

# **GWYNEDD RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

ASSESSMENT PHASE CONSULTATION REPORT

**May 2006**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Public rights of way provide one of the main means by which people can enjoy the countryside. At the same time the network is part of the local transport infrastructure, providing paths from people's homes to school, chapel and place of work as well as the local countryside. The importance of rights of way to the economy, and the tourism sector in particular in Gwynedd, was demonstrated during the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak. Regular walking, cycling and horse riding also have important benefits for people's health and well being.

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, 2000 each local highway authority, such as Gwynedd Council, is required to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for all of their area. In drawing up the Plan, authorities are required to assess the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public and the opportunities provided by local rights of way for recreational purposes and the enjoyment of the area for all. The second part of the plan should comprise a statement of the actions the highway authorities propose to take for securing and managing an improved rights of way network.

The ROWIP will be the prime means by which Gwynedd Council can identify, prioritise and plan for improvements to the public rights of way network – and thereby make better provision for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and people with mobility problems. The Act allows authorities five years from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2002 to publish their ROWIPs. Gwynedd Council must therefore complete its ROWIP by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2007.

In July 2004, Gwynedd Council was selected by the Countryside Council for Wales as one of the highway authorities which was to participate in a ROWIP pilot project. The project, which focused on the ten westernmost communities in Pen Llyn, was aimed to help inform and develop good practice with other highway authorities in preparing their ROWIPs, as well as enabling Gwynedd itself to make considerable progress with its assessments. A substantial element of the work undertaken for this project has been fed into the production of this document.

### **1.1 The rights of way network in Gwynedd**

The public rights of way network in Gwynedd is approximately 3800km long. The total network length can be broken down into a number of different categories of routes, as set out below:-

- Footpaths - 3318km
- Bridleways - 301km
- Restricted Byways – 79km
- Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) – 39km

According to law, all public rights of ways are highways. The nature of the right determines the type of right of way, as explained below:-

- Footpaths are highways over which the right of way is on foot only.
- Bridleways are highways over which the right of way is on foot, riding or leading a horse and on a bicycle. There may also be a right to drive animals (driftway rights) depending on evidence.
- Restricted Byways are highways which carry a right of way on foot, on horseback or leading a horse and a right of way for vehicles other than mechanically propelled vehicles.
- Byways Open to All Traffic are highways over which the right of way is on foot, horseback or bicycle, including horse-drawn and motorised vehicles. BOATS differ from roads only in that they are primarily used for walking and riding rather than by vehicles.

There is also a developing network of off-road cycle routes (designed specifically for walking and cycling) which fall into none of the above categories. It is estimated that 51km of traffic-free cycle paths are currently available, some of which contribute to the National Cycle Network.

## **1.2 The ROWIP process**

The process that Gwynedd is following is set out in the legislative guidance. The key stages are as follows:-

- Publication and consultation on the ROWIP outline and timetable (completed)
- Undertaking the assessments (July 2004 – February 2006)
- Publication and consultation on the conclusions of the assessments (this document)
- Publication of the Draft ROWIP, with a minimum of 3 months public consultation (expected early 2007)
- Assessment of the representations received and revision of Draft ROWIP
- Publication of the final ROWIP (expected November 2007).

## **1.3 Assessments undertaken**

- Strategic Context
- The Condition of the Definitive Map and Statement
- Management and protection of the network
- Current Access Provision
- User Needs
- The Condition of the rights of way network

## **2.0 STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

One of the most important considerations in developing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the Gwynedd area is to ensure that it picks up the key themes and complements the aims and objectives of existing plans and strategies significant to the area.

Identifying and reflecting policies in other relevant documents will give the ROWIP the best chance of delivery and will lend weight to funding bids from both the highway authority and bodies with complementary aims and objectives. It also provides potential opportunities for developing partnerships, the pooling of resources and the delivery of Best Value.

