



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Regeneration & Sustainable Development Cabinet Board
6th September 2019

Report of the Head of Planning and Public Protection
Nicola Pearce

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All

Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 – Consideration of: the Consultation Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP); and the publication / consultation procedures to be implemented.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To consider and agree the *Consultation Draft* Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and the publication / consultation procedures to be implemented.

Executive Summary

- 2 Under Section 60 of the (CROW) Act 2000 (*the Act*), the Council has a statutory duty to prepare a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (ROWIP). The ROWIP sets out how the Council intends to improve access to the countryside over a 10 year period.
- 3 The ROWIP for Neath Port Talbot was initially produced and published for the period 2008-2018. In 2017, under section 60(3) and (4) of the Act, the Council undertook a new assessment, including consultation to determine whether a review of the ROWIP was required.
- 4 In September 2018, based on the outcome of the assessment, Cabinet Board resolved to undertake a review of the ROWIP.

- 5 This report therefore seeks endorsement of the *consultation draft* ROWIP (2019-2029) and the approval of the consultation arrangements.

Background

- 6 The Neath Port Talbot ROWIP was initially prepared and published for the period 2008-2018.
- 7 In 2017, and in accordance with legislation, the Council undertook an assessment of current provision and carried out a public consultation exercise to gather views on the quality and condition of Public Rights of Way and the wider countryside, their use of these routes and the measures that could be taken to encourage greater use of the countryside.
- 8 Based on the assessment and the fact that since publication of the first ROWIP, there have been a number of changes in Wales that would have a bearing on future management of the network and access to the countryside, the decision was taken to prepare a new ROWIP for Neath Port Talbot.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2019-2029)

- 9 The new *Consultation Draft* ROWIP is presented in full in Appendix 1. Covering the period 2019-2029, the plan sets out the means by which the Council intends to improve and promote access to the countryside across Neath Port Talbot over the next decade.
- 10 The ROWIP is structured into the following three parts:
- *PART 1: Introduction and Background* – provides a summary of the key drivers in the national, regional and local context, along with a description of the County Borough and the opportunities for public access to the countryside.
 - *PART 2: Assessment of Access Provision and Use* – outlines the outcome of the assessment in regard to access provision and use of this resource across Neath Port Talbot and identifies the key issues to be addressed moving forward.
 - *PART 3: Statement of Action* – outlines the vision, objectives and policies of the plan, along with the means by which the plan will be delivered and monitored.

Publication and Consultation Procedures

- 11 The ROWIP consultation period will run for 12 weeks commencing in September. Representations received as a result of consultation will again be considered by this Cabinet Board, together with any amendments needed to the document prior to final publication.
- 12 In order to raise awareness and facilitate a public / stakeholder consultation, the following will be undertaken:
 - The Council's website will provide all relevant information and documentation;
 - Correspondence will be sent to relevant stakeholders / organisations listed on the ROWIP database; and
 - Press releases will be issued (including use of social media).
- 13 In accordance with the Council's Welsh Language Standards Policy all publicity / communication will be bilingual and the Consultation Draft ROWIP will also be made available in Welsh.
- 14 The Consultation Draft ROWIP will be available for purchase at a reasonable charge. In common with previous practice, it is suggested that the price be based on the cost of printing together with post and package at the prevailing cost. Electronic copies will be made available at no cost.

Financial Impacts

- 15 The decisions will incur expenditure in relation to the publication and consultation procedures. These costs will be accommodated within existing budgets.
- 16 Given that there is no additional Welsh Government funding being made available for the delivery of the plan, the plan reflects the current budget of the Countryside & Wildlife Team and will make best use of external funding to deliver additional improvement works.

Integrated Impact Assessment

- 17 A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

18 The first stage assessment, attached at Appendix 2, has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required. A summary is included below:

- **Equalities** – the Plan is intended to be inclusive, aiming to encourage greater use of Public Rights of Way and the wider countryside by all community members.
- **Welsh Language** – the Plan will be inclusive, aiming to encourage all community members to be involved. The Plan and all public communications will be bilingual.
- **Biodiversity** – a Service Assessment has been carried as part of the Biodiversity Duty Plan requirements, and appropriate working practices are in place to avoid impact on biodiversity. Policy for the protection of biodiversity is embedded into the ROWIP.
- **Well-being of Future Generation (5 ways of Working)** – The 5 ways of working has been followed in the review of the Plan, and will continue to be followed in delivery of the Plan.

Valleys Communities Impacts

19 No implications.

Workforce Impacts

20 No implications.

Legal Impacts

21 No implications.

Risk Management Impacts

22 No implications.

Consultation

23 This item will be the subject of external consultation.

Recommendations

24 That having considered the report, it is resolved to make the following recommendations for approval:

1. That the *Consultation Draft* Rights of Way Improvement Plan as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed as forming the basis for consultation.
2. That the publication and consultation arrangements as set out in the report are implemented.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

- 25 The recommendations are made to ensure compliance with the CROW Act 2000 and to put a framework in place for the management and improvement of our Public Rights of Way for the next 10 years.

Implementation of Decision

- 26 The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices

- 27 Appendix 1 – ROWIP (2019-2029) Consultation Draft (September 2019)
- 28 Appendix 2 – ROWIP (2019-2029) First Stage Integrated Impact Assessment.

List of Background Papers

- 29 The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000.

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APPENDIX 1

ROWIP (2019-2029) Consultation Draft (September 2019)



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2019-2029)

Consultation Draft - September 2019



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Note to Reader

This note explains the purpose of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and how to comment on the document. This note will not form part of the final published report.

Purpose of the Document

The Neath Port Talbot 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (ROWIP) was initially prepared and published for the period 2008-2018.

In 2017, and in accordance with legislation, the Council undertook an assessment of current provision, including the opportunities that Public Rights of Way (PROW) and other access provision provides.

In addition, a consultation exercise was undertaken to gather views from the public and stakeholders on the quality and condition of PROW and the wider countryside, their use of these routes and the measures that could be taken to encourage greater use of the countryside.

Following this assessment and public consultation, the decision was taken by the Council to prepare a new ROWIP for Neath Port Talbot. This new Plan, covering the period 2019-2029, sets out the means by which the Council intends to improve and promote access to the countryside across Neath Port Talbot over the next decade.

Consultation

The Council is seeking views on the matters set out in this Improvement Plan. The consultation period will run for 12 weeks, **starting midday on Tuesday 24th September and ending at midday on Tuesday 17th December 2019.**

How to Make Comments

Comments can be submitted:

Directly Online at: www.npt.gov.uk

Alternatively:

By E-mail to: countryside@npt.gov.uk

By Post to:

Nicola Pearce

Note to Reader

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The deadline for comments is midday on Tuesday 17th December 2019. Comments received after the deadline will not be accepted.

This report is also available in Welsh, either to download or by request. Should you need this document in another format, then please contact the Countryside & Wildlife team at countryside@npt.gov.uk or [01639] 686199.

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the Council's revised Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which has been produced following an extensive consultation and assessment process.

Neath Port Talbot is an attractive and diverse county, with distinct valley communities benefiting from a dramatic upland landscape, with a network of moorland and forest paths, linking through to our coastal communities, with a range of parks, lowland woodlands and coastal walks. The landscape provides ample opportunity for recreation and tourism, resulting in benefits to health and well-being, the local economy and a strong sense of community pride.

We recognise the importance of Public Rights of Way (PROW) and wider countryside access for our residents and visitors. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan provides a strategic framework for the management of our PROW, leading to notable achievements and improvements.

The revised Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Neath Port Talbot outlines the Council's vision and commitments to protecting, maintaining and improving this resource into the future. Whilst the quality and accessibility of the physical resource remains at the core of the revised Plan, we also believe passionately that our countryside should serve the needs of all people for recreation, health and well-being, therefore will also be focusing our efforts on maximising the number and range of people who are able to enjoy the benefits of our natural environment.

I would urge you to consider this document and take the opportunity to respond to the consultation.



Councillor Annette Wingrave

Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainable Development

Foreword

1 Introduction

1.0.1 Under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, the Council has a statutory duty to prepare a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (ROWIP). The ROWIP for Neath Port Talbot was initially prepared and published for the period 2008-2018.

1.0.2 Under Section 60(3) and (4), the Council is required to undertake a new assessment, a review of this Plan and assess whether amendments are required to the first Plan. Specifically, the assessment is required to include the following:

- An assessment of current provision, i.e. current access provision and opportunities that Public Rights of Way (PROW) and other access provision provides;
- An assessment of use, i.e. how needs are being met, barriers to use and incentives for use; and
- An evaluation of existing, and priorities for a new, ROWIP.

1.0.3 In 2017, and in accordance with legislation, the Council undertook an assessment of current provision including the opportunities that PROW and other access provision provides. In addition, a consultation exercise was undertaken to gather views from the public and stakeholders on the quality and condition of the PROW network and the wider countryside, their use of these routes and the measures that could be taken to encourage greater use of the countryside.

1.0.4 Following this assessment and public consultation, the decision was taken by the Council to prepare a new ROWIP for Neath Port Talbot. This new Plan, covering the period 2019-2029, sets out the means by which the Council intends to improve and promote access to the countryside across the County Borough over the next decade.

1.1 Structure and Content

1.1.1 The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is structured into the following three parts:

- **PART 1: Introduction and Background** - provides a summary of the key drivers in the national, regional and local context, along with a description of the County Borough and the opportunities for public access to the countryside.
- **PART 2: Assessment of Access Provision and Use** - outlines the outcome of the assessment in regard to access provision and use of this resource across Neath Port Talbot and identifies the key issues to be addressed moving forward.
- **PART 3: Statement of Action** - outlines the vision, objectives and policies of the Improvement Plan, along with the means by which the Plan will be delivered and monitored.

1 . Introduction

2 Policy Context

2.0.1 There are a number of national, regional and local plans / strategies which recognise the importance of access to the countryside, and the benefits it can provide for public health and well-being.

2.0.2 The ROWIP has to have regard to these national and local policies and initiatives, and implementation of the plan will contribute to the achievement of Welsh Government (WG) policy objectives. The most relevant plans and strategies are set out below.

Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board (PSB) Local Well-Being Plan (2018-2023)

2.0.3 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015 is striving to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals, which public bodies must work towards achieving, and five sustainable development principles to adopt.

2.0.4 The Well-being Plan sets out the Public Service Board's (PSB) long term vision for Neath Port Talbot, as required by the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. The Plan lays out 4 key objectives to improving the well-being of people in Neath Port Talbot, and identifies the priorities for action:

- Support children in their early years, especially children at risk of adverse childhood experiences;
- Create safe, confident and resilient communities, focusing on vulnerable people;
- Put more life into our later years – ageing well;
- Promote well-being through work and in the workplace.

2.0.5 Furthermore, the following have been identified as objectives which cut across the first four objectives:

- Value our green infrastructure and the contribution it makes to our well-being;
- Tackle digital exclusion.

Neath Port Talbot Corporate Plan (2019-2022)

2.0.6 The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's vision:

We want our county borough to be a place where everyone has an equal chance to get on in life – a place where people want to live, learn and work and bring up their family.

