

# ITEM 8

## SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM, WEDNESDAY APRIL 20<sup>TH</sup> 2005

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### Introduction

Over the last year targeted consultation has been carried out to help inform the RoWIP process. This has included questionnaires to the public (Somerset Influence Citizens' Panel), parish/town councils, cyclists/mountain bikers, horse riders/carriage drivers and landowners. The following are the key findings from each with, where applicable, differences specific to Exmoor National Park. Should anybody wish to access the full Quantitative Consultation Report then please visit the rights of way homepage [www.somerset.gov.uk/rightsofway/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/rightsofway/) or <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/media//D4055/RoWIP%20Quantitative%20Consultation%20Report.pdf>

It is hoped that the Draft RoWIP for Somerset will be out for consultation next Spring/Summer with a view to publishing the final Plan before the end of 2006. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries at this stage.

### Public Consultation

Distribution: mailed to Somerset Influence Citizen's Panel (1400 representative members of the Somerset public), posted on various websites.

Response: 802 postal, 78 online. Only 3 were from non-residents

### Key findings:

- Local paths are important to people as are the statutory duties of signing and maintenance of public rights of way.
- Information on rights of way and circular routes are the highest non-statutory priorities for the public.
- Almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with rights of way matters
- Use of public transport to access the countryside is very low at 6.3%, less than a tenth of the level of car use.
- Walking is the most popular reason for accessing the countryside. Dog walking ranked 10<sup>th</sup> out of 13 activities.
- Unspoilt landscape, car parking and heritage interest are the main priorities for the public when visiting the countryside.
- The surface condition of rights of way is the main reason for people not going to the countryside as often as they would like to.
- Almost 15% of respondents consider themselves to have a disability.
- The majority of respondents were from the Somerset Influence residents panel and were predominantly over 45. It has to be considered whether the results are a true reflection of the general public in Somerset.

## **Parish / Town Council Consultation**

Distribution: all Parish and Town Councils in Somerset apart from those wholly within Exmoor National Park. These were excluded as it was felt they had already had enough consultation from various other bodies and also the rights of way network on the whole is in a better state within the Park compared to other parts of Somerset.

Response: 187 from 300 (62%)

Key findings:

- Councils are satisfied with signposting and don't consider it a high priority.
- Councils are most dissatisfied with routes with access for all and waymarking.
- Regional long distance routes are not a priority for Councils.
- The main priorities for Councils are the maintenance and freeing of obstructions of rights of way.
- Waymarking and access for all are other high priorities.
- These findings are only representative of Parish/Town Councils and in some cases individual Councillors and should be used with caution.

## **Horse Riding/Carriage Driving Consultation**

Distribution: existing contacts, riding centres, livery yards, tack/feed shops. Libraries, TICs and websites.

Response: 647 horse riders, 24 carriage drivers

Key findings:

- The majority of horse riders ride everyday.
- Carriage-drivers drive mostly on a weekly basis but also on a daily basis.
- Over 46% of riders use main roads and almost all riders use minor roads.
- Half of carriage drivers use main roads and all use minor roads.
- Over 80% of riders/drivers encountered 'poor surfaces', 'overgrown tracks' or 'gates hard to open' either frequently or occasionally on rights of way.
- 65% of riders/drivers encountered poor sight lines at rights of way junctions with roads either frequently or occasionally and have had one or more near misses in the last five years.
- 25% of riders/drivers have had five or more near misses with motorised vehicles in the last five years.
- 42% of respondents cited a lack of routes as the reason they don't go riding as much as they would like. Over a fifth of respondents cited that it was too dangerous as another reason.
- Both riders and drivers are in agreement that there are not enough rights of way and the existing ones are poorly maintained. They are also agreed that they; use the same routes again and again, like circular routes, would use the network more if it was improved and that there is not enough information available on routes.
- Enhancing the existing network through; links to form circular routes, improved road crossings and upgrading routes so that more people can use them were the highest priorities for respondents.

- Exmoor National Park had a well below average percentage of riders/drivers that have had five or more ‘near misses’ with a motorised vehicle in the last five years.
- Only 60% of those riding/driving in the Park agreed that there are not enough public rights of way compared to over 80% for all other areas in Somerset.
- Riders/drivers in the Park have the lowest incidence of; ‘frequently encountering’ poor sight lines where rights of way meet roads, and ‘frequently encountering’ public rights of way that force you to cross busy roads.
- The majority of riders/drivers in the Park ride gave a non-response to ‘reasons why they don’t ride/drive as much as they would like’ whereas in all other areas it was the minority.
- Riders/drivers in the Park had a higher disagreement than any other area that ‘the public rights of way are badly signposted/ waymarked’.