### **2.1 Documents and sources of information**

To establish the strategic context a number of sources have been considered including the relevant sections of:

- Gwynedd's Unitary Development Plan (UDP), Snowdonia National Park's Local Development Plan, Gwynedd Transport Plan, Snowdonia National Park and Llyn Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans and other countryside strategies,
- Tourism, economic regeneration, community development or rural recovery Plan proposals which have a bearing on rights of way or the use of the countryside for recreation;
- Assessments that have been made of the route network or its potential for development as part of sustainable local transport (e.g. the contribution of rights of way to local walking and cycling strategy including healthy living initiatives)
- National and local landscape planning, nature conservation and other designations. Information about the amenity value, vulnerability, use and management of these designated areas and sites in so far as it is relevant to rights of way; and
- The Welsh Assembly Government's Walking and Cycling Strategy.

### **2.2 Wider benefits**

The public right of way network in Gwynedd should be treated as a major asset and utilised to the full. Many of these diverse strategies depend upon the existence of good provision and promotion of public access. Increased physical activity through walking and cycling is of vital importance to enhance the health and well-being of Gwynedd's residents. It can help to reduce the risk of developing diseases such as coronary heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes and obesity as well as helping to maintain healthy muscles, bones and joints. Parts of the network are vital for transport and travel within communities, providing sustainable alternative modes of transport to cars thus reducing congestion and the environmental impact of transport. The importance of the rights of way network to Gwynedd's economy was clearly demonstrated during the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak, when the majority of the county's network was closed.

Visitors to the countryside, many of whom use the local rights of way network for all or part of their visit, make an important contribution to the local economy through the money they spend in local shops and businesses. The ROWIP represents a significant opportunity to help deliver a range of wider objectives and for these benefits to continue to be realised, it is important that the Council ensures that the network is properly managed and maintained.

### **3.0 Definitive Map and Statement**

#### **3.1 What is the Definitive Map and Statement?**

The Definitive Map and Statements are extremely important records of public rights of way. These records are held and maintained by Gwynedd Council's Rights of Way section. The statement, which accompanies the Definitive Map, may contain a description of the position and width of a path or any limitation or condition affecting the right of way. Together, they provide conclusive evidence as to the existence and status of the public right of way shown on them. No paths on the Map and Statement can be altered in any way unless a legal order is confirmed.

The original Definitive Maps and Statements for this area were prepared following the introduction of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The current area of Gwynedd is formed by what were parts of two pre-1974 counties, namely Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire. Each produced a set of documents, the former showing the paths as they were on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1954, the latter 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1952.

#### **3.2 Modification Orders**

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 requires every highway authority to continuously update its Definitive Map and Statement. A major part of maintaining this document is modifying it by Modification Order to add previously unrecorded rights of way to the Map or to vary particulars about a way shown on the Map.

The process of claiming these routes as definitive public rights of way and affording them legal protection is complex and often contentious, usually dependant on historical documentation and user evidence. Gwynedd currently has 85 applications for Modification Orders awaiting determination, some of which are of a considerable age. The Council is currently working through this backlog, assessing which are defective applications and which will require processing, whilst generating the information that is now required to be held on the a register of such applications.

#### **3.3 Public Path Orders**

Gwynedd Council process public path orders either in response to applications from individuals or as schemes generated by the Council. Highway authorities prepare Public Path Orders to create, divert or extinguish (close) public rights of way and there are 86 requests for such Orders awaiting to be processed.

#### **3.4 Anomalies**

Errors brought about when producing new working copies of maps on a metric scale, and inconsistencies between the map and its accompanying statement mean that the working copy may not always be reliable. The net effect of the uncertainties caused by these

problems has meant that Gwynedd has undertaken a painstaking review of the Definitive Map in order to compile a list of anomalies which need to be investigated and clarified. There have been 427 discrepancies identified to date to be further investigated, many of them being minor problems in the wording of statements but others would require Modification Orders to correct.

### **3.5 Lost Ways**

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 imposes a deadline of 1 January 2026 after which it will not be possible to apply for footpaths and bridleways, or higher rights, to be included onto the definitive map based on historical documentary evidence (historical is classed as pre 1949).

The lost ways research for Wales found that there may be 2,200 missing rights of way in Wales which amounts to some 1600 km. This research produced estimates by various methods, one gave an average estimate of 0.18km of lost ways in Wales per km<sup>2</sup>. On this basis Gwynedd would have 458 km of such ways. A different approach estimated an average 130 cases adding 5.8% to the network which for Gwynedd would be some 216km.