We want our beautiful natural environment, and our rich cultural and industrial heritage to be appreciated and protected for many future generations to enjoy. We also want to pursue new and existing opportunities for economic growth so we can sustain our diverse communities for years to come.

2 . Policy Context

2.0.7 Through the following well-being objectives, the Council will maximise its contribution to the well-being goals:

- To improve the well-being of children and young people;
- To improve the well-being of all adults who live in the County Borough; and
- To develop the local economy and environment so that the well-being of people can be improved.

2.0.8 Both the Well-being Plan and Corporate Plan have a strong focus on improving well-being, alongside valuing and protecting our local environment. Provision, and promotion, of an accessible network of routes for a range of users will be integral element of meeting the Council's, and PSB's, well-being priorities and goals.

South West Area Statement

2.0.9 Welsh Government's Natural Resources Policy sets out the key challenges and opportunities in Wales in relation to our natural environment. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is required to produce area statements that will specify priorities, risks and opportunities to implement the priorities of the Natural Resources Policy. Wales has been split into seven areas and Neath Port Talbot falls within the South West Wales area with Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Swansea.

2.0.10 NRW are currently developing the Area Statement for the South West, however have currently identified emerging themes which are likely to form the basis of the Area Statement:

- Supporting health outcomes;
- Unsustainable rural land management;
- Reversing the decline in biodiversity; and
- Resilience to a changing climate.

2.0.11 Implementation of the ROWIP will need to be mindful of the emerging Area Statement, recognising the opportunity to deliver improvements to health and changing climate (through reduced travel), whilst also ensuring that work practices do not negatively impact on biodiversity or sustainable land management requirements.

Joint Transport Plan for South West Wales (2015-2020)

2.0.12 The Joint Transport Plan for South West Wales is the result of joint working between the four Councils (Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and Pembrokeshire) in South West Wales. It replaces the individual local transport plans previously adopted by the four councils. As well as acting as a bidding document for major transport schemes it will shape transport policy in the region for the period 2015 -2020 and beyond.

2.0.13 The long term strategy and policies of the plan includes a focus on improving walking and cycling links within, and between, key settlements.

Active Travel

2.0.14 The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 requires the Council to map and plan for suitable active travel routes within settlements specified by the Welsh Government. The Council is required to prepare, publish and keep under review the following two maps:

- *Existing Route Map (ERM)* - primarily intended to inform the public of the existing routes in the County Borough that the Council considers suitable for active travel and which meet standards set out in the Welsh Government's Active Travel Design Guidance.
- *Integrated Network Map (INM)* - setting out the Council's aspirations for the next 15 years, identifying either improvements that could be made to existing routes or where new routes could be developed and added to the active travel network.

2.0.15 Whilst meeting the requirements of the Active Travel Act is outside the remit of this Plan, there will clearly be opportunities to deliver against the INM alongside the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. A collaborative approach will be taken to carrying out improvements that maximise the benefits for leisure, health and well-being and active travel.

Picture 2.1 Pontardawe Canal



2 . Policy Context

Destination Management Plan (2015-2020)

2.0.16 A Destination Management Plan (DMP) is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination, outlining the roles of different stakeholders and identifying the actions that they will take. The DMP recognises the important role that PROW play in enabling visits to the local area, both via physical access but also in allowing us to showcase Neath Port Talbot in a more picturesque and rural light, in contrast to the industrialised urban areas of the County Borough.

Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2011-2026)

2.0.17 The Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (LDP) guides the future development of the area, providing a clear vision for the County Borough, setting out where, when and how much new development can take place over the duration of the plan (2011-2026). The aim is to provide developers and the public with certainty about the planning framework for Neath Port Talbot.

2.0.18 There are a number of objectives and policies that support and promote access to the countryside, for health, recreation and for commuting, which would be supported by delivery of the ROWIP. The most relevant of these are outlined below.

Objectives

- OB 4: Maximise accessibility to a range of leisure, recreational, health, social and community facilities in line with the role and function of settlements.
- OB 21: Increase accessibility, promote active travel and encourage a shift to more sustainable modes of transport for people and freight.

Policies

- Policy SP2 Health: Healthier, more active and safer lifestyles will be encouraged through the retention of a range of accessible leisure, recreational, health, retail, social, cultural and community facilities throughout the County Borough.
- Policy SP4 Infrastructure: Improving access to facilities and services including the provision of walking and cycling routes.
- Policy SP20 Transport Network: Supporting enhancements to the walking and cycling network.

3 Access to the Countryside

3.1 Description of Neath Port Talbot

3.1.1 Neath Port Talbot comprises a diverse natural environment which supports the well-being of local people as well as attracting many visitors to the area. Rising from sea level in the west to 600 metres at Craig Y Llyn, above Glynneath, Neath Port Talbot is predominantly an upland area dissected by the valleys of the Afan, Neath, Dulais and Tawe rivers which all flow to the sea at Swansea Bay.

3.1.2 These valleys are separated from each other by ridges of high forest or moorland and a narrow coastal strip extends around Swansea Bay where the main centres of population are found. The surrounding valleys are rural in aspect with scattered communities, many of which still contain significant numbers of Welsh speakers.

3.1.3 There is a range of access provision in Neath Port Talbot, offering plenty of opportunities for those wishing to visit the countryside. The Gnoll and Margam Country Parks, along with Aberafan Seafront, offer a variety of leisure facilities that appeal to families and walkers of all age ranges. Local Nature Reserves offer the opportunity to get closer to nature and the Public Rights of Way network offers the opportunity to gain access into areas such as the 'Waterfall Country' located at the foot of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Picture 3.1 'Overlooking Glyncorrwg' - Pencraig Isaf



3 . Access to the Countryside

3.2 Means of Access to the Countryside

3.2.1 Throughout the County Borough there are extensive opportunities to gain public access to the countryside, either through legally defined, or less formal means⁽¹⁾.

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

3.2.2 PROW are public highways which provide one of the most important means of access to the countryside. They provide communities with opportunities to access the countryside for purposes of leisure and also a sustainable transport option.

3.2.3 The duty to record PROW was first introduced by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. This Act resulted in the creation of 'Definitive Maps' by each highway authority, based on an assessment of their historic use and status. It was a long and protracted process, accompanied with public scrutiny of the maps and associated statements, following which Neath Port Talbot's Definitive Map was published⁽²⁾.

3.2.4 PROW benefit from a robust legislative framework which provides the user with a clearly defined right of use and places a duty on the Council to ensure the right of passage is maintained, open and available at all times. There is a legal process in place for the extinguishment, diversion or creation of Public Rights of Way, or for rectifying anomalies on the Definitive Map⁽³⁾.

3.2.5 PROW carry a range of access rights, which are recorded on the Definitive Map. They comprise:

- **Footpaths** - a public highway over which the public has a right of way on foot only.
- **Bridleways** - a highway over which the public may ride or lead a horse, walk or ride on a pedal cycle.
- **Restricted Byways** - the public has a right on foot, on horseback or leading a horse, and a right in or on a vehicle other than mechanically propelled vehicles, thereby giving a right for pedal cyclists and drivers of horse drawn vehicles.
- **Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)** - these are highways over which the public can exercise all the rights referred to above, but there is also a right to drive mechanically propelled vehicles. The Council however, does not have a duty to provide a surface which is capable of being used by all forms of motor vehicular traffic.

Cycleways

3.2.6 Cycleways are routes over which the public have the right to ride a pedal cycle, with or without a right to walk or ride a horse.

1 The availability of the various forms of public access to the countryside in Neath Port Talbot is considered in Chapter 4.

2 The Definitive Map comprises an OS based map showing the location of the paths and their status, together with a written statement which provides evidence of width, etc.

3 Details on these processes are outlined in Appendix A.

3 . Access to the Countryside

3.2.7 The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, has provided the legal framework for the provision of active travel routes. With the emphasis on commuting and making purposeful journeys, existing and proposed aspirational routes are identified on the Council's 'Existing Route Map' (ERM) and 'Integrated Network Map' (INM) respectively.

3.2.8 This ROWIP mainly considers the rural cycleway network which provides a means of access to the countryside. Some of the rural cycleways are aligned with PROW, but many are part of the permissive network of paths described below.

Permissive Paths

3.2.9 These are paths over which the landowner has granted public rights of access. The rights may be on foot, horseback or on pedal cycle, but rarely do they include a right to drive motor vehicles. The landowner may withdraw this right at any point in the future.

Common Land

3.2.10 The Council has a duty to keep a register of common land under the Commons Act 2006. All registered common land is open to public pedestrian access for air and exercise. In addition, there is a public right to ride on horseback on urban common land and on rural common land where a deed of access has been granted under Section 193 of the Law of Property Act 1925.

Open Access Land

3.2.11 The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 provided a public right of access on foot to areas of mountain, moor, heath and down, which includes all common land. The Act also provides landowners with the opportunity to dedicate their land for public access, which has been done by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for all of its freehold estate. The land is indicated on maps prepared by NRW.

Permissive Areas of Access

3.2.12 These are areas of land where the landowner has provided public access to areas of land, such as country or urban parks, nature reserves and parts of the coast.

Open Space

3.2.13 Open space⁽⁴⁾ refers to publicly accessible recreational space and includes playing fields, sports pitches and courts, children's play areas, facilities for older children, informal open space, greenspace, parks and allotments. Many of these will refer to access opportunities identified above, either on a permanent or permissive basis.

4 As defined by the Council's Local Development Plan (2011-2026).

3 . Access to the Countryside

4 Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

4.0.1 The assessment of current access provision across the County Borough has confirmed that there are a broad range of opportunities to facilitate public access to the countryside. Whilst the findings of the assessment is outlined in more detail below, Figure 4.1 overleaf illustrates these areas in broad terms.

4.1 Public Rights of Way (PROW)

4.1.1 The total recorded length of legally existing PROW across the County Borough amounts to 777.3 kilometres (km). This is the PROW that legally exist and is not necessarily an indication of the length of routes that are open / physically accessible.

4.1.2 The table below presents a breakdown of PROW by 'Definitive Map Classification', with the data showing that footpaths make up the most significant proportion of the network.

