

**East Sussex County Council**

**Rights of Way  
Improvement Plan**

**2007-2017**

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## **i. Foreword**

By Councillor Matthew Lock  
Lead Member for Transport & Environment

East Sussex has some of the finest and most protected landscapes in the United Kingdom. Ensuring that there is the best possible access provision to our countryside, whilst protecting the environment, is an important challenge.

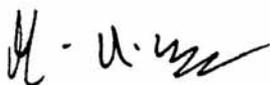
In order to meet this challenge we are developing our first Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The Plan has been drafted after extensive consultation with those who both manage and enjoy the East Sussex countryside. Importantly, at several stages during this process, the views of the East Sussex Local Access Forum have been sought. The concerns, wishes and ideas of all these people have contributed to the Plan.

Since the closure of access to the countryside during the Foot & Mouth Disease crisis of 2001, we have been committed to developing the links between the rural economy and the provision of public access to the countryside. As a part of this commitment, we developed a series of 'Paths to Prosperity' circular walks designed to encourage more people to visit rural businesses whilst enjoying the East Sussex countryside. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan will build upon this success.

A further commitment is to continue to inform and encourage the public to take advantage of the wonderful countryside resource in East Sussex. It is now widely recognised that outdoor recreation is important for the health, well-being and enjoyment of the community. The provision of a variety of well maintained and promoted paths alongside our excellent guided walks and cycle rides programmes has encouraged an increasing number of people out into the countryside and continues to be one of our key aims.

For many existing path users, such as walkers, horse riders, cyclists and the disabled, key concerns include the safety, continuity and suitability of the public rights of way network. For example, we are keen to reduce, as much as possible, the need for walkers and horse riders to walk or ride in the road by providing safe alternatives. Also, we must ensure that in improving the path network for one group of users we are not reducing the ability of other users to enjoy the countryside.

However, we must be open and honest about our ability to improve access to the countryside, given the limited availability of the resources needed in many cases. Finding new sources of funding for public rights of way improvements is one of the main challenges we face in the future.



Matthew Lock

**ii. Vision**

***A county where people of all abilities, backgrounds and ethnic groups have greater access opportunities to a wide range of well maintained and well connected public rights of way and areas of open access.***

### iii. Summary

#### The Importance of Public Rights of Way

Public rights of way are the public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic that criss-cross England & Wales, often on private land. They can be in towns or in remote countryside. They can be narrow paths or wide tracks. All public rights of way are highways in law.

In most areas public rights of way are the main, if not only, method by which the public can access the countryside. In rural East Sussex they link villages and sites of interest, provide views and make an important contribution to the rural economy.

The closure of public rights of way during the foot and mouth disease crisis in 2001 highlighted just how vital access to the countryside can be for some rural businesses.

Awareness has also increased of the importance of public rights of way in promoting exercise and healthy living.

#### Our Duty to Prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan

East Sussex County Council has a duty to prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan by November 2007. It should assess:

- The extent to which the local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and enjoyment of the County Council's area;
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind and partially sighted people and others with mobility problems.

The Plan is designed to look at potential improvements to public rights of way and access to the countryside above and beyond the County Council's normal maintenance and enforcement duties.

#### Our Aims

Many users of public rights of way in East Sussex believe that the priority for the County Council should be to ensure that the existing network of paths is kept in a fit and proper condition for the public to use.

However, we need to build upon that basic wish. Importantly, this includes making the path network safer and more accessible for more potential users to enjoy.

In the Rights of Way Improvement Plan we have set ourselves seven aims which, if achieved, will deliver a better network of paths for the public to enjoy.

These aims are:

- Improve resourcing
- Improve partnership working
- Improve safety and convenience
- Improve access for all
- Improve information
- Improve access to the countryside from urban areas
- Improve promoted routes

## Our Plan

The East Sussex Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a document detailing our vision for the future of access to the countryside in East Sussex. However, this is not its only role. It is also designed to be an informative document setting the full context of the provision of rights of way and other forms of countryside access in the county.

The Plan also details the process we have gone through in developing our aims, objectives and actions. We have been guided by the advice of rights of way users and, in particular, by the East Sussex Local Access Forum.

## Our Statement of Action

In order to achieve these seven aims a number of objectives are set out in detail under each aim in our Statement of Action. To meet these objectives we then have a series of specific actions that we intend to carry out.

We have already started to meet some of the targets set in the Statement of Action.

## What Can We Achieve?

Many of the actions listed within the Statement of Action have been tailored to fit within existing and future budget expectations and we are committed to delivering on many of the actions. However, we recognise and accept that we may not be able to achieve everything that is hoped for.

The County Council has developed the following draft overarching statement which encapsulates what the authority wants to achieve over the next four years.

### **The East Sussex County Council Vision**

We will be a modern, efficient, accountable authority leading work with partners to deliver to all our customers and communities:

- Increased prosperity and security for EastSussex
- Affordable, quality core services at lowest possible council tax

We will make a positive difference to local people's lives by making best use of resources, being clear about the choices involved and encouraging local communities to thrive.