### **3.6 Consolidation**

Once Gwynedd has completed its analysis, assessed what action is required to correct the above legal matters and processed any resultant Orders, there is the opportunity to produce an administrative Consolidation Order to unify the Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire maps and all subsequent Orders into one new Definitive Map (with a new relevant date).

Ideally all the known anomalies and defects would also be examined, corrected and removed prior to consolidating rather than producing a new Map still retaining known deficiencies. The extent of work to achieve an accurate single map for Gwynedd is considerable, and an estimate of staff resources required and way forward will be presented as part of the ROWIP's Statement of Action.

## **4.0 Management and Protection of Rights of Way**

### **4.1 Gwynedd's Countryside and Access Unit**

The staff of the Countryside and Access Unit dealing with public rights of way are responsible for managing the day-to-day maintenance of the network, together with the maintenance and updating of the Definitive Map through due legal process. In addition, staff responsible for wardening the Gwynedd's local nature reserves, woodland sites and permissive linear access such as Lonydd Las and promotion of routes like the Llyn Coastal Path also fall into the same Unit.

### **4.2 Staffing and budgets**

It has long been considered that the current level of staffing is inadequate to deal with the complex range of issues and legal procedures in order to carry out the duties of the Unit. Of particular concern is the resources required to process the legal defects and anomalies within the Definitive Map in addition to dealing with a continuing backlog of claims to register previously unrecorded rights of way.

Current maintenance is generally a re-active approach to investigate reported problems. To undertake inspections on a regular cycle has been an aspiration for many years but the staff resources have never been available.

The annual budget for maintenance work is £322,970 for the 3737km of rights of way in Gwynedd which equates to £86 per km. However a national right of way condition survey undertaken by the Countryside Council for Wales has estimated a required £400 per km for 5 years to upgrade the network to a satisfactory condition and £252 per km thereafter to maintain it. It is clear that such levels of funding are not within the current capacity of rural Local Authorities.

### **4.3 Other parties involved**

Whilst the Highway Authority is ultimately responsible for maintenance, other authorities play a significant role such as the Snowdonia National Park Authority who undertake improvements on upland paths and most Community Councils who take up Gwynedd's offer of a contribution to undertake routine path maintenance.

Gwynedd also holds regular meetings with the Rambler's Association, British Horse Society and British Driving Society (i.e. carriage driving) to discuss all aspects of policy and path management in an attempt to ensure closer understanding of the needs and aspirations of these user groups. The Council also receives the co-operation of the Ramblers Association (and Cymdeithas Edward Llwyd) in undertaking an annual random sample inspection of paths to derive the statutory performance indicator.

The three Local Access Forums operating within Gwynedd, whose function is to advise the authority as to the improvement of public access, uses its range of interests and

experience of access-related matters to inform and assist in the steering of the ROWIP process.

## **5.0 Current Access Provision**

A key aspect of the Plan is to look at the network in its entirety in order to assess what access opportunities are currently available to the public which, in turn, will assist us in identifying areas which may be deficient for one or more type of user. As part of this year's Countryside Council for Wales-funded pilot work, Gwynedd Council is in the process of developing and trialling an "Integrated Access Map" which digitally records the extent of all known access in Gwynedd. The Council intend to use the map as a tool to assess deficiencies in the network.

### **5.1 The Public Right of Way network**

The rights of way network is predominantly made up of public footpaths allowing reasonable access for pedestrians to the countryside. There is a lower number of bridleways and routes of higher status which is an especial issue among equestrians and cyclists. Gwynedd also has a fragmented network (for some class of users) as there is an uneven or incomplete coverage of routes available to some class of users. Routes have been severed by development and road building or are unusable due to inconsistent status e.g. where bridleways change status to footpaths at community boundaries. As a consequence, the usability of the network can vary from area to area and dependent on the type of user. There is, as a result, a need to further develop the network for a wide range of users including horse riders, carriage drivers and cyclists.