Table 4.1.1 Extent of PROW in Neath Port Talbot

Definitive Map Classification	For Use By	Length (km)	Network % (Approx)
Footpath	Walkers	591.52	76.1%
Bridleway	Walkers / Horse Riders / Cyclists	147.12	18.9%
Byway Open to All Traffic	Walkers / Horse Riders / Cyclists / Horse Drawn & Motor Vehicles	38.66	5%
TOTAL		777.3	100%

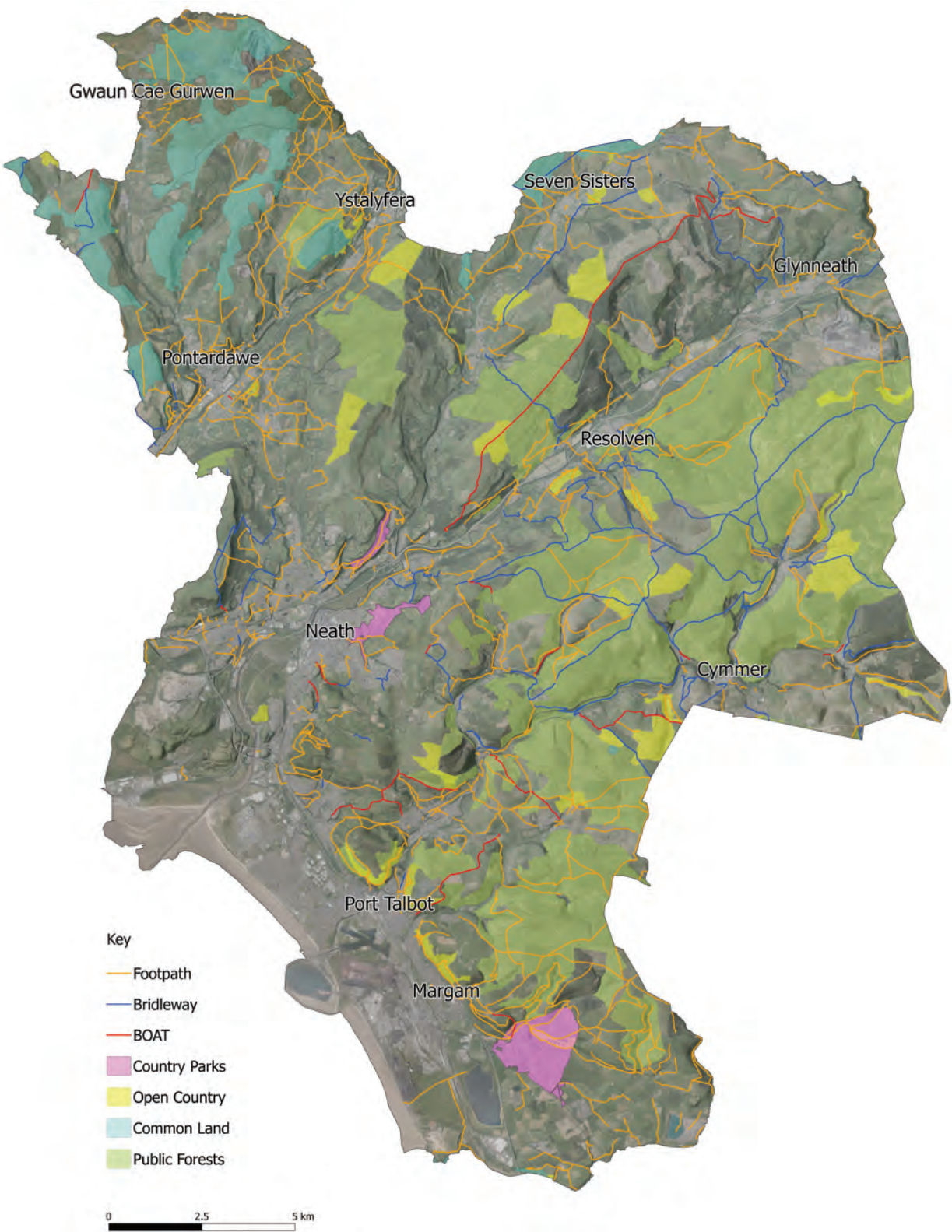
4.1.3 Whilst the Council does not hold data on individual paths, survey work was previously carried out on randomly selected paths as part of statutory performance indicators, providing a percentage of the paths that are '*open and easy to use*'. Consequently, this provides an indication of the condition of the network. Although these surveys are no longer a statutory requirement and therefore no longer undertaken, the figures presented in the table below demonstrate a relatively stable trend.

Table 4.1.2 Paths in Neath Port Talbot 'Open and Easy to Use'

Year	Paths Open & Easy to Use
2014/15	68.9%
2013/14	67.3%
2012/13	68.2%
2011/12	59.9%
2010/11	59.9%
2009/10	64.8%
2008/09	68.6%

4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

Figure 4.1 Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot



4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

4.1.4 As paths can be created, diverted or extinguished, the length of the rights of way network is not static. Extinguishments are however rare, with a greater tendency for paths to be diverted onto more appropriate routes. With that being the case, the path network is gradually growing each year, following successful applications made by members of the public for new public rights of way. Since the publication of the first ROWIP, the Council's PROW network has increased from 697km to 777km.

4.1.5 The Definitive Map and Statement can be viewed by appointment at the Council Offices at The Quays, Baglan Energy Park. A further good resource for anyone interested in using the PROW network are the 'Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps', which not only show the updated path network but also the open access land which includes open country, common land and dedicated land.

4.1.6 Since the network of PROW is basically a historic one, it does not always meet current needs. However, when other forms of countryside access are considered alongside the path network, any deficiencies in the network itself are often less relevant.

4.2 Cycle Routes and Adopted Highway

4.2.1 Within the urban and semi-rural environment, PROW are often intertwined with the adopted highway network and with cycle routes, providing a sustainable transport alternative for commuters, as well as the role they play as a leisure resource.

4.2.2 National Cycle Network (NCN) 887 was created in 2013 as part of the Lottery funded Connect 2 scheme, creating a cycle route between Aberafan Seafront, Port Talbot, Cwmafan, Pontrhydyfen and Afan Forest Park, the majority of which is off-road. In addition, there are sections of the Neath Canal towpath which have been recently improved and are open to cyclists by permission of the Neath Canal Navigation Company, also offering easy access opportunities for less able users.

4.2.3 Rural cycleways are an important element in the range of opportunities for gaining access to the countryside in Neath Port Talbot. Where they have been developed on disused railway lines their gradient is often suitable for users with various mobility problems. The 'Amman Valley Cycle Route' is a proposed cycle route from Garnant to Cwmtwrch, largely utilising a disused railway track, traversing both Neath Port Talbot and Carmarthenshire. As of 2019, the cycle route is largely complete from Garnant to Cwmllynfell, with a short gap near the Forge Washery site in Lower Brynamman.

4.2.4 Neath Port Talbot has also developed an international reputation for the quality of its mountain biking routes in the Afan Valley. These routes are a valuable tourism resource and have helped raise the profile of Neath Port Talbot as an outdoor visitor destination. Whilst there are challenges to be had with managing conflict between walkers and mountain bikers, the momentum behind the mountain biking industry has resulted in wider access improvements, such as family friendly routes and provides opportunities to engage the younger generation in increased physical activity.

4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

4.3 Canal Network

4.3.1 The remnant canal network in Neath Port Talbot provides a highly valued and locally significant means of countryside access. The canal towpaths alongside the Swansea, Neath and Tennant Canals allow walkers of all abilities an opportunity to walk through the countryside, also acting as commuter routes between settlements.

4.3.2 Due to their relatively flat surface and their proximity to residential areas, the towpaths are particularly important as a means of access for people with limited mobility problems.

Picture 4.1 Neath Canal



4.4 Long Distance Trails

4.4.1 There are long distance trails which pass through Neath Port Talbot, providing links to adjacent local authority areas.

4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

Wales Coast Path

4.4.2 The Wales Coast Path was opened formally in 2012, with the section in Neath Port Talbot benefiting from the creation of a new footpath into Bridgend and a new route through Baglan Burrows to Aberafan Seafront.

4.4.3 Owing to the industrial presence along the coastline, the challenges of remaining within the desired 2km resulted in the creation of two routes in Neath Port Talbot. The routes enter the County Borough over the newly installed bridge from Kenfig National Nature Reserve in Bridgend, splitting into an upland and lowland route, before entering Swansea along the Tennant Canal at Jersey Marine. The upland route provides the best views of the coastline, whilst the lowland route takes in Aberafan Seafront and our most extensive dune system at Baglan Burrows.

Picture 4.2 Installation of Bridge Linking Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend



4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

Great Dragon Ride (North South Bridleway)

4.4.4 The 47km section of this national bridleway commences at Margam Park and passes through Afan Forest Park in a generally northern direction to Banwen. From Banwen, the route travels up through the Brecon Beacons west to Talybont, near Aberystwyth, before heading up to the north coast. This is a challenging upland ride or walk, much of it through forest areas, but there are also outstanding views of the Brecon Beacons and the coast.

St. Illtud's Walk

4.4.5 This path links Pembrey Country Park in Carmarthenshire with Margam Park in Neath Port Talbot, passing through the upland part of Swansea en route. The trail is 110km in length, of which 61km is within Neath Port Talbot, and passes through a variety of rural and coastal landscapes. In conjunction with the Ramblers Association the route has recently been more closely re-aligned onto public rights of way by the three local authorities, resulting in its re-launch in 2017.

Ogwr Ridgeway

4.4.6 This path starts at Margam Country Park and extends to the western end of the Taff Ely Ridgeway in Bridgend. The trail is 24.1km in length, of which 5km is within Neath Port Talbot, and offers spectacular walking in a variety of upland and valley scenery. Panoramic views of rugged, narrow valleys can be obtained to the north, with the hills of Devon and Somerset usually visible to the south.

4.5 Waterfall Walks

4.5.1 Of particular interest to Neath Port Talbot is the range of waterfall walks that exist, including Aberdulais and Melincourt Falls, and Sgwd Gladus (Angel Falls) at the foot of the Brecon Beacons National Park. The falls are steeped in industrial heritage, in addition to being sited within some of our most important ecological sites, providing a range of points of interest for visitors.

4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

Picture 4.3 Angel Falls



4.6 Public Access under CROW Act 2000 and Common Land

4.6.1 Whilst PROW provide the main linear means of access in Neath Port Talbot, there are also extensive areas of open access and common land, currently comprising:

- 1,389 hectares open access land;
- 1,783 hectares common land;
- 9,784 hectares freehold estate of Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

4.6.2 The 'Register of Common Land' is held at the Civic Centre in Port Talbot. Land classified as open country under the CROW Act is shown on maps which can be viewed on the NRW website.

4.6.3 Figure 4.1 gives a broad overview of the extent of these areas. Access provision in the Afan and Neath Valleys is improved greatly by the extent of NRW owned forest plantations / woodland. Whilst there may be historic issues with the overplanting of PROW, alternative routes are generally available along forest tracks providing significant opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding. Common Land is particularly prevalent in the Amman Valley and provides an additional resource for access to the countryside.

4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

4.7 Coastal Access

4.7.1 With exception to the Wales Coast Path, Aberafan Beach at Sandfields is the main area of accessible coastline in Neath Port Talbot and is promoted as a tourist destination. The beach is adjacent to the urban area, is easily accessible and has a range of play facilities and food outlets.

4.7.2 The promenade also provides links to the wider Coast Path and the National Cycle Network, linking through to the rural cycle network in the valleys. It is very urban in nature, with a number of facilities for families and visitors, whilst a short walk to Whitford Point at the mouth of the Neath Estuary, provides a more natural coastal environment.

4.7.3 At the eastern side of the County Borough, a public footpath gives access to the edge of the foreshore at Margam Sands, although there is no public right of access over the foreshore, which is privately owned. The beach can however, be accessed by following the Coast Path over the border into Bridgend, at Kenfig National Nature Reserve.

4.8 Permissive Access

4.8.1 In addition to statutory rights of access, the County Borough is fortunate in having considerable areas of land to which public access is available by permission of the landowners, making a significant contribution to the range of options for access to the countryside.

4.8.2 Access to these areas of land is provided on a very secure basis as the landowners are either public bodies, trusts or private landowners who have entered into access agreements with the Local Authority. There are a number of ecologically important sites and accessible sites owned by the Woodland Trust and Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, however most significant in terms of access are those owned by the Council and Community / Town Councils.

