and access network for a further 10 years.

The new plan has been developed against a backdrop of challenges but sets out opportunities for the ROW&A team, its partners and communities, to ensure the green access network continues to meet the needs of all people in Suffolk.

Review of the 2006 ROWIP

Suffolk County Council’s first ROWIP “In Step with Suffolk” spanned 2006-2016. It was developed following widespread consultation through questionnaire surveys and focus groups, and reviewed the use, demand and management of the rights of way network. The consultation identified 6 key objectives:

- Objective A: Provide a better signed, maintained and accessible network.
- Objective B: Provide and protect a more continuous network that provides for the requirements of all users.
- Objective C: Develop a safer network.
- Objective D: Increase community involvement in improving and managing the network.
- Objective E: Provide an up-to-date and publicly available digitalised definitive map for the whole of Suffolk.
- Objective F: Improve promotion, understanding and use of the network.

Here are some of the 2006 ROWIP’s achievements:

Objective A: Provide a better signed, maintained and accessible network

- Between 2006 and 2011, over £1.5 million was invested in PRow secured from the Government’s Local Transport Plan funding for highway improvements.



East Anglian Daily Times, 22nd December 2014

- In 2015, Suffolk County Council successfully gained £2.3 million from the Government’s Safer Cycling Fund, delivering significant rights of way schemes in Bury St Edmunds and in Mildenhall.

- The ROW&A team responded to and acted upon over 2,500 reports from the public every year on issues they’ve experienced using rights of way.

- Maintenance of rights of way is managed on a system of priorities. The system was reviewed creating Category 1 and Category 2 paths. Two thirds of the network are Category 1 paths, which means they receive a higher level of maintenance throughout the year.

- Between 2004 and 2010, over 10,000 roadside public rights of way signs were replaced.
- Between 2006 and 2016, over 600 barriers (stiles or gates) were either removed or improved to enhance access.
- Between 2006 and 2016, the grass cutting programme was re-tendered twice, reducing per metre costs and increasing the length of PRow cut.
- Up to 2,485 miles (4,000km) of paths are cut each year and, in addition, over 50 landowners cut the paths on their land.
- Suffolk County Council worked with land managers, the National Farmers Union, the Countryside & Landowners Association and the Suffolk Local Access Forum to launch a Land Manager Guide and adjust enforcement policy.

Part 2 - In Step with Suffolk



Disabled Ramblers on the Suffolk Coast & Heaths Path.



Greyfriars, Dunwich

Objective B: Provide and protect a more continuous network that provides for the requirements of all users.

- Green access has been integrated into SCC's policy documents including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Suffolk Cycling Strategy, Suffolk Walking Strategy, Suffolk Nature Strategy and Local Transport Plan.
- Coordination and awareness raising with local planning authorities and developers over planning applications led to commitments of significant funds for PRow improvements including £500,000 at Haverhill, £230,000 in Stowmarket, and £75,000 in Lowestoft.
- In 2011, SCC's countryside sites were divested to local communities, with public rights of way created to protect access at each site. Sites included the Lavenham Walk, Sudbury Valley Trail and Melford Walk.
- Numerous new rights of way were dedicated by landowners across Suffolk, including new routes in Assington and Whepstead.
- In 2013, a bridleway underpass was agreed in the design for the dualling of the A11 between Barton Mills and Thetford. The underpass links 2 large areas of open access with Thetford Forest and Lakenheath Warren to the north and The Kings Forest and a series of open access sites to the south, providing a continuous off-road network linking West Stow and Brandon County Parks. The local access forum played a significant part in this.
- Between 2008 and 2010, all open access sites were reviewed with new signs installed carrying clearer mapping and improved visitor information.
- In 2013, a new footpath was created alongside the A1094 Saxmundham Road to enable walkers following the Sailors Path to walk off-road beside Aldeburgh Golf Course.
- Working with the Access Group for Suffolk, the Easy-Going Trails booklet was published, promoting 12 accessible walks around the county for people with limited mobility, wheelchair users and pushchairs. The guide was launched at Thornham Walks in May 2012.
- In 2011, SCC secured £130,000 of Growth Area Funding from St Edmundsbury Borough Council to improve access along the Lark Valley Path north of Bury St Edmunds.
- The green access team's Discover Suffolk website has been promoted at various bus stops around the county, linking the use of sustainable transport with visiting the countryside.
- The Discover Suffolk project has supported the promotion of local village walks, circular cycle rides, horse riding trails and the Four Ferries leaflet.

Part 2 - In Step with Suffolk



Knettishall Heath Nature Reserve

Developing a safer network...

Between 2010 and 2013, a new off-road cycle route was created between West Row and Mildenhall. The new route enabled cyclists and equestrians to avoid a busy main road. The route was surfaced making it suitable not only for cyclists and equestrians, but also walkers, runners, pushchairs and wheelchair users. Realising the project was achieved by a partnership of county and local councils, planning officers, ecologists, tree officers, the Environment Agency, Natural England, County Farms, local cycling groups, angling clubs, schools, the cricket club and highways contractors. Opened in 2013, the route became an immediate commuter route, a safe route to schools and a leisure path for people to enjoy the countryside.

Objective C: Develop a safer network.

- Improved and new bridleway links have been created between Mildenhall and West Row, Stowmarket and Onehouse, and between north and south Bury St Edmunds. These have provided significant off-road access for walking and cycling between towns and outlying villages.
- Cycle track conversion orders create new cycle routes from existing footpaths. A number of new cycle routes were created including Dock Spur Bridge in Felixstowe and a link connecting Bury St Edmunds town centre with the hospital.
- Officers have worked with passenger transport to include PRoW as walking routes to school to improve health, sustainability and support school travel plans. The County Council seeks walking routes to school in any new development, e.g. Haverhill North East with a proposed new cycle path from Kedington using public rights of way.
- Officers worked with Network Rail to divert and extinguish high risk level crossings to improve local rail transport links. This included the confirmed Gun Lane Transport and Works Act Order that formed part of the Felixstowe Branch line improvements.
- The County Council reviewed its inspection regime for PRoW bridges with all bridges being inspected; a new specification devised for new bridges; and capital funding for PRoW structures increased.
- Traffic regulation orders (TROs), which enable the County Council to restrict the use of PRoW to limit damage and avoid conflict between users, have been used where necessary and officer guidance provided to landowners and user groups on the management of byways.



The Sailors' Path

Creating a more continuous network...

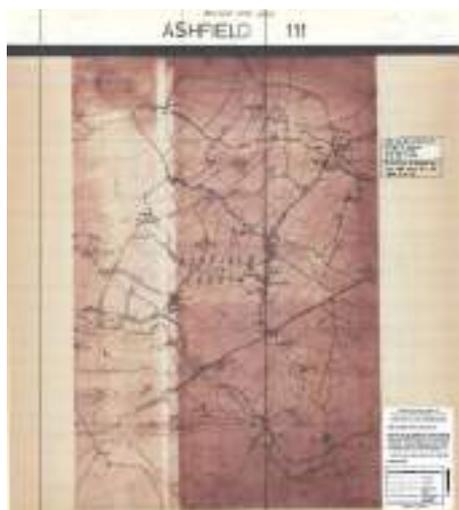
The Sailors' Path is an ancient commuting route once used by sailors between Snape and Aldeburgh. Today, the route is a popular tourist destination linking the heritage coast with Snape Maltings. Although mostly off-road, one section caused issues where the footpath met a main road, forcing walkers to walk on the road. Negotiations with Aldeburgh Golf Club and funding through a European cross-border project, allowed a new right of way to be created linking the footpath with the pavement.