### **5.2 Access land – Open Country and registered Common Land**

The Countryside and Rights of Act 2000 grants a statutory right of access to particular areas of the countryside. These are areas of registered common land, some types of open country (land which is wholly or predominantly mountain, moor, heath or down) and land that has been dedicated for public access by the landowner or land manager. The Act provides a right for anyone to be on Access Land for "open-air recreation" on foot (without precluding the use of wheelchairs or pushchairs) and requires anyone using the land to behave responsibly and not interfere with land management.

Since the depiction of areas of open country is largely dependant on the nature of the landscape (it being a decisive factor in determining whether such rights were recorded), the vast majority of access land is within the boundaries of the National Park, with limited opportunities elsewhere within the County.

Many of the commons in Gwynedd are Crown Commons (i.e. owned by the Crown, Crown agencies or government departments) and access to them was created by deeds of declaration made under the Law of Property Act 1925, which take priority over the rights created by CROW Act 2000. This allows a right of access on foot and on horseback, but excludes cycling.

The Welsh Assembly Government are currently exploring the possibility of extending open access to the coast. The CCW identified three exploratory areas to investigate the

issues involved, one of which is the section of coast which runs from Caernarfon to Trefor. A process of consultation with a variety of stakeholders took place in Autumn 2005 and a report will soon be submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government with advice as to the likely ease of implementation, potential problems and costs.

### **5.3 Access to Woodland**

Many Forestry Commission Wales woodlands and forests have also been opened to the public, often with car parking and other facilities and with trails clearly waymarked and well-maintained. Forestry Commission Wales has dedicated or is in the process of dedicating many of the forests and woodland it manages for public access under the CROW Act 2000. In these areas, the public can enjoy the same rights as on other CROW land.

In addition to giving the public rights to walk within its forests, Forestry Commission has allowed many of its woodland tracks to be used by horse-riders. (Forestry Commission is also currently building a mountain bike trail in Coed y Brenin Forest as well as constructing two all-ability trails).

Some private woodland are also open to the public with the landowner's permission, including most of those owned by Woodland Trust.

### **5.4 Cycle routes**

In Gwynedd there are a number of quiet country lanes and paths which have been built alongside some of the county's busiest roads which offer cycling opportunities and open up secluded areas of the countryside. National Cycle Network Route no.8 follows a combination of routes through Gwynedd on its journey from Holyhead to Chepstow. Route no.5 is mainly an on-road and footway route which runs from Bangor to Chester.

Two cycling hubs have been established in Gwynedd, which are promoted by the Wales Tourist Board offering rides mostly on signed country lanes – four rides are available on the Llyn Peninsula and five in the Dolgellau area.

Lonydd Las Gwynedd offer 50km of safe, traffic-free routes within Gwynedd, designed especially for walking and cycling. Established along disused railway lines, the network is based on paths that are used by permission and maintained by Gwynedd Council and the Snowdonia National Park Authority.

### **5.5 Land/routes with access by permission**

#### **5.5.1 Tir Gofal**

Tir Gofal are agri-environment schemes that encourage farmers to adopt management practices that protect or enhance the natural environment. The scheme allows farmers to

volunteer additional access along particular routes (allowing them to be used as footpaths or bridleways) and to particular areas of land. All such new access is by agreement and may come to an end when the agreement ends.

### **5.5.2 National Trust**

Many miles of coastline has been bought by the National Trust, or covenanted to them, to protect them because of their scenic importance and many areas of land are open to the public, often subject to certain conditions.

## **5.6 Nature Reserves**

### **5.6.1 National Nature Reserves**

Reserves that are of national importance may be declared to be National Nature Reserves and there are eight such sites in Gwynedd – Coedydd Aber, Cwm Idwal, Snowdon, Coed Llyn Mair, Morfa Harlech, Ynys Enlli, Morfa Dyffryn and Cadair Idris. They are sites which are managed by CCW to preserve or give opportunities for the study of their special conservation interest. On some reserves additional paths have been provided whilst others may be crossed by public rights of way.

### **5.6.2 Local Nature Reserves**

In Gwynedd there are over 1700 hectares of land which have been designated as Local Nature Reserves, which are managed by the Council in partnership with others such as CCW, the Environment Agency and a number of town or community councils. These sites were designated because of their high conservational value and to safeguard public access to these places. There are seven such sites in the County – Parc Dudley, Y Foryd, Traeth Lafan, Pen y Banc, Parc y Borth, Lon Cob Bach and Coed Dinorwig.