4.8.3 There are three major country parks in Neath Port Talbot: Margam Park, Gnoll Country Park and Afan Forest Park, and there is also a smaller Country Park at Craig Gwladus, Cadoxton. These parks provide the public with an opportunity to experience a variety of countryside landscapes in a secure and more easily accessible environment. The parks have waymarked paths, are accessible by public transport and have car parks, whilst the three major parks also have visitor centres and/or cafes.

4.8.4 In addition, there are currently five Local Nature Reserves, a number of accessible woodlands and a range of high quality urban parks throughout the County Borough. There are too many to list here, however many of them can be found on the Council's website under Leisure and Culture⁽⁵⁾.

4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

Picture 4.4 Gnoll Country Park



4.9 Open Space

4.9.1 In 2013, the Council undertook and published an assessment of open space provision across Neath Port Talbot as part of the evidence base supporting the Local Development Plan (LDP), ultimately informing the policies in the adopted Plan.

4.9.2 The assessment identified shortfalls in the different categories of provision across the County Borough, with all wards having a shortfall in at least one category of open space, with the vast majority experiencing multiple deficiencies by category. There is better provision for 'informal' open space, however this category was also found to be lacking in 30% of the wards.

4.10 Neath Port Talbot Public Consultation (2017)

4.10.1 A targeted consultation was undertaken by the Council in November 2017. An online questionnaire was disseminated via existing networks and also publicised extensively through partners and social media. Whilst the majority of the questions related to use of the public rights of way network and countryside access, participants were also asked whether they felt it was easy to access the countryside in Neath Port Talbot.

4.10.2 62% answered yes to this question, citing a wide range of access opportunities to substantiate their view. Of the 38% that answered no, reasons primarily focused on a need for better information / signage, with some localised examples of routes in need of improvement work.

4 . Assessment of Access Provision in Neath Port Talbot

4.11 Overview

4.11.1 Whilst there is wide ranging access provision in Neath Port Talbot, there are localised areas that will need to be addressed as part of the Delivery Plan. Performance indicators demonstrate that access problems exist on substantial parts of the PROW network through lack of maintenance or obstruction, and the need to continue efforts to open up neglected paths will continue throughout the period of this plan.

4.11.2 Where paths are in remote locations and have not been subject to public complaint, a pragmatic approach will need to be taken, ensuring that resources are targeted towards PROW that deliver the most benefit.

4.11.3 In addition to PROW, it is clear that access provision is greatly enhanced by other resources, such as parks, permissive routes and cycle routes. However, there are deficiencies in open space within settlements and budgetary pressures will present challenges to the Council's ability in providing such resources in the future. Whilst the provision of these resources primarily falls outside the scope of this Plan, there will be a need to work collaboratively with colleagues and partners to ensure that the Council maximises opportunities to provide access to the countryside and the wider natural environment.

5 Assessment of Use in Neath Port Talbot

5.0.1 In order to make the most of our Public Rights of Way, the wider countryside and open space, there is a need to understand the extent that people make use of these resources, the barriers to their use and measures that could be put in place to provide better opportunities.

5.0.2 Where national surveys have already been undertaken, the Council has assessed this data. In addition however, the Council has also directly sought the views of local residents through a targeted consultation specifically on access to the countryside in Neath Port Talbot.

5.1 National Survey for Wales (2016-2017)

5.1.1 NRW undertook a nationwide survey on outdoor recreation between 2016 and 2017 and the Council considers the findings to be relevant to Neath Port Talbot. Respondents included people reporting relatively low participation in outdoor recreation, with 81% of adults living in Wales taking part in one or more activity at least once in the last 12 months. However, only a minority of people (18%) were 'frequent' participants, based on those who reported 20 or more visits to the outdoors in the last 4 weeks.

5.1.2 There were some differences in the demographics of people visiting the countryside, with a higher proportion of men than women, more people living in rural areas than those in urban areas and a decrease in visits with an increase in age.

5.1.3 Walking was by far the most common activity, at 72% of all adults, followed by picnicking (31%) or taking children to the playground (31%). Local parks are clearly an important resource, as these are the most frequently visited locations (30%), followed by the beach or coast (19%) and woodland / forest (14%). Also of note, 47% of adults typically travel less than a mile to visit the outdoors, demonstrating the importance of 'doorstep' opportunities in outdoor recreation.

Motivation and Barriers

5.1.4 The reasons for visiting sites seem to be different for each location. People visiting the beach or coast do so for fresh air, relaxation and good weather, whilst visits to the hills are more motivated by health and exercise. Not surprisingly, visits to parks are usually to spend time with the family or entertain children.

5.1.5 For those reporting no visits in the last year, the most common reason that was given was lack of time (28%), closely followed by physical disability (24%), other health reasons (19%) and old age (19%). Only 2% said there was nowhere for them to go or that they did not know where to go (1.7%).

5.1.6 For respondents who hadn't visited the outdoors in the last 4 weeks, the most common response was bad weather.

5 . Assessment of Use in Neath Port Talbot

5.2 Neath Port Talbot Public Consultation (2017)

5.2.1 A targeted consultation was undertaken by the Council to assess the extent of use and access to the countryside in Neath Port Talbot. A total of 106 responses were received.

5.2.2 A significant proportion of respondents were frequent users of PROW, or the countryside in general, with 37% visiting the countryside daily, and 46% visiting at least weekly.

5.2.3 Of type of area visited, country / urban parks were the first choice for most people, closely followed by mountain / open moorland. When considering the total number of choices made for this category (including 2nd, 3rd, etc. options) however, the highest categories: mountain / open moorland, woodland / forest and country / urban parks are almost equal in popularity. Of note, farmland and pavement / country lane are least popular.

5.2.4 PROW were the most popular means to visit the countryside at 49%, with open access land / publicly accessible space at 24%.

5.2.5 In terms of motivation for visiting the countryside, 40% of people cited health and well-being, with dog walking / leisure in general, motivating approximately 20% each. Of leisure, these were generally a combination of horse riding, walking, fishing and photography. A smaller proportion of people (13%) cited family activity as their reason.

5.2.6 When asked whether it was easy to access the countryside, of the answers received, 62% indicated yes and 38% no. Reasons used for this response included (for yes), areas being accessible / easy to get to and from where people lived, good choice of walks, although availability of / cost of parking was mentioned a few times as a constraint. Of reasons cited for preventing people accessing the countryside, lack of information (28%), lack of signage / waymarking (22%), obstructions / accessibility issues (20%) were the most popular responses.

5.2.7 When asked what measures could be put in place to encourage greater use of the countryside, the strongest responses were better site based signage (54%), followed by better parking / transport links (39%), suggestions on places to go (34%), with organised activities and ideas for family activities being selected by 16% each.

5.2.8 For access to information on where to go, web based information was by far the most popular answer, at 42% of responses received, followed by smart phone at 21%. More traditional methods are still being used, with 14% of people preferring to use ordnance survey maps and 11% preferring leaflets.

5.2.9 In addition, respondents were asked to identify specific areas that were important to them and issues / areas that required improvement works. These responses will be used to inform the work plan in the form of Delivery Plans, which will be produced on an annual basis to support the delivery of this Improvement Plan.

6 Evaluation

6.0.1 The first ROWIP provided the Council with a framework within which to deliver positive change for countryside access. Local Authorities throughout Wales were fortunate in being able to utilise a dedicated fund to support delivery of the Plan, in the form of the Welsh Government 'Rights of Way Improvement Programme'. With the support of this grant, the Council has delivered an annual programme of improvement works, with a particular focus on increasing accessibility, improvement to structures and delivery of promotional activities and resources.

6.0.2 Notable achievements include the creation of the Neath Port Talbot section of the Wales Coast Path and the Great Dragon Bridleway, re-routing and re-launching St. Illtyd's Walk, a significant expansion in provision for cycling, creation of an online resource for promoted walks and delivery of a wide range of activities to promote access to the countryside and health. A more detailed breakdown of delivery against the ROWIP is provided in Appendix B.

6.0.3 Despite these achievements, the Council recognises that challenges still exist. There remain areas of the network that are overgrown or obstructed and there remain deficiencies for horse riders, although the Great Dragon Ride has enhanced this provision. Furthermore, it is clear that participation in the outdoor environment is still low for significant proportions of the population and measures to address this will need to play a prominent part in future action.

6.0.4 Progress has been made in processing legal orders, with the number of outstanding legal orders greatly reduced. The need to deal with these remains, with issues to do with historic anomalies on PROW that are shown going through housing estates becoming increasingly prevalent over the last few years.

6.0.5 The overall aims and policy areas of the first ROWIP are still very relevant and will be addressed as part of the revised Plan. Broadly, these were:

- Definitive Map policies;
- Public rights of way maintenance and improvement;
- Enforcement;
- Publicity and promotion; and
- Management of countryside access other than public rights of way.

6.0.6 There have been a number of policy and legislative changes since the first ROWIP was published and these will need to be considered in identifying what needs to be done over the next 10 years. Most significantly, the 'Well-being of Future Generations Act' requires the Council to take a holistic and sustainable approach to all activities and the Council should be meeting the needs of our future generations through implementation of this Plan.

6 . Evaluation

6.1 Benefits of Public Rights of Way

6.1.1 The PROW network along with wider access provision, provides notable benefits for:

Health

6.1.2 DEFRA published an evidence statement in 2017 that outlined the benefits between health and the natural environment⁽⁶⁾. The statement recognised the role that access to the natural environment had for well-being, particularly so for mental health.

6.1.3 The cited benefits included reductions in stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression, together with evidence that these benefits may be most significant for marginalised groups. Socio-economic inequality in mental well-being has been shown to be 40% narrower among those who report good access to green / recreational areas, compared with those with poorer access.

6.1.4 The report reinforces the concept that PROW, and other access to the countryside / natural environment, play a significant role in improving health and well-being, whilst providing opportunities to reduce the impacts of socio-economic inequalities through greater equality of access to green space.

6.1.5 'Green Infrastructure' is recognised as delivering multiple benefits for both urban and rural residents, and opportunities should be taken to integrate access provision into the delivery of green infrastructure, working collaboratively with partners and colleagues across the Council.

Open Space / Recreation

6.1.6 Given that transport and mobility may be more limited for some members of our communities, urban and semi-urban networks and parks will play an important role in the provision of access for health, well-being and recreation.

6.1.7 Although not traditionally seen as a means to access the countryside, their role in supporting more active lifestyles and enjoyment of the natural environment is significant, either as destinations in their own right, or as stepping stones to accessing more rural locations.

6.1.8 The more focused provision of facilities and surfaced paths offers greater access opportunities to a much wider range of the public, who may not be able to access more remote locations. Consequently, opportunities should be taken to improve access to, or encourage use of, urban green space, alongside the wider countryside.

6 Maxwell, S & Lovell, R. (2017) 'Evidence Statement on the links between Natural Environments and Human Health' (Defra and University of Exeter Medical School).

Active Travel

6.1.9 In recognition of the need to increase physical activity and reduce carbon emissions, promotion of more sustainable means of travel is now a high priority in Wales. The Council's 'Integrated Network Map' has identified key opportunities to create or improve commuter routes for cycling and walking, and PROW are well placed to support delivery and linkages to these routes.