### **Cycling/ Mountain Biking Consultation**

Distribution: cycling groups, cycle hire/shops, Cheddar Challenge, large employers, websites, libraries, TICs, face-to-face.

Response: 563 responses overall, 434 as normal cyclists, 308 as mountain bikers (179 filled in both).

#### **Key findings: Cycling**

- Over 81% of respondents cycle on a daily or weekly basis.
- 94% of respondents cycle for recreational purposes.
- Over 27% of recreational cyclists use a car to get to where they cycle.
- Disregarding the ‘no replies’ and ‘lack of time’ the main reasons for respondents not cycling as much as they would like are ‘safety on roads/road crossings’ and ‘lack of suitable routes’ at 20% and 17% respectively.
- ‘More routes for mountain bikers’ had the highest response as a ‘high’ priority.
- The highest priority for recreational cyclists was ‘more multi-use trails’ followed by ‘more cycle lanes on roads’.
- For those who cycle purely for utility trips the highest priority was ‘more cycle lanes on roads’ followed by ‘more footpaths allowing access for cyclists’.

#### **Mountain Biking**

- The majority of respondents mountain bike on a weekly basis.
- Over 78% of respondents mountain bike on the Quantock Hills compared to 43% in Exmoor National Park.
- The least popular area is South Somerset District with only 13% of respondents mountain biking in this area.
- A third of respondents travel to where they mountain bike by bike, however the majority (65%) travel by car to where they mountain bike.
- 29% of respondents are prepared to travel in excess of 40 miles to go for a mountain bike ride within Somerset.
- 39% of respondents cited the ‘lack of routes’ as a reason that they don’t mountain bike as much as they would like and 26% cited ‘lack of facilities’.
- Over 80% of respondents rated the current off-road mountain bike routes available as satisfactory or better.

- Overall, 65% of respondents mountain bike on public footpaths. 47% of respondents mountain bike on public footpaths because they offer a more convenient route although ENP had the lowest incidence of this in Somerset.
- 37% of respondents had not encountered problems with other users (or did not answer the question), therefore the majority of respondents (63%) did encounter problems. 42% of respondents had encountered problems with walkers, 35% with 4x4 vehicles and 21% with horse riders.
- Over 72% of respondents rated 'more adventurous single-track routes' as a high priority. The next highest priorities were 'more cross-country routes' and 'increased connectivity' with 63% and 57% of respondents rating them as a 'high' priority respectively.
- 'Better way-marked routes' and 'better facilities at start/end of rides' were both the lowest 'high priorities' for respondents who mountain bike in ENP.
- The incidence of car use to get to where respondents mountain bike was highest by those mountain biking in ENP.

### **Landowner Consultation**

Distribution: 3000 random sample of holdings in Somerset through DEFRA Mailshot, NFU website, CLBA members e-mail.

Response: 695.

Key findings:

- 8.1% (56) of respondents own/farm land in Exmoor National Park.
- Over a fifth of respondents consider gates left open, out of control dogs and dog fouling to be a serious problem.
- Trespass, worrying livestock and litter were all problems (although not as serious) experienced by over 40% of respondents.
- The majority of respondents believe the responsibility for stiles and gates rests with either the County or District Council.
- Over 80% of respondents were aware of their responsibility to reinstate paths across cultivated land.
- Two-thirds of respondents would prefer cross-field paths to be diverted to headland paths.
- Just over half of respondents would consider having stiles replaced by stock proof kissing gates however over a third would not.
- Only 16% of respondents would not consider allowing paths across their land to be fully waymarked.
- Out of control dogs and worrying livestock would appear to be serious problems for landowners/farmers particularly in Mendip Hills AONB and Exmoor National Park.
- Serious problems particular to landowners/farmers in Exmoor National Park are gates left open and people exceeding their rights.
- Dog fouling is an above average serious problem for landowners/farmers in Mendip Hills AONB.
- The most negative area to public access was Sedgemoor District where 41% of landowners/farmers said they would 'prefer to have no public access' on their land.
- The area with the highest percentage of landowners/farmers who think it is their responsibility for stiles/gates on rights of way was Quantock Hills AONB (35%).
- Landowners/farmers in Exmoor National Park see the Park as responsible for stiles/gates on rights of way (71%) whereas in the AONBs

landowners/farmers are split between themselves, the District Council and County Council as to who is responsible, but not the AONB service.

- The area where landowners/farmers were most in favour of having stiles replaced with stock proof kissing gates were Quantock Hills AONB (65%) and Blackdown Hills AONB (61%).