## **5.7 Promoted routes**

There are a number of routes in Gwynedd, mainly following the existing path and minor highway network which have been promoted via leaflets, booklets or the Council website. Although it is not a comprehensive list of what is currently being publicised, the most popular of these routes are described below.

The Slate Valley Paths was developed by the Council's Tourism section in partnership with the Slate Valley Initiative and focus on the slate valley communities of Ogwen, Peris, Nantlle, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Corris.

The Four Valleys Path is an 18 mile linear route through the Nantlle, Gwyrfai, Padarn and Ogwen valleys including six circular walks around the villages of Penygroes and Bethesda.

The Llyn Coastal Path was recently developed by the Council in partnership with the Countryside Council for Wales and Tourism Partnership North Wales. The path, whose route may be broken up into eight smaller sections, starts off in Caernarfon and travels over 95 miles around the Llyn Peninsula to Porthmadog. It makes use of the public right of way network, quiet roads, permissive paths, beaches and some Access Land.

## **6.0 Condition Survey Assessment**

### **6.1 Aims**

The condition of the rights of way network is an assessment of the physical state of the network and its ease of use by members of the public. This survey considers a host of factors that affect the ability of the public to use the routes with ease, these include, signage, surface condition, obstructions and the condition of gates and stiles.

### **6.2 Process**

#### **6.2.1 Consultation with Community/Town Councils**

Path selection for this survey was based on a categorization system according to levels of apparent usage of rights of way. Initial preparation work began in August 2004 when Gwynedd Council invited all local councils to assist with the process by allocating one of the following categories to each path within their area:-

- Category 1 - Paths that facilitate people's movement. These will usually already have significant usage or form connections within towns, villages or between public transport facilities, car parks and pleasure attractions.
- Category 2 - Popular paths used mainly for pleasure including paths around communities, circular walks or access to beaches.
- Category 3 - Paths, whilst being less used, form significant connections between the paths in categories 1 and 2 or between communities.
- Category 4 - Paths with only occasional use but still form part of a full and effective network. These may include potential links between communities where there is currently little to encourage walking.
- Category 5 - Paths with no obvious benefit or potential and where a reasonable convenient alternative route exists on higher category paths.

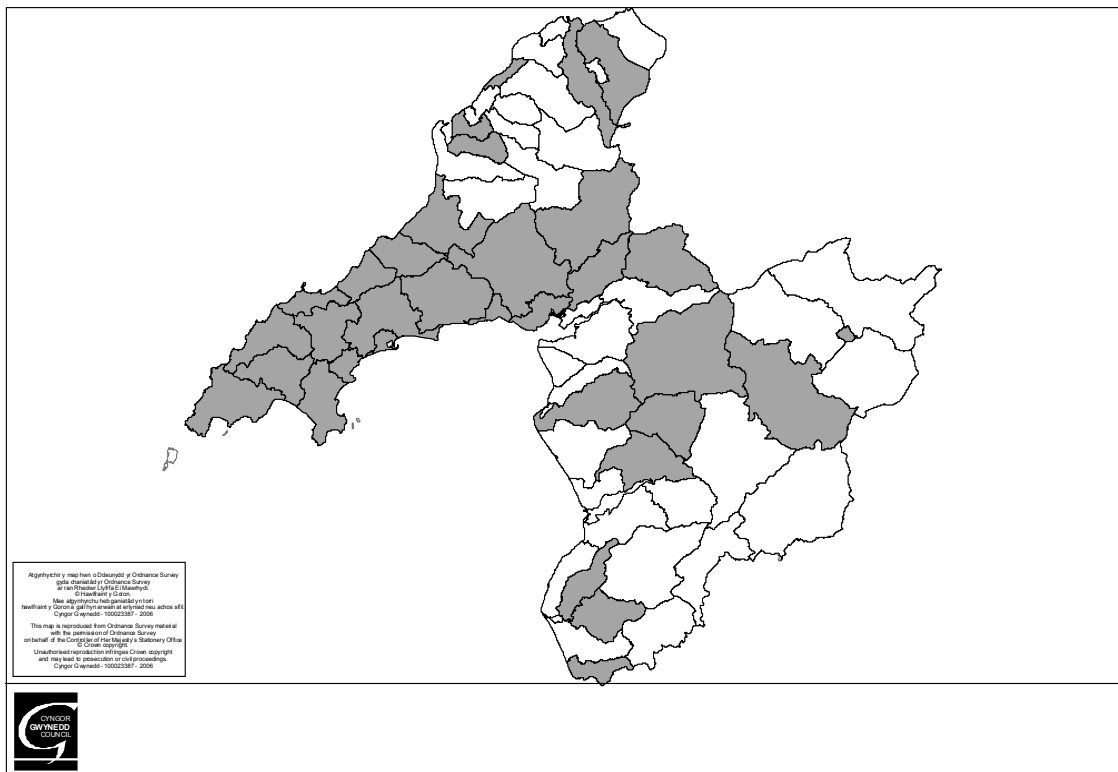
Ideally the condition of every path would be individually surveyed for this assessment but since resources only permitted the appointment of one full-time officer to undertake the work, the assessment was limited to mainly paths in categories 1, 2 and 3. Some category 4 paths were surveyed, particularly ones which had been included in the Llyn Coastal Path project or paths which connected to higher category paths in adjacent communities.