Tourism

6.1.10 PROW also plays a key factor in economic development, in particular by supporting the growth of the tourism economy. PROW create opportunities for connecting visitors to rural and urban areas and enables access to natural assets such as waterfalls and other key routes such as mountain bike trails.

6.1.11 In future, visitors will be looking for 'undiscovered' places to visit in addition to existing, well-maintained, high profile routes so investment is crucial in maintaining and creating visitor interest in our area.

6.2 Key Issues in Neath Port Talbot

6.2.1 The key issues that emerged from the assessments are summarised in the table below, including the measures that will be taken to address the points.

Table 6.2.1 Key Issues & Targeted Action in Neath Port Talbot

Issue	Action
Locally, PROW are the most popular means to access countryside. Nationally, local access was considered to be important.	Maintain focus on maintenance and improvement of PROW whilst continuing to take a holistic approach to countryside access and access to local green space.
Processing of legal orders remains a requirement, with a need to address historic anomalies.	Retain provision for the processing of legal orders.
Locally, open moorland / forest / parks are almost equal in popularity, whilst nationally, urban parks are most popular.	Ensure access provision remains varied, providing access to key areas of interest, including local green space.
Walking is the most popular activity.	Deliver measures that support walking, focus on footpaths, provision of information to promote new routes and encourage new users.
Frequent users are low, and there is an inequality in the demographics of users, seeing reduced use by women, urban residents and older residents.	Introduce measures to encourage increased participation, and in particular for low use groups; engage with low use groups to ensure needs are being met.

6 . Evaluation

Issue	Action
Health is the biggest motivator for visiting the countryside and countryside access is proven to provide benefits for physical and mental health and well-being.	Actively pursue 'access for all routes', alongside more challenging routes, providing the opportunity for users to progress and increase fitness; work in partnership to deliver activities that promote access to the countryside for health benefits.
Nationally, family orientated activities (picnic or playground) are the second most popular activity, although locally, family activity is relatively low at 13%.	Work in partnership to deliver activities and provide resources that encourage families to access the countryside.
The majority of people locally feel it is easy to access the countryside, on the basis of areas being accessible and a good choice of walks.	Maintain existing maintenance programme, undertaking a process of continual assessment with opportunity for revision.
38% of respondents locally feel that it is not easy to access the countryside, citing lack of information and signage as the primary reason, followed by issues with obstructions.	Introduce further measures to provide information on access to the countryside; continue with programme of waymarking; continue to deal with obstructions as they are identified and/or reported by users.
Measures to put in place to encourage greater use of the countryside include better site based signage, then better parking/ transport, suggestions on places to go, organised activities / ideas for activities.	Promote easy / short / accessible routes; improve and promote access for all routes; where possible, identify parking / public transport options as part of promotion of routes.
For access to information, web based followed by smart phone most preferred.	Prioritise provision of information digitally, whilst continuing to support the provision of leaflets where appropriate.
Specific issues identified in localised areas.	Each to be assessed and/or addressed during first year of the Delivery Plan, with remaining work to be built into subsequent years work.
Access to the countryside is a key element of the tourism economy.	Deliver initiatives that support the promotion of Neath Port Talbot as a tourist destination.
PROW can support the aims of the Active Travel Act.	Work collaboratively to support delivery of the Integrated Network Map and to encourage walking and cycling as a means of travel.

7 Vision and Objectives

7.0.1 The 'Statement of Action' outlines the Council's vision for Neath Port Talbot and the objectives that will be addressed as part of this Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

7.0.2 The objectives are designed to deliver against the needs identified in the assessment, whilst also recognising the legislative processes that are required to underpin delivery of the Plan. It will also provide a framework for the actions and activities to be taken in delivering the requirements of this Plan.

Vision

That countryside access provision in Neath Port Talbot provides the best opportunity possible for residents and visitors to enjoy the benefits that it provides.

7.0.3 In working towards this vision, the Council will adopt the principles of 'Sustainable Management of Natural Resources'⁽⁷⁾, whilst also taking each opportunity to contribute towards the well-being goals and objectives set for Neath Port Talbot.

Objectives

Objective 1: The Public Rights of Way network will be protected, maintained in good condition and easy to use.

7.0.4 Actions will deliver against the following themes:

- *Routine Works* - including maintenance, improvement, waymarking and inspection.
- *Enforcement and Negotiation* - addressing obstructions such as overplanting and illegal structures.
- *Strategic Planning* - inputting to wider strategies and plans such as the Local Development Plan, Active Travel, other highways policies, etc.
- *Advice and Advocacy* - advising on planning applications and works being undertaken by the Council, partners and members of the public.

Objective 2: Opportunities to improve access to wider countryside / green space will be improved, working in partnership where necessary.

7.0.5 Actions will deliver against the following themes:

- *Open Access* - providing and improving signage.

7 <https://cdn.naturalresources.wales/media/678317/introducing-smnr-booklet-english.pdf>

7 . Vision and Objectives

- *Public Open Space* - ensuring that PROW that serves these areas meets the needs of users.
- *Partnership Working* - pursuing opportunities to deliver multiple benefits alongside maintenance of PROW, through collaboration and advice.

Objective 3: Maintain a robust system to record and process information on public rights of way and relevant countryside access.

7.0.6 Actions will deliver against the following themes:

- *Definitive Map and Statement* - kept up to date and an electronic mapping system is in place to portray the map and statement.
- *Claimed Rights of Way* - continuing to process in line with policies for prioritisation.
- *Legal Orders* - continuing to process in line with policies for prioritisation.

Objective 4: Public Rights of Way and other countryside access meet the needs of users, now and for the future.

7.0.7 Actions will deliver against the following themes:

- *Involvement* - people will have the opportunity to inform works being carried out and partnership working with the Local Access Forum and wider sectors will be actively pursued to understand the needs of people who require additional measures to access the countryside.
- *Access for All* - ensuring that maintenance and improvement works maximise the opportunities for all users to access the countryside.
- *Monitoring and Evaluation* - ensuring that the ROWIP, and associated Delivery Plans, remain fit for purpose and meeting the needs of users.

Objective 5: Countryside access will be promoted, providing benefits for health and well-being, tourism and recreation.

7.0.8 Actions will deliver against the following themes:

- *Provision of Information* - to include improvements to online-material and further exploration of digital technology.
- *Site-Based Signage* - to support waymarking, and information points.
- *Engagement* - through the provision of activities that encourage use of the natural environment for health, recreation.
- *Partnership Working* - raising awareness of the opportunities and benefits that the natural environment provides.

8 Policies

8.0.1 The following policies will be implemented in support of the delivery of the identified objectives.

Maintenance / Improvement Works

Policy 1

Standards of maintenance will be based on an assessment of the historic nature and use of the path. There will be a presumption to retain surfaces in a permeable / natural state unless of priority as an easy access route.

Policy 2

Public Rights of Way which also carry private rights of access will be maintained in accordance with the maintenance requirements of the public right only. Additional access requirements as part of the private right will remain the responsibility of the private user.

Policy 3

An annual maintenance programme is in place, addressing the needs of the most frequently used paths. Additional work will be undertaken and/or added to the maintenance programme on a priority basis, with highest priority given to those that present a safety hazard to the public, followed by well used paths and then those that have potential to be well-used / promoted.

Policy 4

Improvements to Public Rights of Way will be prioritised on a number of criteria, to include current and potential levels of public use, potential to improve accessibility and accessibility from public transport routes.

8 . Policies

Policy 5

There will be a presumption of least restrictive option and minimal use of structures in response to applications for new furniture on Public Rights of Way. Stiles will no longer be approved or installed by the Council unless a legitimate reason can be demonstrated.

Policy 6

The Council will only erect new barriers on footpaths and bridleways to restrict vehicles as a last resort and only where certain criteria are met, including evidence of illegal use and where legitimate users are not disadvantaged.

Policy 7

Improvement and maintenance works will be carried out in accordance with all legislative requirements in respect to biodiversity, including the biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems statutory duty. All works will ensure biodiversity is maintained and enhanced.

Legal Processes / Orders

Policy 8

Applications for making legal orders in respect of Public Rights of Way will be prioritised using a suitable scoring matrix, taking into account health and safety, benefit to network and wider Council strategies⁽⁸⁾.

Policy 9

The Council will seek to resolve issues on Public Rights of Way through negotiation with the landowner before resorting to legal proceedings.

Policy 10

There will be a presumption against permitting Town and Country Planning Act Diversions unless it can be proven that a Public Right of Way must be diverted to enable the development to be carried out and where an acceptable and comparable alternative route will be provided.

Financial Charges

Policy 11

The Council will recover from applicants the costs associated with making legal orders, including full cost of advertising and costs incurred by the Council. If the change to the path in question has some public benefit, the Council may decide to share the cost of making the order.

Policy 12

The Definitive Map will be available for public inspection free of charge at the Council Offices at Baglan Energy Park during normal office hours. Copies of the map will be available to members of the public at a charge.

Policy 13

In response to Definitive Map enquiries by prospective purchasers or their agents, written responses will incur a charge, in line with fees charged for similar enquiries of the highway network.

8 . Policies

9 Implementation and Monitoring

9.1 Annual Delivery Plans

9.1.1 'Annual Delivery Plans' will be developed, outlining the action that will be taken to deliver against the Statement of Action, and ultimately the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

9.1.2 Each Delivery Plan will be informed by the framework provided by the Statement of Action, a review of the previous year's delivery plan (where relevant) and current resources and funding availability. Issues identified as part of the assessment process will be addressed within the Delivery Plans.

9.1.3 The Delivery Plan will be held by the Countryside and Wildlife Team, and may be updated in response to more urgent priorities coming to light during the year. Activities that are delayed for such reasons, will be rescheduled for delivery in the following year.

9.2 Delivery Mechanism and Funding

9.2.1 Delivery of the ROWIP will be led by the Countryside and Wildlife Team, within the Planning and Public Protection Department of the Council. Whilst the responsibility for Public Rights of Way falls to this team, the ROWIP carries a wider vision for countryside access, recreation, health and well-being and tourism. This will require a collaborative approach between many departments of the Council, to maximise the benefits that this Plan can deliver.

9.2.2 Current funding for delivery of this Plan is reliant on existing resources within the Council's core budget. The Welsh Government Rights of Way Improvement Programme no longer exists, therefore significant improvement works will require efforts to secure external funding.

9.2.3 The Local Access Forum will also play a role in delivery of the Plan, through the provision of advice and through the role that its members has in promoting access to the countryside. Furthermore, opportunities to work collaboratively with other external partners will be pursued.

9.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

9.3.1 At the end of every 3 years, a more comprehensive review and evaluation process will be undertaken, assessing effectiveness of the policies and actions being taken. The outcome of the review will be reported to Council and the Local Access Forum, whilst providing the opportunity to make changes to key policies of the Plan.

9.3.2 As part of the third review (Year 9), an assessment will be undertaken to assess future delivery of the ROWIP and a potential full review of the Plan.