Objective D: Increase community involvement in improving and managing the network.

- The County Council provides secretariat and guidance to the Suffolk Local Access Forum, recruiting new members to extend the knowledge, skills and experiences of the forum to enhance their role and effectiveness.
- The County Council's work with the Suffolk Local Access Forum helps promote understanding of different needs of land managers and users of public rights of way.
- Guidance and advice has been given to parishes on the development of parish plans.
- In 2010, the County Council developed a community project in preparation for a submission to Heritage Lottery "Access to Nature" Fund. Although the bid was unsuccessful, a 2-year project left a legacy of village walk leaflets, community involvement in maintaining rights of way and guided countryside walks.
- In 2016, the County Council started promoting Walkers Are Welcome, a national scheme for communities to promote their destination as walker-friendly.
- The County Council works with public health and OneLife Suffolk to promote the health walk

Part 2 - In Step with Suffolk

There is a definitive map and statement for each parish, forming a legal record of all its public rights of way. These documents are legally signed, sealed, dated and stored in the County Records Office. Any subsequent legal changes to the network are recorded on a working copy definitive map. The working copy definitive maps can be viewed at County Council offices and online. Periodically, all changes are legally consolidated to produce a new definitive map. Since 2016, over 90 parishes have been digitally consolidated, bringing the oldest definitive maps up-to-date on modern Ordnance Survey base mapping. Digital consolidation has the advantage that updated working copies can be printed incorporating legal changes and removing the need for hand-drawn annotations. The digital public rights of way lines can also be shared with local authorities and other parties, such as developers.



An example of an old working copy of the definitive map, with hand-drawn updates (Ashfield Parish, 1991)

Objective E: Provide an up-to-date and publicly available digitalised definitive map for the whole of Suffolk

- All public rights of way are recorded on a definitive map and statement, a legal record of each route. Over time, the map changes as alterations are made to the network: a claim for a route yet to be recorded; a need to divert a route; a route being extinguished; or a new route being created. These changes take place through a legal process called a definitive map modification order (DMMO) and a public path order (PPO). Between 2006 and 2016, 172 DMMO claims were investigated with 81 orders confirmed, and 215 PPO cases were processed with 192 orders or agreements confirmed.
- Eight traffic regulation orders (which manage access along a public right of way) and 7 licensed path agreements (which create time-limited public rights of way) were completed.
- A definitive map of Ipswich was published for the first time in May 2009, with 21 routes. A further 41 routes were added between 2009 and 2016.
- A new process was developed to review and prioritise order making casework to give priority to cases that potentially deliver greatest public benefit.
- Scanned images of the working copy definitive map and copies of DMMOs and PPOs can now be viewed online.



An example of a new working copy of the Definitive Map produced and updated digitally (Woodbridge, 2015)

Part 2 - In Step with Suffolk

Promoting the network...

In 2018 over 2,000 people attended the Suffolk Walking Festival, walking over 10,000 miles and taking an astonishing 24 million steps across Suffolk. It was "...the most relaxed and friendly walk I've been on to date", one walker said. The festival impacts on health and the economy: half of participants said they would become more active as a result of taking part; and over £175,000 was contributed to the county's economy.

Objective F: Improve promotion, understanding and use of the network.

- In 2008, the Discover Suffolk Project was launched. The project develops and promotes countryside access and delivered new and improved access in the Waveney Valley, led to the creation of the Suffolk Walking Festival and created a website to promote Suffolk's countryside.
- The Suffolk Walking Festival was launched in 2010. It evolved out of the Heart of Suffolk Walking Festival, launched in 2008, and is a partnership of all local authorities, conservation bodies, charities, town centre guides and many volunteer groups.
- Discover Suffolk has worked in partnership with communities, parish and town councils, tourism organisations and the Church of England to promote the countryside and the use of public rights of way.
- The green access team has represented the County Council on Visit Suffolk's Marketing Panel, steering how the county is promoted to tourists.
- The team has worked closely with the media including BBC Radio Suffolk, Archant who produce the East Anglia Daily Times and the Suffolk Magazine, and various local, regional and national publications to promote Suffolk as a countryside destination.



Part 3 - Delivery Plan



Part 3 - Delivery Plan

Suffolk Green Access Strategy

Consultation

Developing Suffolk County Council's Green Access Strategy started with consultation. In 2016, online consultation was conducted through Survey Monkey. It sought people's views on the rights of way network, including asking how they use the network, their views on how easy it is to use, how they discover where to visit, what adversely affects them using rights of way, and for landowners how rights of way affect managing their land. The consultation received over 800 responses. These were from members of the public, user groups, parish councils and land managers. A second consultation was carried out in 2019 which received 357 comments, resulting in further amendments to this strategy.

Well managed infrastructure provides the building blocks for promotion and working with communities and other agencies to improve and exploit the green access network.

Key Themes

Four key themes were identified from the consultation:

1. Managing green access infrastructure, looking at:
 - o How the network is recorded, managed, maintained and protected.
 - o How landowners are advised of their responsibilities.
2. Improving green access infrastructure, identifying:
 - o How the network is enhanced by improving existing rights of way, creating new routes, and developing the network for today's user.
3. Promoting green access, focusing on:
 - o How the public are encouraged and enabled to use the green access network more easily.
 - o How well we understand what motivates or inhibits people from visiting the countryside, using the green access network and travelling sustainably.
 - o How we communicate with the public including: marketing; editorials and advertising; events; and working with volunteers and communities to promote access locally.
4. Developing healthy and sustainable communities, addressing:
 - o How green access can be embedded in the health agenda and how green access can contribute to our physical and mental wellbeing.
 - o How working with communities can make people healthier.
 - o How planning of developments can allow for green access, both within and outside the development site.
 - o How rights of way can be a key feature of any new development, creating green corridors and access into the surrounding countryside.
 - o The way communities can be involved in the management and promotion of green access.





1. Managing green access infrastructure

“Walking is the nearest activity to perfect exercise”
(Morris and Hardman, 1997).

Introduction

Public rights of way are a key component of the highway network. The highway network refers to the entire network of roads and public rights of way and Suffolk County Council, as the local highway authority, has a duty to maintain this network. This is set out in Section 36 of the Highways Act 1980, with Section 130 of the Act providing a further duty to protect the rights of the public to both use and enjoy all highways.

Although the local highway authority exercises this duty, in most instances it does not actually own the land on which the right of way lies. It is only responsible for the surface of the route and, consequently, managing the network becomes a shared responsibility between the highway authority, the land manager and the local community.