#### **6.2.2 Survey area and method used**

Surveying began in September 2004 on the ten communities in the Llyn West pilot area. It was apparent that the Council did not have the necessary resources to survey the whole of Gwynedd before preparing this document. With this in view, the Council decided that

initial survey work would be undertaken in the communities whose local councils had responded to Gwynedd's request for assistance with categorizing paths in August 2004.

A digital information management system was purchased and installed in May 2005 enabling the remainder of the survey to be captured electronically. The Council is currently in the process of extending the survey as it expands its maintenance database to cover the whole authority area. The Council has so far surveyed 1100km of paths, which represents 29% of Gwynedd's network. The shaded areas on the map below show the communities which were surveyed at the date of preparation of this document.



### 6.3 Results of survey

- Users may expect to encounter a problem every 330m and every 1640m may expect to encounter a problem which renders a path unusable.
- 48% of the surveyed paths were properly signposted at the roadside.
- 68% of the network in the research area is open.
- Only 43% of the researched paths were classed as being “easy to use”. (“Easy to use” means that the path is signposted where it leaves a metalled road, free from obstructions and interferences **and** surface and path furniture (e.g. gates, stiles, bridges etc) in good repair.
- Muddy and waterlogged paths represented 24% of the obstacles encountered on the surveyed network.
- 90% of the furniture recorded were in acceptable condition

- Stiles are the commonest type of structure on a right of way. Although 89% of the stiles recorded were in satisfactory condition, it is quite clear that they will not be accessible to all, particularly those with mobility difficulties.

## 7.0 User Needs Assessment

### 7.1 Aims

The overall aim of this assessment was to:-

- Identify the needs of different types of rights of way users.
- Understand the barriers faced by various types of users in accessing the countryside.
- Identify improvements to meet the needs of users.

### 7.2 Process

The user needs assessments were conducted in three stages:-

- Written consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders
- Questionnaire sent to members of the Council's Citizen's Panel
- Questionnaire sent to members of Gwynedd's three Local Access Forums

### 7.3 Summary of issues

The table below summarises the issues that emerged across the whole spectrum of users who contributed to the consultation.

Issue	Details
Signage	Lack of signposts where path leaves metalled road. Lack of waymarking. Signposts showing incorrect status.
Obstructions	Overgrowth. Obstructions placed by landowner e.g. padlocked gate, barbed wire. Incorrect furniture.
Surfacing	Muddy routes. Poor drainage. Path erosion caused by over use. Cliff erosion on coastal paths.
Furniture	Gates and stiles in poor state of repair. Stiles are considered a barrier to the elderly, people with disabilities, dogs, pushchairs
Promotion/publicity	Lack of information. Display boards required on some paths. Leaflets that can be studied in advance. Non-use of rights of way
Safety	Conflict, although limited, between some user groups. Conflict between some users and landowners. Dangerous road crossings.