9 . Implementation and Monitoring

Appendix A: Legal Processes

A. Procedure for Applications for Diversion, Extinguishment and Creation Orders (generally based on consent)

A.1 To make an application to divert, extinguish or create a Public Right of Way, please contact the Rights of Way Officer on 01693 686868 or countryside@npt.gov.uk

A.2 The applicant will then be provided with the application forms that must be completed and returned. It is recommended that the applicant meets with the Rights of Way Officer to discuss the proposal and understand what additional information may be required.

A.3 An application form will need to be accompanied by:

- An Ordnance Survey Map detailing the proposal;
- Proof of ownership of all land involved with the proposal and consent from all parties, if other landowners are involved; and
- Confirmation of acceptance of any charging policy.

B. Procedure for Applications for New Public Rights of Way (based on user and / or historic evidence)⁽⁹⁾

A.4 To make an application for a new Public Rights of Way on user and/or historic evidence, the person who will be identified as the 'Main Applicant' should contact the Rights of Way Officer on 01639 686868 or countryside@npt.gov.uk

A.5 The process will be conducted in two stages:

Stage 1

A.6 The Main Applicant will be provided with official evidence forms and maps for the proposed new path. Ideally, the forms should be completed by at least 10 people who have used the path for a period of at least 20 years.

A.7 Each completed evidence form will need to be accompanied by an Ordnance Survey Map detailing the proposed new Public Right of Way.

A.8 The Main Applicant must also provide proof of ownership for the entire length of the new path. The Land Registry will be able to supply a copy of the title plan and schedule.

Stage 2

A.9 The Main Applicant will meet with the Rights of Way Officer, who will review the evidence forms, OS maps of the claimed path and the land Registry Information.

A.10 If everything is in order the Main Applicant will be required to complete three notices:

9 There is no charge for this process.

Appendix A: . Legal Processes

- One advising the Council as to the nature of the application;
- One to be sent to each owner of the new path (with assistance from the Rights of Way Officer); and
- One advising the Council that the owners have been notified.

A.11 Where the land is unregistered, with no information being held by Land Registry, the Main Applicant will be required to erect a copy of the notice, with a plan, on site for at least 28 days. The Rights of Way Officer will assist with this process.

A.12 Following the 28 days the Main Applicant will again meet the Rights of Way Officer and complete the remaining two notices:

- One advising the Council as to the nature of the application; and
- One advising the Council that the owners have been notified (via the site notice).

Appendix B: ROWIP (2008-2018) - Evaluation of Delivery

Table B.0.1 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2008-2018) - Evaluation of Delivery

POLICY AREA DM: DEFINITIVE MAP	
<p>DM: Introduction</p> <p>The Map can only be amended through the legal order making process, and the authority undertakes this area of work through an agency agreement between the Council's legal officers and those in the City and County of Swansea.</p>	<p>Due to efficiency savings, the agency agreement was cut and the legal function in relation to Rights of Way has been undertaken by Neath Port Talbot's Legal Section since January, 2015.</p>
<p>DM1: Continuous Review of the Definitive Map</p> <p>Keep the Definitive Map under continuous review in accordance with the requirements of Section 53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.</p> <p>Changes to the network are currently kept as a separate, but complementary, record. This has not caused any managerial problems to date but, nevertheless, the authority does intend to make a composite legal event order during the plan period which will formally allow the changes to be recorded on the Map itself, and it will then be republished with a new relevant date</p>	<p>The Council has continued to process applications under section 53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act as well as other legal orders.</p> <p>Due to budgetary pressures and limited staff resources, this has not been achieved. Due to potential changes on the legal process by the Welsh Government on the legal process this will be revisited when any changes are confirmed.</p>
<p>DM2: Priority for making Legal Orders in respect of Public Rights of Way</p> <p>(i) Orders for the diversion or extinguishment of footpaths and bridleways made under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which are necessary for development to take place.</p> <p>(ii) Orders for the diversion or stopping up of public rights of way made under the Highways Act 1980.</p> <p>(iii) Definitive Map Modification Orders for adding new public rights of way to the Definitive Map based on evidence of public usage.</p> <p>(iv) Definitive Map Anomalies.</p> <p>(v) Orders to register historic public rights (CROW Act Sections 53 to 56).</p>	<p>Legal orders were undertaken in accordance with this order of priority, as follows:</p> <p>(i) None since 2015 (no requests)</p> <p>(ii) 3 since 2015. 3 remaining</p> <p>(iii) 16 since 2015. 14 remaining</p> <p>(iv) none since 2015. 65 remaining</p> <p>(v) none since 2015. 0 remaining</p>
<p>DM3: Temporary Orders for Diversion or Closure of Public Rights of Way</p> <p>It will be the policy of the Council to make orders for the temporary diversion or closure of public rights of way, where appropriate, on the request of landowners or statutory undertakers. Orders of this nature are usually made within six weeks of the request, and this period allows time for statutory notices to be placed in the press.</p>	<p>Since 2008 the Council has processed 62 temporary closures on the rights of way network, they majority of which were to allow forestry operations to take place, on safety grounds.</p>

Appendix B: . ROWIP (2008-2018) - Evaluation of Delivery

<p>DM4: Charges for certain types of Legal Order which affect Public Rights of Way</p> <p>It will be the policy of the County Borough Council to make an appropriate charge for certain types of legal order:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developers and statutory undertakers who require temporary or permanent orders, will be expected to pay for the costs incurred in making the order. • Landowners who require orders to be made which are primarily for their own benefit will be charged the full cost of the order. If the change to the path in question has some public benefit, then the Council may decide to share the cost of making the order. • If the Council itself wishes to change the location of a public path because it is in the public interest, the council will pay for the order. 	<p>Policy implemented. With exception to orders in the public interest, the Council currently charges £1,250 (including a £1,000 legal fee) for a temporary or permanent diversion. This does not include advertising costs which are charged separately.</p>
<p>DM5: Public Inspection of the Definitive Map</p> <p>The Definitive Map will be available for public inspection free of charge at the Council Offices at Baglan Energy Park during normal office hours. Copies of the map will be available to members of the public at a charge set by the Service Level Agreement with the Ordnance Survey.</p>	<p>The Definitive Map and Statement are available for viewing, etc., as per the policy.</p>
<p>DM6: Definitive Map Land Charges Enquiries</p> <p>The Countryside Section will respond to Land Charges Section within ten working days regarding public rights of way enquiries on Part 2 of the CON 29 search form.</p>	<p>Policy implemented and achieved.</p>
<p>DM7: Additional Definitive Map Enquiries by Prospective Purchasers or their Agents</p> <p>If the request requires only a verbal reply, the information will be given free of charge. If a written response is required, the County Borough Council will provide this additional information on payment of an appropriate fee which is consistent with the fee charged for similar enquiries of the main highway network.</p>	<p>Policy implemented and achieved.</p>
<p>DM8: Protecting Public Rights of Way from Development.</p> <p>The Countryside Section will respond to the Planning Section within 21 days regarding applications for planning consent which affect public rights of way.</p>	<p>Policy implemented and achieved.</p>

POLICY AREAS M & IP: MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

The County Borough Council has a statutory duty to maintain public rights of way under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980, and it also has a wide range of powers to improve them under the same Act. Section 60 of the CROW Act provides the authority with a duty to include measures to improve the network of public rights of way in its ROWIP, and this is a clear indication that highway authorities are expected to use their powers of improvement. The policies in this section provide the basis on which maintenance and improvement work will be carried out during the plan period.

Appendix B: . ROWIP (2008-2018) - Evaluation of Delivery

<p>M1: Improving performance in maintaining the Rights of Way Network</p> <p>The Wales Data Unit Performance Indicator on rights of way will continue to be the main means by which the achievement of improved standards will be measured. Over the plan period, the council will aim to increase the proportion of the path network which is in a condition that is fit for purpose.</p>	<p>The Performance Indicators were downgraded from being compulsory to optional. Due to budgetary pressures the decision was taken to cease monitoring against the indicator, however maintenance of the Network continued as normal.</p>
<p>M2: Standards of Path Maintenance</p> <p>The Council has a duty to keep a highway in a safe and fit condition for the ordinary traffic of the neighbourhood at all times of the year. In practice, this means that the standard of maintenance which is appropriate for each right of way has to be based on its historic character and use. The Council will continue to base its maintenance duties on an assessment of the historic nature and use of the path.</p>	<p>Policy implemented.</p>
<p>M3: Maintenance Priorities</p> <p>The Council has an annual programme of routine maintenance work but often additional work has to be carried out urgently in the interests of public safety. The Council will undertake the work on a priority basis:</p> <p>(i) Where a problem is discovered on a well used path and it is a potential safety hazard to the public, the remedial work will be regarded as top priority and it will be carried out as soon as possible.</p> <p>(ii) A hazard discovered on a little used path will be treated as high priority in the interests of public safety.</p> <p>(iii) If a problem is discovered on a very well used path, but it is not an immediate safety hazard, this will be next in priority after safety issues.</p> <p>(iv) Non urgent work on paths which are little used will be the lowest priority.</p>	<p>The Council has continued to undertake the annual programme of routine maintenance and paths are added to the list as and when it is expedient to do so.</p> <p>The system of prioritising non-routine work has continued to be implemented and has worked well, enabling the Council to target its resources effectively.</p>
<p>M4: Methods of Implementation</p> <p>The Countryside Section will manage the maintenance and improvement programmes, by the means outlined below:</p> <p>(i) Countryside Project Team: This is a team of two workers based in Unit 20 at the Crynant Business Park, where stocks of materials and equipment are held.</p> <p>(ii) Contractors: The Council will continue to employ experienced contractors to carry out maintenance work where their skill and expertise is required.</p> <p>(iii) Community Council Path Maintenance Scheme: Since 1996, the Council has offered 75% grants to Community Councils in order for them to undertake approved maintenance on public rights of way.</p>	<p>Maintenance and improvement works have continued to be overseen by the Countryside and Wildlife Team (formerly Countryside Section) by the means outlined, with the following changes:</p> <p>The Countryside Project Team has relocated to the Council building at the Quays, with storage at the adjacent Service Response Centre.</p> <p>Due to budgetary pressures, the Community Council Path Maintenance Scheme was revised. The Council now offers a fixed grant for the distance of Public Rights of Way being maintained by the Town / Community Councils, of which three are now partaking.</p>