To manage the network, the ROW&A team records, protects, maintains, develops and promotes the network.

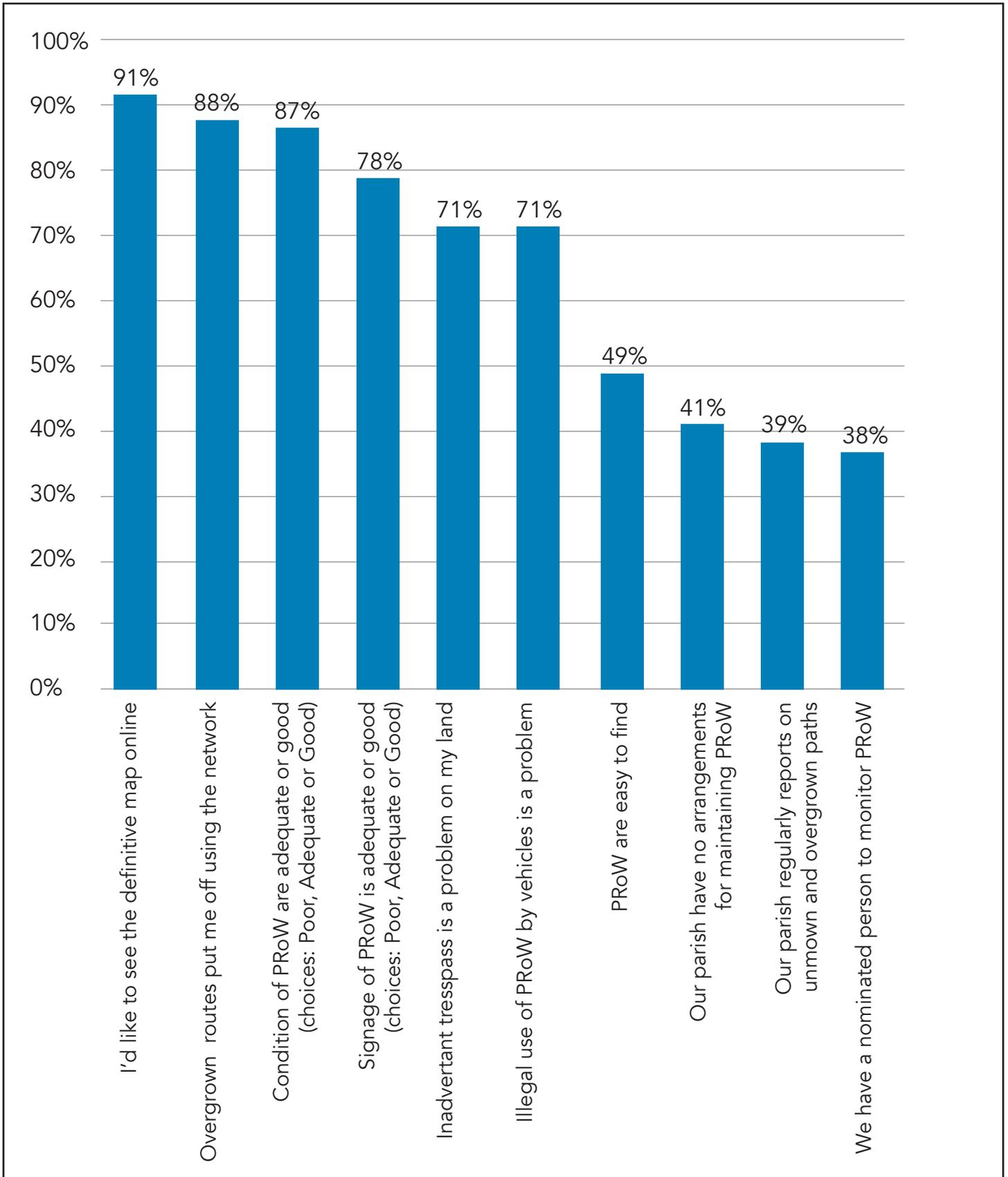
The definitive map team ensures all public rights of way are accurately recorded, and that any changes to the network are completed in compliance with the law.

The area teams work closely with land managers and the public to ensure all rights of way are accessible on the ground, addressing any obstacles to access and repairing damage to routes.

The green access team focuses on development and promotion, coordinating responses to planning developments, working in partnership on external funded projects and promoting green access to the public.

**Consultation key findings:
managing green access infrastructure**

The consultation showed that whilst the condition and signage of PROW was deemed to be good, there were issues with overgrown routes and trespass. Over 90% of respondents wanted to see the definitive map online.



1. Delivery Plan: managing green access infrastructure

Timescale:

1 = on-going activity

2 = within 3 years

3 = within 5 years

4 = 5 years+

Resources:

£ = existing resources

££ = additional resources (up to £100k) and reallocation of staff resources

£££ = significant additional resources (over £100k) and additional staff

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
1.1 Recording the network					
1.1.1 Ensure the definitive map is accessible to the public.	Complete the legal process to produce a digitally updated definitive map and statement for the whole county. Consolidate the existing definitive maps and statements into a single countywide definitive map and statement and commence rolling consolidation.	1	£	Number of parishes digitally consolidated. Rolling consolidation of countywide definitive map commenced.	Up-to-date definitive map is easily accessible to all.
1.1.2 Ensure the definitive map is accessible to the public.	Publish a digital version of the definitive map on the County Council's website.	1	£	Publication of the digital working copy definitive map online.	Up-to-date definitive map is easily accessible to all.
1.1.3 Making orders in the public interest.	Continue to prioritise definitive map case work in the public interest.	1	£	Number of high priority cases put into workstream each year.	A public rights of way network that meets the needs of today's user.
1.1.4 Making orders in the public interest.	Review the prioritisation scheme to cover the 2026 cut-off in line with legislation when implemented.	1	£	Review complete.	A public rights of way network that meets the needs of today's user.
1.1.5 Making orders in the public interest.	2026 cut-off date – scope outstanding historic claims and anomalies with sufficient evidence to proceed by DMMO and prioritise. Process applications and discovery of evidence arising from 2026 cut-off.	2	£££	Number of historic DMMO cases determined.	A public rights of way network that meets the needs of today's user.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
1.2 Protecting the network					
1.2.1 Make it easy to access the PRow network.	Work with land managers to help them meet their statutory responsibilities, using enforcement procedures where public rights of way are obstructed.	1	£	Annual condition survey data.	More people with mobility issues using the network.
1.2.2 Make it easy to access the PRow network.	When opportunities arise, remove unnecessary physical and psychological barriers that adversely affect people using the network.	1	£	Barriers removed.	More people with mobility issues using the network.
1.2.3 Make it easy to access the PRow network.	Protect the network from adverse impacts from new developments.	1	£	Number of developments addressed.	More routes in the PRow network used regularly.
1.2.4 Make it easy to access the PRow network.	Review the role of communities in giving informal advice to land managers on caring for PRow on their land.	2	£	Review complete.	More routes in the PRow network used regularly.
1.2.5 Make it easy to access the PRow network.	Prepare for a new agricultural policy post-Brexit, and if required review relationship with stakeholders.	2	££	Policy reviewed.	More PRow routes used regularly.
1.2.6 Make it easy to access the PRow network.	Work with land managers to prepare for new agricultural and environmental standards, to ensure both compliance with highway law and to support access related diversification.	2	£	Discussions held and a post-Brexit understanding with land managers on managing access on their land in place.	More PRow routes used regularly.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
1.3 Maintaining the network					
1.3.1 Manage the network efficiently.	Develop the public rights of way asset management to ensure innovative, prioritised and efficient management of the network that reflects available budget.	1	££	Updated asset management plan.	A more effectively and efficiently managed network – being used by more people.
1.3.2 Manage the network efficiently.	Use local contractors and land managers on small to medium scale PRow maintenance.	1	£	Number of schemes delivered.	More routes used regularly because of a more efficiently maintained network.
1.3.3 Manage the network efficiently.	Review the management of large scale projects to deliver best value.	2	£	An agreed policy for how the council manages larger scale projects.	A more efficiently managed network.
1.3.4 Manage the network efficiently.	Review the system for prioritisation of the PRow network.	2	£	A reprioritised network.	Planned maintenance rather than expensive / disruptive emergency works on most used routes.
1.3.5 Manage the network efficiently.	Migrate the PRow management and customer reporting systems to Insight.	1	£	Successful migration from PROWS to Insight database.	More defects on the network being fixed because of higher levels of reporting.
1.3.6 Manage the network efficiently.	Deliver a cost effective programme of works.	1	£	Outputs of maintenance works, e.g. signposts replaced.	Planned maintenance rather than expensive / disruptive emergency works on most used routes.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
1.3 Maintaining the network					
1.3.7 Byway maintenance.	Work with user groups to deter anti-social use and take a proportionate approach to byways maintenance. Where damage by public vehicles cannot be repaired at reasonable cost, consider restricting or prohibiting access to those types of vehicles causing the damage. Access will only be restricted where there is evidence of a pattern of misuse.	1	£	Traffic orders made.	Restoration of a reasonable surface.
1.3.8 Looking after our structures (mainly bridges).	Work on structures will be prioritised using a scoring system.	1	£	A scoring system in place.	A more efficiently managed network.
1.3.9 Looking after our structures (mainly bridges).	Works on high priority structures which can be funded from existing budgets will be programmed in the same way as other maintenance work.	1	£	A prioritised work programme in place.	A more efficiently managed network.
1.3.10 Looking after our structures (mainly bridges).	The County Council will seek to extend the life of high cost high priority bridges and other structures requiring repair using low cost solutions.	1	£	Examples of low cost solutions.	Planned maintenance rather than expensive/ disruptive emergency works on most used routes.
1.3.11 Looking after our structures (mainly bridges).	Where high priority structures require refurbishment or replacement and there is no funding, The County Council will seek contributions.	1	££ or £££	Locations where contributions received.	More funds available to work on structures.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
1.3 Maintaining the network					
1.3.12 Looking after our structures (mainly bridges).	Where appropriate The County Council will seek diversions to alternative crossing points where funds are not available to repair or replace a high priority structure.	1	£ or ££	Locations where PRoW successfully diverted.	Reduced spending on managing structures releases funding for other works on PROW network.
1.3.13 Looking after our structures (mainly bridges).	Lower priority work on structures will be assessed on the basis of cost and benefit.	1	£	Works completed.	Reduced spending on managing structures releases funding for other works on PROW network.
1.3.14 Looking after our network.	Where a public right of way becomes unusable and the council considers the cost of repair or reinstatement to be too high, it will consider creating an alternative route. The community will be consulted.	1	££	Locations where PRoW successfully diverted.	PROW routes available to use.
1.3.15 Manage the network efficiently.	Instigate a new public rights of way vegetation cutting contract, reflecting current market prices.	2	£	Award of new contract and length of paths cut.	Reduced spending releases funding for other works on PROW network.

2. Improving green access infrastructure

"A healthier population makes for a more robust and prosperous economy."¹¹

Introduction

The opportunities for developing green access involve the whole ROW&A team. Development projects will often include changes to the definitive map requiring legal orders to be drawn up; working closely with land owners requesting permissions and access to sites; liaising with the public on how the development will be delivered; working on funding bids and reporting on the delivery of projects; and celebrating the delivery of new projects through the media.

PRoW works are relatively low cost, providing excellent value for money. Past public rights of way projects have been funded through partnerships (Sustrans and parish councils), utilising local and national capital budgets (Local Transport Plan and Department for Transport Cycle Safety Fund), and through the European Regional Development Fund (InterReg Cross Border Cooperation Programme).

A key opportunity for funding improvements is the planning process. Suffolk County Council is a statutory consultee on all local planning applications that affect public rights of way and the team receives over 1,000 consultations a year.



Sustainable development is defined as “making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations.”



With aspirations to build 66,000 new homes in Suffolk between 2019 and 2039¹², there is a growing number of planning applications and consultations. Where developments are significant, it is possible to obtain funding or to agree works with the developer to improve the network. This approach can create new routes, improve existing routes, or change the status of a route, for example upgrading a footpath to a bridleway.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development is defined as “making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations.”