	Dogs not being under close control. Unlawful vehicular use on paths and commons.
Environmental	Dog fouling. Fly tipping. Litter.
Gaps in the network	Lack of bridleways and off-road cycle routes. Lack of circular walks. Poorly linked network. Paths which change status at community boundaries. Under-recording of rights. Dead ends.

## 7.4 Specific issues

Gwynedd Council has carried out consultation and research in establishing the needs of different types of users, understanding the barriers faced by users in accessing the countryside and identifying improvements to meet the need of the user.

### 7.4.1 Walking

The rights of way network in Gwynedd is used mainly for walking and 70.3% of the Citizen Panel surveyed in May 2004 walked in the countryside on at least a weekly basis. A study for the Countryside Agency in England found that 47% of households said they would walk more if provision were improved.

Despite walkers' entitlement to use all types of local rights of way, there is a clear scope to improve provision for them. All walkers needed a network which is easy to use with adequate and clear waymarking. In addition, it was recognised that wet and muddy paths can often render paths unusable which can substantially reduce enjoyment of the countryside. There should be measures taken to control severely muddy paths, particularly on routes used by horse-riders but without negatively influencing the natural appearance of the path.

Walkers felt that there should be fewer obstructions on paths caused by overgrown vegetation. The Panel survey indicated that the extent of the problem varied considerably; from grass and bracken to dense gorse or brambles, which can render some paths impassable. There was recognition of the work done by the Council although problems still existed in some places and cutting needed to be done on a more regular basis.

Walkers also felt that furniture in poor repair was a significant problem with the current rights of way network. It was also noted that stiles were not suitable for the elderly or less-able and many preferred kissing gates as they were easier to negotiate.

The quality of the environment was considered to be important by walkers. Several comments were made about the level of dog fouling and the lack of dog waste bins on rights of way. Some respondents to the Panel survey felt that dog owners needed to be

reminded to pick up dog waste, whilst others felt that an increased enforcement of dog fouling laws was required.

#### **7.4.2 Horse-riders and carriage drivers**

The British Horse Society estimates that around 4.5% of the UK population are regular horse riders. There are currently no estimates for the number of carriage drivers. Despite equestrians' reliance on them, bridleways and higher rights network tend to be fragmented, and they are frequently forced to use sealed roads. In some areas there may be quiet lanes that horse-riders may use, but more usually they are forced on to busy roads that are unsuitable for horses. Despite there being a network of lightly-trafficked highways in some areas of Gwynedd, it is difficult for horse-riders to find attractive, convenient and safe networks of routes.

Local research shows that less than 4% of 1200 gates surveyed could be opened without dismounting with 30% of cattle grid bypass gates being difficult or impossible to open ("Bridleroutes in Snowdonia", BHS, 2002), a factor which can quickly discourage use of a route. Equestrians felt that choice of appropriate surface was an issue. Slippery tarmaced minor roads, deep ruts and muddy/boggy routes were considered to be significant hazards for horses. Other issues such as insufficient head clearance from overhanging trees and vegetation encroaching on the path surface were also considered to be problems.

#### **7.4.3 Cyclists**

Cycling has long been a popular and low-cost method of transport and it is estimated that 38% of households in Wales now own a cycle (Welsh Transport Statistics 2002, National Assembly for Wales). The Countryside Agency's "Use and Demand for Rights of Way" study (2001) shows that 32% of households said they would increase cycling as an activity if more provision was available.

Cyclists, like horse-riders and carriage-drivers, experience difficulty in finding safe, attractive and sufficiently long routes away from busy roads, for which there is increasing demand. Cyclists wanted existing rights of way network better integrated with planned cycle routes and those currently found on the highway network, in addition to linking towns and villages with the countryside. Cyclists were also concerned about difficult road crossings, overgrown routes caused by lack of maintenance and gates which were difficult to open.

#### **7.4.4 Motorised users**

The United Kingdom Day Visits Survey 1998 lists activities undertaken by visitors to the countryside, based on a large-scale household survey in Great Britain. As off-road driving is not shown as a separate category, it may be inferred that, in comparison with other activities, it is only undertaken by a very small percentage of the population. DEFRA, in its consultation paper on mechanically-propelled vehicles and public rights of

way, quote a figure from a user group representative of about 15,000 recreational off-road vehicle drivers active in England and Wales.