Appendix B: . ROWIP (2008-2018) - Evaluation of Delivery

<p>The Council will welcome the continuing support of the Community Councils during the plan period.</p> <p>(iv) Neath Port Talbot Highways Staff: Each year, part of the structural maintenance work is undertaken by Council highway staff. This is work which is beyond the scope of the rights of way contractors, and includes the repair of tarmacadam surfaces and major footbridges which are more than 10 metres in length.</p> <p>(v) Landowners: Where appropriate and cost effective, to carry out work on paths which cross their land.</p> <p>(vi) Volunteers: Where public liability cover can be provided by the volunteer group itself.</p>	
<p>IP1: Priorities for Public Rights of Way Improvement</p> <p>The criteria below will be used to determine priorities for improvements to the Public Rights of Way network. Highest priority will be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paths which provide communities with access to attractive areas of countryside or coast. Additional factors will be the level of public use and public pressure for improvement. ● Paths which can be improved to provide access to the countryside for people with mobility problems, or improve the safety of the path for all users. ● Paths which provide access to the countryside from public transport routes. ● Paths which are little used but have the potential to be well used following improvement works. ● Paths which are located in Communities First areas of the authority, or help meet the objectives of the Western Valleys Strategy. ● Paths which are located in the coastal area and will contribute to the achievement of an all Wales coast path with associated access improvements. 	<p>The Council has run an annual programme of improvements works throughout the duration of the Plan, primarily funded through Welsh Government ROWIP (Rights of Way Improvement Programme) grant funding, initially set at £57K, reducing to £35K by 2018.</p> <p>The grant funding was utilised to carry out improvement works and undertake promotional and engagement activities to encourage use of the Public Rights of Way Network and access to the wider countryside.</p> <p>Improvement activities were prioritised in line with this policy and within the ROWIP grant criteria.</p> <p>The ROWIP grant was cut in 2018 therefore future improvement and promotional work will be undertaken where funding can be secured.</p>
<p>IP2: Improvement of Structures on Public Rights of Way</p> <p>The Council has an on going programme of stile and gate replacement, with the aim of improving the accessibility of the path network by replacing structures which are easier to use. There will be a presumption in favour of:</p> <p>(i) Replacing existing stiles on public footpaths with self latching kissing gates,</p> <p>(ii) Replacing gates on bridleways with bridlegates which meet British Horse Society standards wherever possible.</p>	<p>Policy implemented, with an active programme of replacement with easy access structures. The Council no longer installs stiles on the network.</p>
<p>IP3: Approval for new stiles and gates on footpaths and bridleways</p>	<p>Policy implemented, taking into account potential loss of enjoyment of the path.</p>

Appendix B: . ROWIP (2008-2018) - Evaluation of Delivery

<p>Where landowners wish to erect new fence lines across a Public Right of Way, it will be the policy of the Council to approve applications for new structures which meet the statutory requirements, and which do not adversely affect the public enjoyment of the path to an unacceptable degree.</p>	
<p>IP4: Erection of barriers to restrict vehicles</p> <p>The Council will only erect new barriers on footpaths and bridleways as a last resort and only if the following criteria are met:</p> <p>(i) There is strong evidence that the path is being used by unauthorised vehicular traffic.</p> <p>(ii) If there are any private vehicular rights along the path, all those persons holding such rights will have to agree to the type of barrier being proposed.</p> <p>(iii) The physical nature of the site of the proposed barrier will allow the installation of a barrier which cannot be easily by-passed.</p> <p>(iv) It will be possible to provide a barrier that will enable the passage of all categories of user, including those with mobility problems. If the whole length of the path is of a width and gradient that enables it to be used by disabled persons, then a barrier which allows the passage of wheel chair users will be appropriate.</p>	<p>The Council has seen an increase in requests from landowners for structures to help combat the increasing illegal off-road vehicle use. The Council has implemented this policy in deciding on the structure, if any, that should be installed.</p> <p>Wherever possible, other measures to curtail misuse have been explored first, such as seeking involvement of the Police. Every effort has been made to establish whether there are private access rights and where these exist, structures have not been erected without the agreement of all parties.</p>
<p>IP5: Improvement of path surfaces</p> <p>The criteria set out in Policy IP1 will be used to determine the paths to be improved and the nature of the works to be undertaken, recognising future maintenance requirements of such works. Typically the work will entail the following:</p> <p>(i) Providing rolled aggregate surfaces on previously unsurfaced paths.</p> <p>(ii) Providing additional drainage on waterlogged paths.</p> <p>(iii) Construction of steps on steep slopes to encourage greater public use.</p> <p>(iv) Constructing footbridges where none previously existed to improve the accessibility of the paths to the whole community.</p>	<p>See response to IP1 above.</p>
<p>POLICY AREA E: ENFORCEMENT</p>	
<p>Under Section 130 of the Highways Act 1980 the County Borough Council, as highway authority, has a duty to assert and protect the public right to use the highways in its administrative area, and this includes Public Rights of Way.</p>	
<p>E1: Priorities for removing obstructions on Public Rights of Way</p>	<p>Policy implemented where required.</p>

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The criteria which the Council will use to prioritise the workload are set out below:

(i) High Priority

(a) Where members of the public are prevented from using the path by intimidating or aggressive behaviour by, or on behalf of the landowner, this will be regarded as an immediate priority, and the police will be involved if appropriate.

(b) Recently erected structures on well used public rights of way which are subject of numerous public complaints.

(c) Obstructions on well used paths which are a safety hazard, such as barbed wire fences, locked gates with barbed wire on them, metal barriers with sharp edges, seriously defective stiles or gates.

(d) Encroaching vegetation on well used paths which is a responsibility of the landowner to cut back.

(e) Obstructions which have been subject of a notice served on the authority under Section 130A of the Highways Act 1980.

These five categories are all regarded as top priority, but which of them will be regarded as first priority at any point in time, will depend on the circumstances of each case.

(ii) Medium Priority

If the problems listed in points a) to d) above are discovered on paths which are not currently well used, but have the potential to be well used, they will be treated as medium priority. Such problems may be discovered through routine monitoring, or by receiving a first complaint from the public.

(iii) Low Priority

Where the authority discovers obstructions on little used parts of the network which have not been subject of any public complaint, they will be treated as low priority.

E2: Procedure to be used to secure the removal of obstructions

The Council will adopt the following procedure when dealing with any obstructions on Public Rights of Way:

(i) Determine the identity of the landowner responsible for the obstruction. Where this is not the case, the authority will carry out a search of Land Registry records. Where there is no record of land ownership, the Council will use its powers under Section 143 of the Highways Act 1980 to serve a notice requiring the removal of the obstruction.

(ii) If the landowner can be identified, the authority will make contact in order to request the removal of the obstruction. In most cases a discussion with the landowner will result in the removal of the obstruction. In appropriate circumstances, particularly where the obstructions have not been intentional,

Policy implemented. Enforcement is seen as the last resort and it is unusual to not succeed in resolving an issue through negotiation or agreement. Whilst there has been occasion to serve legal notices in relation to obstructions, each has been resolved without needing to seek prosecution at Court.

Appendix B: . ROWIP (2008-2018) - Evaluation of Delivery

<p>the Council may assist in the removal of obstructions by providing stiles or gates as part of its path improvement programme. In such instances landowners will be informed that they will remain primarily responsible for future maintenance of the structures. This approach is in accordance with the duty of the authority to secure an improved rights of way network which is set out in Section 60(b) of the CROW Act 2000.</p> <p>(iii) In situations where a landowner refuses to remove an obstruction, this is a criminal offence under Section 137 of the Highways Act 1980, and the Council will seek a prosecution of the offender in the magistrates Court.</p>	
<p>POLICY AREA P: PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION</p>	
<p>P1: Improving Publicity and Promotion</p> <p>The Council will improve the provision of information on countryside access by the following means:</p> <p>(i) Create a countryside access point on the Council's website which will contain information on the types of public access available in the County Borough. The site will contain information on public access rights and also on the responsibilities expected of the public when enjoying access to private land. The site will be linked to the National Access data base being established by CCW, and this will assist members of the public who live outside the area to find information on local access opportunities if they are planning to visit the area.</p> <p>(ii) Increase the range of access information leaflets produced by the Council, and include the information on the countryside access point on the Council website. The Local Access Forum will be consulted on the form and content of the material that will be produced.</p> <p>(iii) Make access information available at public buildings throughout the County Borough, including those provided by Community Councils.</p> <p>(iv) Work with members of the Local Access Forum to distribute information through organisations with which they are involved.</p> <p>(v) Promote the use of public access to the countryside for the benefit of public health. This will be in accordance with the aims of the Neath Port Talbot Physical Activity Plan, and will be done as a corporate exercise and in conjunction with outside organisations.</p> <p>(vi) Signposting and waymarking is an ongoing task undertaken under the maintenance and improvement programmes, as described above. The authority will attempt to increase the proportion of the network which is adequately signed and waymarked by 1% a year in line with Policy M1, and priorities for this work will be as described in that Policy. However, additional priority will be given to signposting or waymarking promoted paths or access areas, including those in the coastal zone.</p>	<p>(i) Action achieved. See www.npt.gov.uk/countrysideaccess.</p> <p>N.B. The National Access database was not established therefore no link to this page was possible.</p> <p>(ii) Production of leaflets has been carried out and have either been distributed locally or are available on the website (see www.npt.gov.uk/countryside), including the new series of Wildlife Walks. However, given an increasing demand for web-based information and the need to reduce waste, efforts have been focused on creating an online, interactive walking map, with the ability to edit / update walks as needed. See www.npt.gov.uk/walking.</p> <p>(iii) See (ii) above. Whilst leaflets have been shared at information points where they exist, the focus to provide information has been through the online map.</p> <p>New initiatives and routes for promotion have been communicated to Forum members to share with local members of their organisations.</p> <p>(v) Due to budgetary savings, staff resources to deliver activities as a corporate exercise has been limited. However, use has been made of external funding to work collaboratively with partners to deliver health focused activities such as the Council run 'Working with Nature' Project ' and Actif Woods' Project (delivery partner Small Woods Association / Coed Lleol). Each of these projects have encouraged access to the wider countryside through engagement and delivery of health focused activities.</p> <p>(vi) The Council has continued to sign and waymark the network and is committed to renew and replace signs that form part of significant and / or promoted routes. New signage was designed and installed for the Wildlife Walks and more recently, the St. Illtyd's Walk was re-routed, and signage updated, as part of a collaborative project with the Ramblers</p>

Appendix B: . ROWIP (2008-2018) - Evaluation of Delivery

	Association. However, due to staff pressures, data is not available to quantify the percentage of the network that is fully waymarked.
POLICY AREA CA: MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS (OTHER THAN PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY)	
<p>CA1: Management of open access land provided under the CROW Act 2000, and common land</p> <p>The County Borough Council will ensure that open access land provided under the CROW Act 2000 is accessible to the public, and this includes areas of common land which previously had no public rights of access.</p> <p>The Council will consider public requests for additional means of entry to access land, and in consultation with landowners, will assist in providing the necessary structures subject to the availability of funding.</p>	<p>The Council has a power (not duty) to provide new access provision onto open access land. Requests to provide additional means of access onto common land have been very limited, however additional access points were provided at the Common at Barry Road, Lower Brynamman.</p>
<p>CA2: Management of access land owned by the County Borough Council.</p> <p>The County Borough Council owns considerable areas of countryside which are already open to public access. This includes the country parks at Margam, and the Gnoll as well as land within Afan Forest Park.</p> <p>The Countryside Section will continue to support efforts to improve public access to land in Council ownership, and will work in partnership with Council land managers on specific projects.</p>	<p>The Council continues to provide public access to extensive areas of countryside, including Country Parks and Local Nature Reserves. In addition, urban green space provides opportunities to access and benefit from the natural environment. Budget pressures have reduced the Council's resources in maintaining and improving these areas, however greater use has been made of external funding, community engagement and partnership working to ensure these sites remain open and accessible to the public. The Countryside and Wildlife Team (formerly Countryside and Biodiversity teams) have supported these activities and continued to ensure that Public Rights of Way are maintained within these areas.</p>
<p>CA3: Management of Long Distance Trails.</p> <p>The Council considers that the maintenance and waymarking of the long distance trails which pass through the County Borough should be considerably improved. This can only be achieved through partnership working with the adjacent local authorities and the Forestry Commission, because some sections of the trails are permissive routes on FC land and they are not public rights of way. A coordinated approach to the work is essential and a group has already been set up to programme work on the Coed Morgannwg way. It is proposed that this will be extended to include the development of other waymarked trails, in order to ensure that they are managed more effectively.</p> <p>The Council will survey the former Cerdded Bro Nedd in order to re-establish this waymarked walk around the Vale of Neath.</p>	<p>Due to budgetary savings and reduction in staff, opportunities to improve our long distance trails have been limited, resulting in a need to prioritise on routes.</p> <p>The Coed Morgannwg Way and Cerdded Bro Nedd are no longer actively promoted, however Ridgeway path and St Illtyd's Walk are still promoted, with an extensive re-routing and waymarking programme having been undertaken for St. Illtyd's Walk. In addition, a new long distance bridleway has been established; in partnership with the British Horse Society; The Great Dragon Ride, which links North Wales to South Wales, finishing at Margam Park.</p>
<p>CA4: Development of the Rural Cycle Network</p> <p>The County Borough Council will improve and extend the access available to cyclists in the plan period by the following means:</p>	<p>The Council works where possible to develop and improve provisions for both horse riders and cyclists:</p> <p>(i) Work undertaken as part of the Red Dragon Ride and schemes undertaken on Byway 1 Port Talbot and Byway 10 Tonna.</p>

