

Plan to improve rights of ways...

PICTURED from left are Abi Mansley, countryside access development officer; county councillor Ian Stewart; David Thornton, chairman Lake District National Park Authority; Malcolm Petyt, recreation management member champion for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority; and Charles Flanagan, chairman Local Access Forum.
Photo: Steve Barber



A MAJOR plan to improve 4,600 miles of Cumbria's rural footpaths, bridleways and byways has been launched.

The county's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) has been drawn together by Cumbria County Council, in partnership with the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Park Authorities and local access forums, and sets out how access can be improved to better meet the needs of residents, visitors, walkers and cyclists.

—by countryside reporter—
Lisa Higginson

Launched on Monday, the five-year programme identifies 1,300 improvement ideas that were generated by the public in early consultations when around 700 people submitted suggestions about how and where they felt enhancements could be made across Cumbria.

Plans to better integrate the rights of way network with public transport, to make it more accessible for families and people with limited mobility and to encourage more use of the network by young people are some of the ideas that have been included in the ROWIP.

"We are blessed in Cumbria with the finest network of footpaths, bridleways, byways and other countryside access opportunities," said Coun Ian Stewart, Cumbria County Council's Cabinet member for environment, transport and planning. "But we can improve on this and the ROWIP shows us how. Some parts of the network are exceptionally popular,

attracting large numbers of visitors with spectacular scenery, relatively good facilities and information. In those areas the challenge is to look after the countryside so that it can cope with the visitors and retain its special character.

"Other parts of our rights of way mainly serve local people for recreation or daily journeys – some of those areas would benefit from improvements or new linking sections to make better routes."

Every Highway Authority has been charged with producing a ROWIP under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and Cumbria has completed its plan four months ahead of a November deadline.

Countryside access development officer Abi Mansley said developing the plan had been a challenge, but it was encouraging to have obtained public feedback.

"People care a lot about Cumbria and the countryside access," she said. "It has been challenging bringing the whole thing together, but the amount of public input we received shows how people care locally and shows that in some places we have got a good network."

"It also reflects the fact that people expect some things to be made better for the future. This is just the beginning really and I'm sure that these ideas are just the tip of the iceberg."

David Thornton, chairman of the Lake District National Park Authority, said: "We think the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will help us reach new audiences and we look forward to working with our partners to put the plan into action and really make the difference on the ground that we all want to see."

"As part of our guided walks

programme, we will be offering short leisurely walks, health walks, Miles Without Stiles walks and some that are specially tailored for community groups who might need a helping hand to access and enjoy the countryside."

As there is no duty to implement the ROWIP, new funding opportunities will have to be sought in order for the plans to be put into action.

Andrew Coleman, CCC's countryside access manager, said: "Unfortunately there is no funding attached to the ROWIP, but we are trying to roll the plans out and in a limited way there are a range of funding sources that can make it happen. We are also going to be pressuring the Government for extra funding."

For more information visit www.cumbria.gov.uk

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