Illegal use is fairly common in Gwynedd especially by motorcycles, which are commonly unlicensed machines ridden by youngsters. Access tends to be in concentrated pockets, with old pit tips and disused quarry workings being especially popular with many riders for the challenging terrain these sites provide. Controlling such illegal activity is very difficult to achieve.

As part of the exemplar ROWIP project in England, research carried out by Fauber Maunsell, on behalf of Nottinghamshire County Council into the needs of lawful vehicular users, showed that most vehicular users were happy to share routes available to them with other user groups. The principle requirements are for connected networks and maintaining the sense of challenge felt by these users in navigating these routes.

#### **7.4.5 Landowners**

While the ROWIP is being developed, it is our view that a balanced approach is needed which takes into account the views of landowners and managers. Any future improvements will require the support and understanding of local landowners and although there are regular opportunities to talk to landowners about access-related matters through their representation on the three Local Access Forums, further liaison will need to take place.

Landowners consulted through the Gwynedd LAFs were mainly concerned about integrating agricultural practices with public access on their land. The issue of dogs not being under close control was stated as being their main concern followed by gates being left open by path users, unauthorised trespass, litter and people exceeding their rights. Many of these problems appear to be due to lack of consideration or lack of awareness of how to behave responsibly in the countryside rather than acts of malice.

Landowners also felt that paths should be diverted away from farm yards and buildings to help overcome some of the problems noted above. Suggestions were also made to rationalise the path network, especially where there is duplication of routes and to resolve long-standing issues on the Definitive Map thus enabling Gwynedd to concentrate its scarce resources on a network which meets current needs and requirements.

#### **7.4.6 People with disabilities**

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act specifically requires Councils to assess the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted and others with mobility problems. Additionally, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of his or her disability in connection with the provision of services. The DDA 1995 affects all those responsible for providing access to the countryside as service providers.

Stiles on rights of way is a main concern for people with disabilities. Structures such as stiles and gates are the responsibility of the landowner and as a consequence any improvement, such as changing a stile for a gate or a gap, must be done with the consent of the landowner. Gwynedd Council supports landowners by helping to provide gates in appropriate places, but progress is currently limited by lack of resources.

Other issues of concern to people with disabilities using Gwynedd's rights of way network are general maintenance problems (surface problems and overgrowth), safety matters such as paths which cross busy roads and a lack of awareness.

Disabled people are seeking inclusion – access to the same services and the opportunity to enjoy the countryside experience as the rest of the community. The DDA places a duty on all service providers to accommodate these aspirations. In developing the Plan, Gwynedd aims to ensure disabled people have choices in where and how they will be able to enjoy the countryside.

## 8.0 Establishing priorities

A key element in the ROWIP process is prioritising issues and by taking into account the assessments, the following table was prepared to show the key issues identified and also sets out our suggestions as to the priority to be given to each.

Issue	Our priority rating
Lack of signposts/waymarking	HIGH
Better surface maintenance of rights of ways	HIGH
Installing furniture which takes into account the needs of all legitimate users	HIGH
Clearance of vegetation	HIGH
Removal of man-made obstructions	HIGH
Promoting responsible behaviour	MEDIUM
Providing better information about the network	HIGH/MEDIUM
Providing more information about rights of way issues and responsibilities relating to rights of way	LOW
Ensuring that the PROW network and other access opportunities form an integrated whole	MEDIUM
Safer road crossings	MEDIUM
Lack of bridleways	MEDIUM
Lack of suitable routes for cyclists	MEDIUM
Lack of suitable routes for carriage drivers	LOW
Create more promoted circular routes	HIGH
Producing an accurate and consolidated Definitive Map	HIGH
Discovering Lost Ways to add routes to the Definitive Map	LOW
Develop a pro-active approach to enable the authority to inspect paths on a regular basis	MEDIUM
Adopting a set of policies to deal with maintenance and enforcement of rights of way	HIGH
Extending partnership working	MEDIUM
Rationalizing the network	