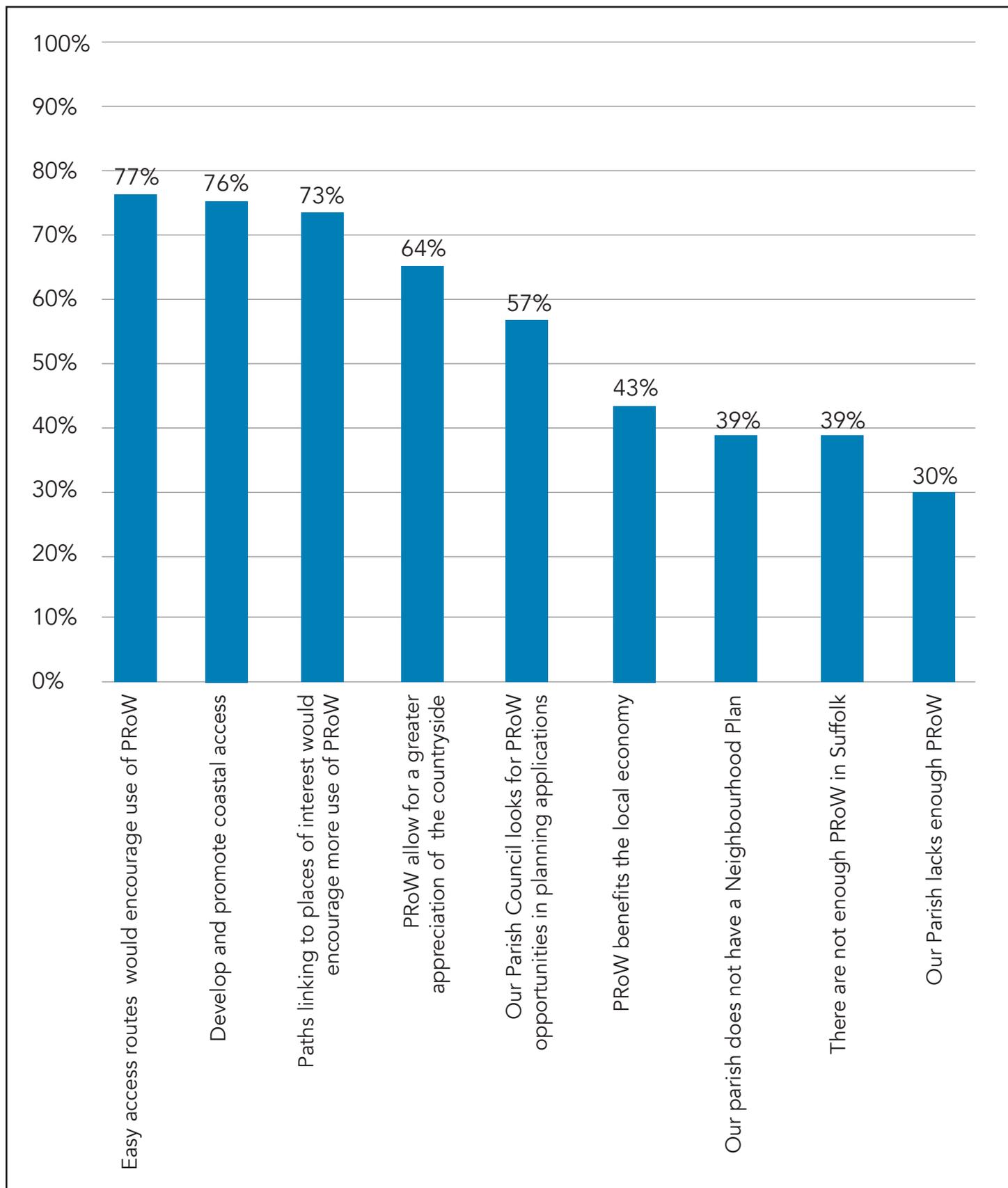
The NPPF also sets out aspirations to make the planning process more inclusive and creative. It provides a framework for local communities and their councils to produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans which will reflect the needs of their local communities.

The ROW&A team provides advice and guidance on the development of local and neighbourhood plans, presenting the case that the public rights of way network plays a key role in developing sustainable communities. Also, within this context sits Suffolk’s Walking and Cycling Strategies. The walking strategy aims to make walking the default option for any journey under 20 minutes. This is where the rights of way network plays a pivotal role; providing safe off-road travel options for those wishing to walk or cycle as an alternative to driving.

The county council is committed to maintaining the green access network within the constraints of revenue and capital funding allocation.

**Consultation key findings:
improving green access infrastructure**

In the consultation two thirds of respondents recognised how PROW allow for a greater appreciation of the countryside and over half of parishes look for PROW improvements in planning applications. However, three quarters of respondents would like to see more easy access routes, more routes that link places of interest and the promotion of coastal access.



2. Delivery Plan: improving green access infrastructure

Timescale:

- 1 = on-going activity
- 2 = within 3 years
- 3 = within 5 years
- 4 = 5 years+

Resources:

- £ = existing resources
- ££ = additional resources (up to £100k) and reallocation of staff resources
- £££ = significant additional resources (over £100k) and additional staff

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
2.1 Improving the network					
2.1.1 Make the network better for all users.	Seek opportunities to enhance public rights of way, including new linkages and upgrading routes where there is a need, to improve access for all and support healthy and sustainable access between communities and services. Funding to be sought through development and transport funding, external grants, other councils and partnership working.	1	£	Improvements delivered.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.
2.2 Developments					
2.2.1 Make the network better for all users.	Where possible and appropriate, work with planners to enhance public rights of way as green corridors within new developments. Where this is not possible, seek the realignment of public rights of way within a green corridor that retains its integrity and links to the natural environment.	1	£	Number of sites with enhanced PRoW.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.
2.2.2 Make the network better for all users.	Where relevant, seek the improvement and creation of new offsite public rights of way to link to other public rights of way or to features of interest.	1	£	Number of sites with enhanced off-site PRoW.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
2.2 Developments					
2.2.3 Make the network better for all users.	Develop a range of improvement proposals that are fit for funding.	2	£	Number of improvements identified.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.
2.2.4 Recognise green access as a strategic and valuable asset in achieving sustainable communities and economic growth.	Streamline the public rights of way response to local planning authorities and other consultations.	2	£	Launch new process.	Greater investment in green access.
2.2.5 Recognise green access as a strategic and valuable asset.	Influence the development of local plans, neighbourhood plans and design guides.	1	£	Number of plans reviewed.	Greater investment in green access.
2.2.6 Recognise green access as a strategic and valuable asset.	Raise awareness with local planning authorities to influence the design of new developments with a strong emphasis on delivering those parts of the National Planning Policy Framework which relate to improving green access and the County Council's policies.	2	£	Number of local planning authorities met and influenced.	Greater investment in green access.
2.2.7 Recognise green access as a strategic and valuable asset.	Contribute to the development of the Suffolk Design Guide to ensure green access is embedded in the guide.	1	£	Inclusion in the guide of green access principles.	Greater investment in green access.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
2.3 Connectivity					
2.3.1 Take a whole highway approach when considering the journeys of vulnerable users.	Work with colleagues and other agencies to consider the needs of non-motorised users on the road as well as the PRow network.	1	£	Number of agencies influenced.	Greater investment in green access.
2.3.2 Create a more connected network.	Obtain significant public rights of way improvements and legacies on nationally important development projects, such as Sizewell C and East Anglia Wind Farm developments.	1	££	Number of schemes influenced.	Greater investment in green access.
2.3.3 Create a more connected network.	Work with Network Rail to improve safety at public rights of way level crossings. Where closures are sought, ensure new public rights of way are created which work well for all users, are well maintained, safe and funded. Oppose proposals which do not meet the needs of local communities in accessing public rights of way.	3	££	Number of schemes influenced.	Greater investment in green access.
2.3.4 Create a more connected network.	Work with Highways England to address public rights of way severed by trunk roads through diversions to existing infrastructure or provision of new grade-separated crossings.	1	£	Number of crossings where the council has sought changes.	Greater investment in green access.
2.3.5 Create a more connected network.	Carry out legal order-making to facilitate improvements to the network as opportunities arise.	1	£	Orders made.	Greater investment in green access.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
2.4 England Coast Path					
2.4.1 Promote coastal access and bring economic benefits to the region.	Inaugurate the new England Coast Path infrastructure on behalf of Natural England and maintain it thereafter in line with national trail standards.	2	££	Sections of England Coast Path (out of total of 5) where new infrastructure completed.	Increased economic activity.
2.4.2 Promote coastal access and bring economic benefits to the region.	Establish a partnership to maintain and promote the England Coast Path around East Anglia as a regional coast path, maximising its benefits.	3	£££	Partnership established.	Increased economic activity.
2.4.3 Promote coastal access and bring economic benefits to the region.	Work with Natural England to launch the England Coast path in Suffolk with emphasis on first and last sections.	2	££	Number of launch events.	Increased economic activity.



Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
2.5 Open Access					
2.5.1 Ensure people can experience and enjoy Suffolk's heathland.	Work with Natural England, land managers and communities to manage open access.	1	£	Number of sites managed.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.
2.5.2 Ensure people can experience and enjoy Suffolk's heathlands.	Identify potential areas of new open access where opportunities arise.	2	££	Number of new sites identified.	Greater access to green space.
2.5.3 Ensure people can experience and enjoy Suffolk's heathlands.	Work with Natural England to dedicate new areas of open access, where it meets the criteria for dedication.	2	£	Number of new sites dedicated.	Greater access to green space.
2.5.4 Ensure people can experience and enjoy Suffolk's heathlands.	Review promotion and accessibility of open access sites.	3	££	Number of sites reviewed.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.
2.5.5 Ensure people can experience and enjoy Suffolk's heathlands.	Work with Natural England, the Suffolk Local Access Forum and land managers when open access restrictions are reviewed to ensure any restrictions are valid.	3	££	Number of sites reviewed.	Greater access to green space.

3. Promoting green access

“Suffolk provides an intoxicating variety of places to explore” (BBC Country Magazine, 2018)

Introduction

Suffolk is an attractive destination in which to live and work, and access to the countryside plays a key role in drawing in tourists and enhancing the quality of life for those living in the county. The public rights of way network is vital in enabling people to experience, enjoy and appreciate the natural environment. The quality of the network therefore has a direct impact on the county's economy through tourism, and on people's wellbeing by enabling healthier lifestyles. However, people's awareness of green access is often limited, and therefore promoting green access is highlighted as a key theme for Suffolk's Green Access Strategy.

Tourism

Suffolk's tourism economy is worth £1.9bn per year, employing nearly 40,000 people. It is Suffolk's third largest employer after 'Public Administration, Education and Health', and 'Wholesale and Retail Trade'. In 2018, BBC Countryfile shortlisted Suffolk as one of the top 5 holiday destinations in the UK, confirming that Suffolk's natural environment is a key driver in promoting Suffolk as a place to visit.

Countryside access has a proven benefit to the tourism economy. The England Coast Path (ECP) is a new long-distance walking route around the coast of England. Where the ECP has been completed elsewhere in England, it has had an impact on coastal destinations on both visitor numbers and spend. In 2012, the South West Coast Path was estimated to have generated a spend of £436 million, supporting 9,771 full time equivalent jobs.

The ROW&A team is working closely with Natural England to ensure the ECP delivers the best outcome for Suffolk. A key feature for Suffolk, differentiating it from many other counties, is its estuaries and the County Council will seek to ensure the route includes access along these estuaries, providing a continuous path for people to follow.



Suffolk Green Access Strategy



Dunwich

The ROW&A team works closely with tourism partners and local communities to promote countryside access at national, regional, local and grass-roots levels. The Discover Suffolk project delivers a range of access projects and activities that promote tourism. The project includes websites (www.discoveruffolk.org.uk) and social media, develops new village walking and cycling leaflets, and works with the media to promote Suffolk's countryside.

The annual Suffolk Walking Festival, established in 2010, is Suffolk's only pan-county event with media partners of BBC Radio Suffolk and Archant publications. It has established partnerships with various organisations including RSPB, National Trust, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and public health and is supported by each of the county's district and borough councils and attracts private sponsorship.

Health

Although covered in more detail in theme 4, the health benefits of being active also impact on the county's economy. Incorporating activity into everyday lifestyles reduces the risk of developing life-limiting health conditions and this provides preventative care. This helps to address the costs of curative care by the NHS and the associated costs to business through absence from work, low productivity and out of work benefits.

Walking is often cited as one of the most accessible ways to be active. The Department for Transport has a long-term ambition for walking and cycling to become the natural choice for shorter journeys including commutes to school and work. In Suffolk's Walking Strategy, that target is for walking to be the default choice for all journeys under 20 minutes. SCC considers this target should be extended to cycling as well and will use this standard when considering proposals that impact on green access and when opportunities arise to improve access.

Developing an accessible right of way network that is well promoted helps everyone and with Suffolk's ageing population keeping active for longer will have a continued effect on health costs and employment productivity.

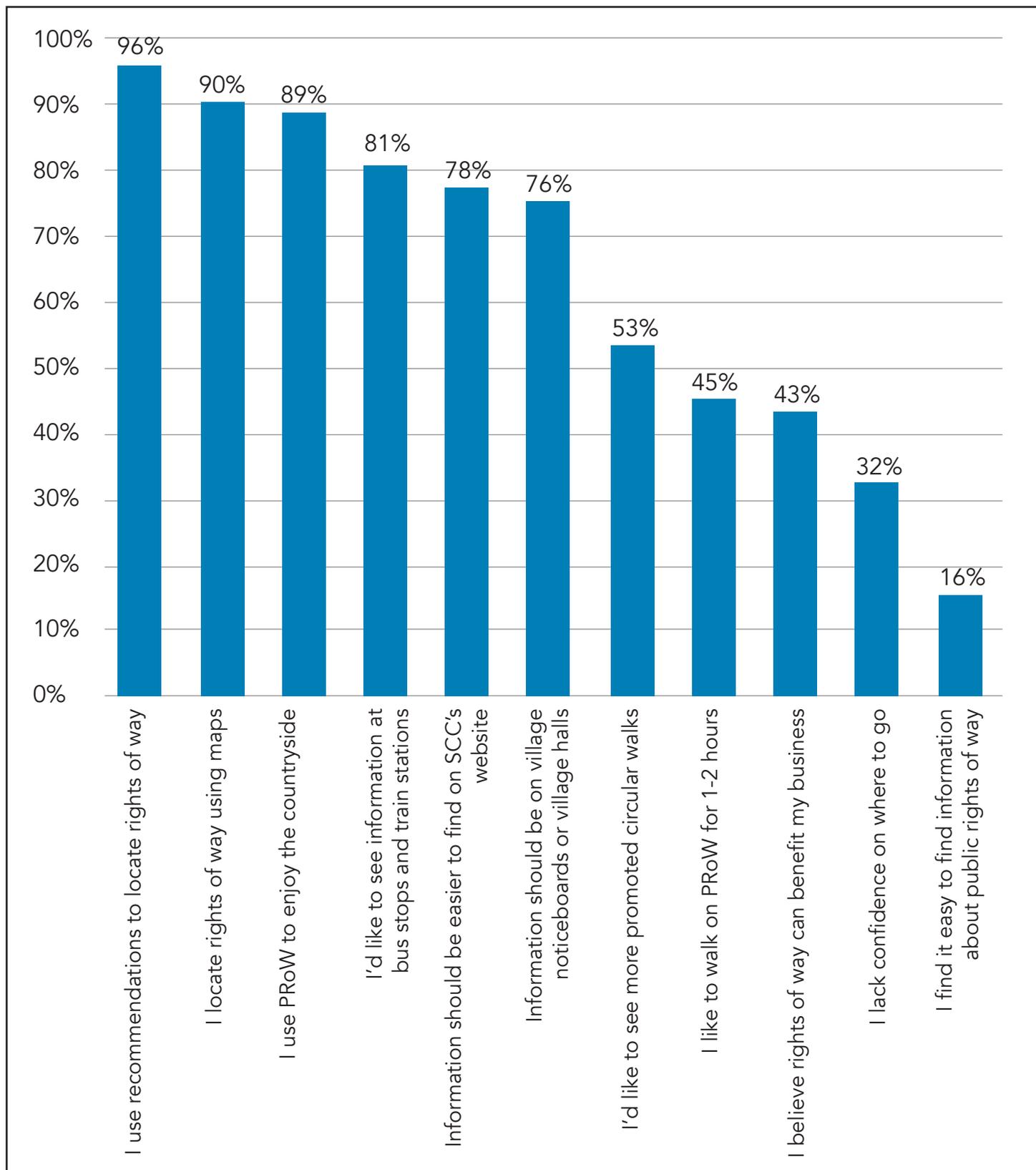
The ROW&A team works with public health and, specifically, the Most Active County team and OneLife Suffolk to identify ways to address health inequalities by utilising the green access network.