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<p>(i) Improving the standards of maintenance of bridleways and byways through the policies in this plan.</p> <p>(ii) Working in partnership with the Forestry Commission to provide waymarked trails in the forest plantations.</p> <p>(iii) Extending the rural cycle network in the valley and coastal areas of the authority area. The following work is proposed to be undertaken in the plan period:</p> <p>(a) Cycleway link between Aberafan Seafront and the Afan Forest Park</p> <p>(b) Cycleway link between Aberafan Seafront and Brunel Dock</p> <p>(c) Cycleway link between the Celtic Trail and the Goytre to Bryn Cycleway.</p> <p>(d) Completion of the Amman Valley Cycleway between Cwmllynfell and Lower Brynamman, in partnership with Carmarthenshire County Council.</p> <p>(e) Completion of National Cycle Route 46 between Neath and Glynneath</p> <p>(iv) Developing waymarked cycle trails in the forest plantations</p> <p>(v) Providing better publicity on the availability of cycling in Neath Port Talbot.</p>	<p>(ii) NRW (formerly Forestry Commission) have constructed numerous mountain bike trails in the Afan Valley.</p> <p>(iii) See below.</p> <p>(a) Completed in 2013.</p> <p>(b) A potential route has been identified through the Energy Park, however delivery would be dependent on opportunities to be pursued through development.</p> <p>(c) As part of the Welsh Government's Active Travel fund in 18/19 a feasibility study looked at the route between Celtic Trail (NCN4) and Goytre to Bryn Cycleway. Funding opportunities are now being explored.</p> <p>(d) The cycle route is largely complete from Garnant to Cwmllynfell, with a short gap near the Washery site in Lower Brynamman.</p> <p>(e) A feasibility study was undertaken in 2018/19 identifying where future improvements could be made to the NCN between Neath and Resolven.</p> <p>(iv) See (ii) above.</p> <p>(v) A cycle leaflet has been produced showing the cycle routes in the County Borough, see www.npt.gov.uk/cycling. In collaboration with Swansea Council a scheme called Swansea Bay Cycle Routes aimed to promote cycle routes for commuting in the County Borough, see www.cycleswanseabay.org.uk</p>
<p>CA5: Access to the Canal network in Neath Port Talbot</p> <p>In terms of public access, the Council recognises the importance of the canal network to persons with mobility problems and will aim to:</p> <p>(i) Maintain the sections of canal which are registered public rights of way to a high standard which will enable their use by all members of the community.</p> <p>(ii) Maintain public access to the Swansea Canal Nature Reserve between Ynysmeudwy and Ystalyfera.</p> <p>(iii) Continue to promote public access to the remainder of the canal network under on-going access agreements.</p>	<p>Access provision to the canal network has been maintained with surface improvement works carried out on significant sections, either as part of Active Travel, Wales Coast Path or ROWIP funded schemes. The canal towpaths remain in good condition and are well used by the public.</p>
<p>CA6: Coastal Access Improvement Programme</p> <p>The County Borough Council is committed to participating in the national Coastal Access Improvement Programme which is being implemented as a partnership between the coastal local authorities and CCW.</p>	<p>The Wales Coast Path was opened on 5 May 2012, and offers a 870-mile (1,400 km) walking route from Chepstow in the south to Queensferry, Flintshire, in the north.</p>

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The project will have two main aims:

(i) To create an All Wales Coastal Path. It is envisaged that this will be completed by 2012.

(ii) To carry out other coastal access improvements within a notional 2km strip inland of the high water mark.

Due to restrictions along the coastline in Neath Port Talbot, two routes were opened in Neath Port Talbot, an upland and lowland route. In addition to utilisation of existing routes, a new Public Right of Way was created to enable access into Kenfig National Nature Reserve in Bridgend, and an access agreement was secured to create a new permissive route from Briton Ferry along the coastline to Aberafan Seafront.

Appendix C: Priority Criteria for Claimed PROW and Other Orders

Table C.0.1 Priority Criteria for Claimed PROW and Other Orders (e.g. Downgrading and Extinguishment)

CRITERIA	POINTS
Path has recently been obstructed:	
(a) Where the obstruction renders the path inaccessible	10
(b) Where the obstruction results in access being inconvenient	2
Threatened by development	10
Currently in use or in use just prior to claim (That is, it is not a retrospective claim based on use which has long ceased, but there is a demand, well supported)	4
Fills a gap in the network (useful short cut), contributes significantly to the ROWIP or is of strategic importance. This may include re-alignment	2
Elderly users (There is a risk the evidence will be lost, could create a significant delay or additional work in assessing evidence, resulting in a failed claim which would otherwise had better prospects)	4
Access to sites of historic, scientific or scenic interest	1
Used by a wide section of the public:	
(a) Would benefit the wider community e.g. less able people, use by push chairs and multi reasons for use i.e. attend school, surgery, Post Office, shops, bus stops	2
(b) Claimed bridleway, could benefit three categories of users	2
Avoids busy roads and/or improves public safety	2
Application to delete/downgrade/re-align:	
(a) Affects promoted route or regional trail	5
(b) Where evidently an error exists	10
Application supported by 6 or less	0
Application supported by 10 to 20	1
Application supported by over 20	2
Application outstanding for up to 5 years	1
Application outstanding for up to 6-10 years	2
Application outstanding for up to 11-15 years	3
Application outstanding for up to 16-20 years	4

C.1 Any application that does not score any points will be prioritised according to the date the application was made.



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Appendix 2 – ROWIP (2019-2029) First Stage Integrated Impact Assessment

1. Details of the Initiative:

Initiative Description/Summary: Consultation Draft of Rights of Way Improvement Plan, setting out the means by which the Council intends to improve and promote access to the countryside across the County over the next 10 years.
Service Area: Planning and Public Protection
Directorate: Environment

2. Does the initiative affect:

	Yes	No
Service Users	✓	
Staff		✓
Wider Community	✓	
Internal administrative process only		

3. Does the initiative impact on people because of their:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't Know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence)/How might it impact?
Age		✓				Plan is intended to be inclusive aiming at encouraging greater use of Public Rights of Way and the wider countryside by all community members.
Disability		✓				
Gender Reassignment		✓				
Marriage/Civil Partnership		✓				
Pregnancy/Maternity		✓				
Race		✓				
Religion/Belief		✓				
Sex		✓				
Sexual orientation		✓				

4. Does the initiative impact on:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence used) / How might it impact?
People's opportunities to use the Welsh language		✓				Plan will be inclusive aiming at encouraging all community members to be involved. Plan and all public communications will be bilingual.
Treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English		✓				Plan will be inclusive aiming at encouraging all community members to be involved. Plan and all public communications will be bilingual.

5. Does the initiative impact on biodiversity:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence) / How might it impact?
To maintain and enhance biodiversity			✓		L	Service Assessment has been carried as part of the Biodiversity Duty Plan requirements, and appropriate working practices are in place to avoid impact on biodiversity. Policy for the protection of biodiversity is embedded into the ROWIP.
To promote the resilience of ecosystems, i.e. supporting protection of the wider environment, such as air quality, flood alleviation, etc.			✓		L	Service Assessment has been carried as part of the Biodiversity Duty Plan requirements. Appropriate working practices are in place to allow continuation of necessary works whilst minimising any impact on the resilience of ecosystems. The ROWIP supports promotion of countryside access and greater engagement with the natural environment, leading to improved awareness and understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

6. Does the initiative embrace the sustainable development principle (5 Ways of Working):



	Yes	No	Details

Long term - how the initiative supports the long term well-being of people	✓		Plan is promoting greater engagement and awareness with the natural environment, leading to long term improvements to health and well-being of users.
Integration - how the initiative impacts upon our wellbeing objectives	✓		The Plan delivers against a range of plans and initiatives, links with which have been identified with the Plan. Local Well-being objectives have been reflected within the Plan, and its felt that delivery against the Plan will contribute towards these goals.
Involvement - how people have been involved in developing the initiative	✓		A consultation process was undertaken prior to commencement of this review, and has informed the decision to undertake the review, as well as the content of the plan itself. Furthermore, wider relevant consultations were assessed as part of the process. A further public consultation process will be undertaken of the draft plan.
Collaboration - how we have worked with other services/organisations to find shared sustainable solutions	✓		Internal consultation of the draft plan has been carried out and built into the content of this Plan.
Prevention - how the initiative will prevent problems occurring or getting worse	✓		The Plan is providing a framework for the effective management of our Public Rights of Way, looking to undertake necessary maintenance works before problems deteriorate. Delivery of the Plan will provide the opportunity for residents and visitors to be more physically active, leading to improved health, whilst participation in the natural environment leads to improved mental well-being, in the short term and in the long term.

7. Declaration - based on above assessment (tick as appropriate):

A full impact assessment (second stage) is not required	✓
Reasons for this Conclusion	
<p>Equalities – The Plan is outlining an inclusive and community focused approach to management, and promotion, of the Public Rights of Way and wider countryside, ensuring that groups of people are not disadvantaged.</p> <p>Welsh Language – Plan will be inclusive aiming at encouraging all community members to be involved. Plan and all public communications will be bilingual.</p> <p>Biodiversity – A policy is integrated into the Plan to ensure negative impacts on biodiversity are avoided. Working methodologies will be underpinned by this policy.</p> <p>Well-being of Future Generation (5 ways of Working) – The 5 ways of working has been followed in the review of the Plan, and will continue to be followed in delivery of the plan.</p>	

A full impact assessment (second stage) is required	
Reasons for this conclusion	

	Name	Position	Signature	Date
Completed by	Catrin Evans	Countryside & Wildlife Team Leader		24 th July 2019
Signed off by	Nicola Pearce	Head of Service		14 th August 2019