The Angles Way

**Consultation key findings:
promoting green access**

Nearly all respondents to the consultation used public rights of way with people using recommendations and maps to explore the rights of way network. However, over three quarters also wanted to see information more readily available locally or on the internet, with a third lacking confidence on where to go.



3. Delivery Plan: Promoting green access

Timescale:

- 1 = on-going activity
- 2 = within 3 years
- 3 = within 5 years
- 4 = 5 years+

Resources:

- £ = existing resources
- ££ = additional resources (up to £100k) and reallocation of staff resources
- £££ = significant additional resources (over £100k) and additional staff

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
3.1 Research					
3.1.1 Understand how and why people use green access.	Work with University of East Anglia and others to research how people use the green access network to better understand the barriers to entry.	1	£	Research report received.	Increased use of green access.
3.1.2 Understand how and why people use green access.	Gather feedback following each Suffolk Walking Festival to understand the value of the festival to participants and ways to further develop the event.	1	£	Report received.	Increased use of green access.
3.1.3 Develop innovative means of promoting green access.	Where appropriate, implement new ideas from research to alleviate those issues that inhibit access to the countryside.	2	££	Number of projects delivered.	Increased use of green access.
3.2 Promotion					
3.2.1 Raise awareness, appreciation, and understanding of Suffolk's countryside.	Work closely with tourism organisations, communities and businesses, to promote Suffolk as a destination of diverse and accessible landscapes.	1	£	Number of joint projects delivered.	Increased tourism economy.
3.2.2 Promote the Discover Suffolk brand.	Develop the Discover Suffolk range of leaflets promoting circular and accessible walks and rides.	1	£	Number of new leaflets published.	Increased tourism economy.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
3.2 Promotion					
3.2.3 Use the green access network to promote Suffolk as a desirable location to live, work and visit.	Develop the Discover Suffolk website to promote access to Suffolk's countryside, highlighting seasonal activities, local walks and rides, and relevant tourism businesses.	1	£	New and refreshed Discover Suffolk website launched.	Increased tourism economy.
3.2.4 Engage the public in green access.	Review and refresh green access presence on County Council's websites.	1	£	Refreshed website presence.	Improved on-line experience.
3.2.5 Engage the public in green access.	Use social media to engage with users, community groups and visitors to promote Suffolk's countryside and green tourism.	1	£	Volume of social media activity including followers on social media platforms.	Increased tourism economy.
3.2.6 Publicise green access and the Discover Suffolk brand.	Work with the media at a local, regional and national level to promote Suffolk's green access network.	1	£	Number of media articles achieved.	Increased tourism economy.
3.2.7 Promote the health benefits of green access.	Work in partnership to integrate green access into other strategies and plans.	1	£	Number of partnership plans affected.	Healthier communities.
3.3 Events					
3.3.1 Showcase Suffolk as an accessible destination.	Champion the Suffolk Walking Festival, working collaboratively to enable and encourage residents and tourists of all abilities to participate in the event.	1	£	Number of walking festival events delivered.	Increased tourism economy.
3.3.2 Develop relationships with local businesses to seek sponsorship and promotion of green access.	Seek external funding and investigate efficiencies to secure the Suffolk Walking Festival as self-supporting.	2	££	Amount of sponsorship secured.	Increased tourism economy.



4. Developing healthy and sustainable communities

"How we plan design and manage our landscapes should be guided as much by their importance for health as for all of their other functions." (The Landscape Institute 2013)

Introduction

Whilst the benefits of the natural environment on wellbeing are well recognised, Suffolk's countryside and its rights of way network remain underutilised as a health resource. With a network of over 3,500 miles of rights of way across Suffolk, plus permissive paths and open access land, the green access network offers significant opportunities to enhance the health and wellbeing of local communities. With increasing demands on health providers, green access offers sustainable models of enhancing health and wellbeing from both a preventative and a rehabilitative perspective.

Being active, especially in green space, is proven to be good for both physical and mental health and wellbeing (the same is true for blue space, which is being beside water, lakes, rivers or the sea). Studies identify that access to green space for outdoor exercise delivers £2.2bn of health benefits to adults in England each year¹³. It can have positive outcomes on a wide range of health conditions including obesity; long term health conditions; preventing early death; and mental health, including dementia.

Involving people and communities in managing green access provides a range of benefits. Research undertaken by the Social and Economic Research Group based at the University of Essex (www.iser.essex.ac.uk) shows that environmental volunteering can help overcome socioeconomic barriers to green access, improve self-esteem and build social capacity. It can give people meaning and a sense of identity and can be a means of re-integrating marginalised people into society whilst enhancing people's value of the environment. Volunteering in green access can involve clearing vegetation, building paths and steps, installing new gates or seating, or waymarking routes. It can include researching new trails, writing new guides or guiding walks. These activities can complement the work of other organisations, such as conservation groups, in developing communities and building what is referred to as "community capacity".

Suffolk Green Access Strategy

Studies identify that access to green space for outdoor exercise delivers £2.2bn of health benefits to adults in England each year



Suffolk County Council is committed to developing community capacity by influencing the shape of places. It's important to maximise the potential for green access in new developments and recognise the significant contribution it can make to improving health outcomes by enabling more active lifestyles.

Suffolk County Council recognises the importance of involving communities in the development and management of the green access network, especially when resources are limited. The impact of local communities through such initiatives as Walkers Are Welcome, and through volunteer programmes run by partner organisations, has a significant impact. Volunteers assist in monitoring the state of the network, highlighting maintenance issues and delivering essential works, and plan events, including health walks as well as leading walks for the Suffolk Walking Festival. These activities all help to raise awareness of the local green access network and encourage others to enjoy the countryside with its benefits to health and the tourism economy.

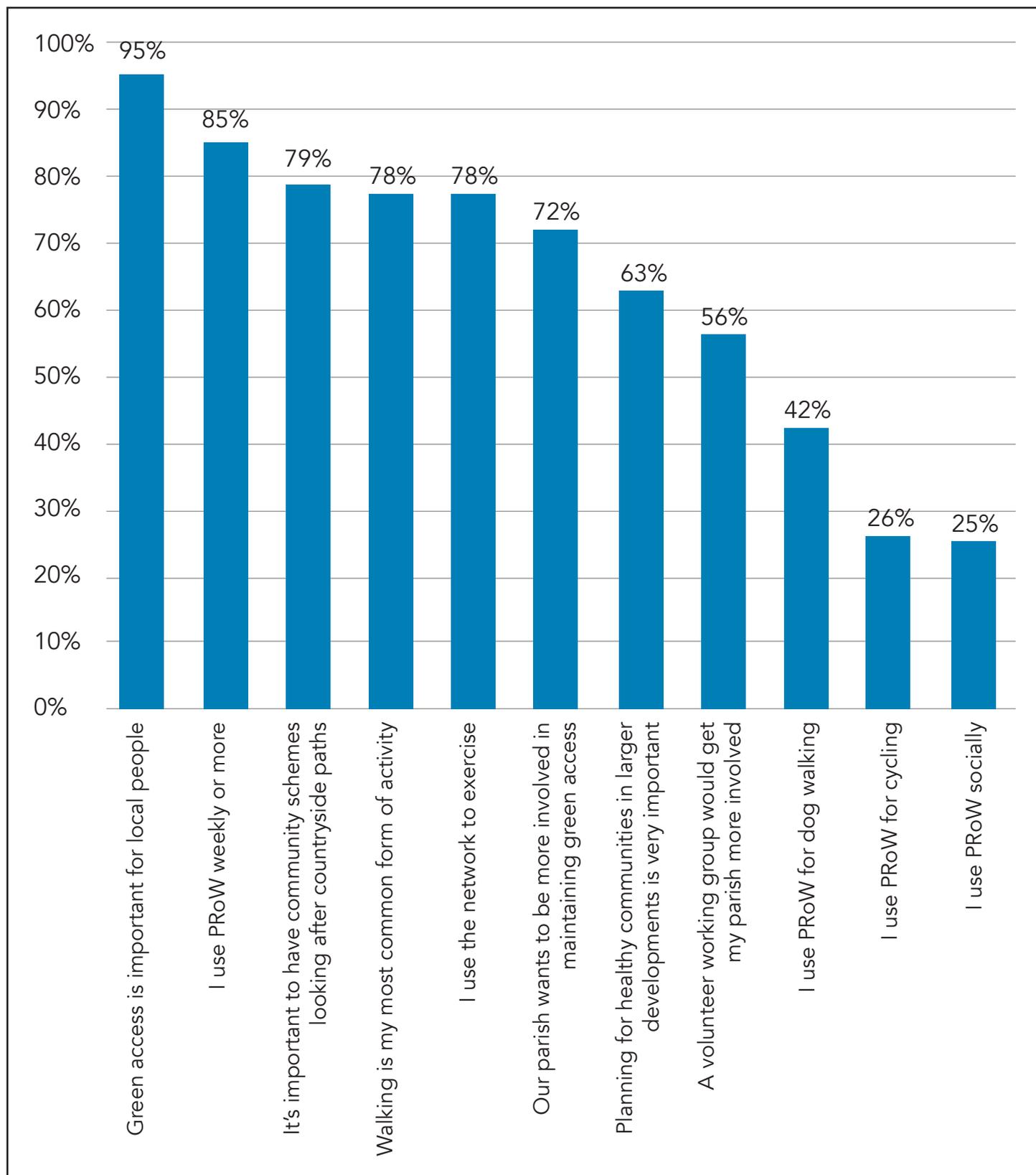
The ROW&A team works closely with volunteers, partner organisations, community groups, and facilitates the Walkers Are Welcome programme in Suffolk, to enable communities to become involved in managing and developing green access, productivity and out of work benefits.



Stour and Orwell Walk, nr. Freston Wood

**Consultation key findings:
developing healthy and sustainable communities**

Ninety-five percent of people see green access as being important for local people with 85% using rights of way weekly or more. Seventy-eight percent of respondents to the consultation used the access network for exercise and over half of parishes who responded would welcome a volunteer scheme. However, only a quarter of those responding used rights of way for cycling or socially.



4. Delivery Plan: developing healthy and sustainable communities

Timescale:

1 = on-going activity

2 = within 3 years

3 = within 5 years

4 = 5 years+

Resources:

£ = existing resources

££ = additional resources (up to £100k) and reallocation of staff resources

£££ = significant additional resources (over £100k) and additional staff

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
4.1 Health					
4.1.1 Promote green access as integral to the health agenda.	Work with public health to champion green access across a range of programmes.	1	£	Number of programmes influenced.	Healthier communities.
4.1.2 Promote green access as integral to the health agenda.	Enable a wider and more diverse range of people to become active, especially those from underrepresented groups and those with long term health conditions.	1	££	Number of participants on Health Walks and similar programmes.	Healthier communities.
4.1.3 Make walking and cycling the natural choice for short journeys.	Work with SCC's Transport Policy team to encourage a shift to sustainable travel.	1	£	Number of PRow schemes delivered that promote sustainable travel.	Healthier communities and reduced congestion and air pollution.
4.1.4 Make walking and cycling the natural choice for short journeys.	Support programmes to embed and deliver the public rights of way network as suitable routes to school.	1	££	Number of PRow routes identified as suitable routes to school.	Healthier communities and reduced congestion and air pollution.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
4.2 Communities					
4.2.1 Embed green activity into community-based programmes and initiatives.	Provide guidance to planners and developers to develop a shared understanding on how improving green access can help build healthy communities.	1	£	Amount of guidance provided.	Healthier communities.
4.2.2 Embed green activity in communities.	Embed green access into Neighbourhood Plans.	1	£	Number of plans influenced.	Healthier communities.
4.2.3 Embed green activity in communities.	Support communities in managing and developing green access.	1	£	Number of communities supported.	Healthier communities.
4.2.4 Embed green activity in communities.	Support communities to achieve and maintain the national Walkers are Welcome (WaW) accreditation.	1	£	Number of communities achieving WaW accreditation.	Healthier communities and improved local tourism economy.
4.2.5 Embed green activity in communities.	Encourage and support communities in protecting the PRoW network.	1	££	Number of communities supported.	Healthier communities.
4.2.6 Embed green activity into community-based programmes and initiatives.	Develop a community scheme that lays out to communities all the ways in which they can get involved in green access – from reporting to maintenance to promotion.	2	££	Number of communities engaged.	Healthier communities.

References;

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- 11 - Department for Transport Nov 2014, Claiming the Health Dividend: A summary and discussion of value for money estimates from studies of investment in walking and cycling
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Suffolk Green Access Strategy Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2020-2030

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The Suffolk Green Access Strategy is
available to download from
www.suffolk.gov.uk (search ROWIP)

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