

6. Consultation





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6.1. Birmingham Local Access Forum

A Local Access Forum (LAF) for Birmingham was established in 2004, as required by the 2000 Countryside and Rights of Way Act. The Local Access Forum advises the Council on how it can improve public access to land in the authority's control for open-air recreation and enjoyment.

The Council consulted the members of the forum before preparing the RoWIP, and again once the draft plan had been published, taking account of their advice.

The LAF contributed to the content of the public consultation and provided valuable ideas to make this more effective, including using focus groups.

A special meeting of the forum took place in December 2005 to establish its priorities for improving public rights of way, and the following information was made available:

- maps of rights of way
- plans identifying local facilities such as schools, local shopping centres, public transport, cycle routes, canals and canal access points
- plans for each constituency showing the results of the condition survey of the surfaced network
- a plan showing the natural surfaced paths
- results of user surveys.

From this information, the forum members identified their key priorities based on: condition surveys, expected level of use, site for new routes, and improvements to existing linkages, including site-specific improvements and broader policy development (Appendix A).

The forum has identified their priorities for policy proposals based around the key themes of:

- maintenance
- health
- better links to other City Council plans and policies
- signs and publicity

- use of central reservations for cycling
- Constituency plans
- barriers to walking and gating orders
- ethnicity
- monitoring
- strategic routes
- pedestrian crossings
- horses.

The comments received from the draft RoWIP were discussed at a meeting of the LAF on the 12th June. Some members of the Forum were also invited to attend a specific workshop in May 2007 to analyse the comments made in relation to the public consultation of the draft RoWIP and contributed to the amendments made to this published document. The amendments have been circulated to the LAF and discussed at their meeting of the 5th September 2007 to ensure that all of their concerns within the draft have been addressed.

More details of the Birmingham Local Access Forum's proposals are in Appendix A.



6.2. Public consultation

As part of the Council's commitment to its citizens, and in accordance with the DEFRA guidance on RoWIP, we have consulted the public and stakeholders extensively about walking opportunities in the city.



6.2.1. Walking and rights of way consultation

The main purpose of the walking and rights of way consultation was to get a greater understanding of the public's attitudes to walking. To achieve this we designed a questionnaire to look at:

- reasons why people do or do not walk
- their expectations of the walking network
- their overall awareness
- general comments on the quality of certain paths
- demographic information to tell us who does and who does not participate in walking activities.

Smaller focus groups were also used to try and find out more about specific issues in more local areas. 10,000 questionnaires were distributed, and the consultation period ran from July to September 2005. To ensure consistency with the Council's e-targets, a web-based questionnaire was made available from a link on the Council's website.

The questionnaires were sent to all 40 libraries (3,000 in total), leisure centres, neighbourhood offices, local councillors, at the time of consultation other council directorates, and to 169 stakeholders (see Appendix B for a complete list). Around 2,130 questionnaires were handed out on the street in specific areas that had been selected to provide a cross-section of demographic characteristics.

Special effort was made to ensure that questionnaires were distributed to areas showing high levels of unemployment, low incomes and high BME populations, as these are typically groups that questionnaire surveys often under-represent.

To encourage a high response rate, we publicised the surveys on 80 billboards around the city and issued press releases in the free 'Forward' publication and in the local press before distribution. We also offered 100 free pedometers to people as an incentive to complete the questionnaire.

Main findings

- The most popular reasons for walking were to go to the shops or to take part in leisure activities. Walking to get to work and school were the least popular reasons.
- The main reasons for not walking were that it was not appropriate for the journey, time pressures, weather and distance. Importantly, these are not areas that the Council can control, apart from ensuring there are direct routes to local facilities or places of interest. Respondents were less concerned about general safety, road safety, road conditions and health.
- Most respondents were prepared to spend up to 20 minutes walking to shops, schools, work and the park. However, they were only prepared to walk for up to 10 minutes to access public transport (bus stops, metro or train stations), indicating that people are more reluctant to walk longer distances when the walking makes up part of a longer journey.

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- Over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that pedestrian crossings, links to public transport and pavement surfacing needed to be improved. 73% agreed or strongly agreed that street lighting needed improving. Fewer respondents felt that links to local facilities (58%), and new and improved pedestrian routes (48%) were needed.
- The most popular daily activities undertaken in the last 6 months were recreational walking (31%), cycling (12%), jogging or training (8%), dog walking (10%) and horse riding (1%).
- Footways (pavements) were the most popular place for these activities (23%), followed closely by footpaths (19%), parks or fields (19%), canal towpaths (15%), bridleways or cycleways (12%) and country lanes (12%). A very small proportion of the network is made up of bridleways or country lanes, so these figures are understandably low.
- The questionnaire then asked respondents why they took part in the activities. The most popular answers related to relaxing, keeping fit and healthy and general enjoyment. Nature, heritage and days out were less important reasons, with exercising pets and horses being the least popular reason.
- The large parks (Sutton Park and Cannon Hill Park) attract the most respondents. Even though the questionnaire was widely distributed and well

publicised, the results may be a little biased because of where the respondents live.

- 49% of those surveyed were not aware of any public rights of way in Birmingham, and 42% did not use the public rights of way network. This shows that we need to put more emphasis on publicising and educating people about rights of way



way through initiatives like the walking and cycling map, Walk 2000, guided walks and signposting, to help raise general awareness.

- The questionnaire asked respondents to rate the condition of Birmingham's rights of way. The table below compares and contrasts the public's perception of the rights of way network against the BCC condition surveys of surfaced paths.

- The results show that the public has a more positive perception of paths in Birmingham than the condition surveys show, with more respondents putting paths in the top two categories. The percentages for 'poor' paths are quite similar, but there is a greater difference between paths classed as 'very poor' and 'failed'.
- There was an even distribution of questionnaires completed by men and women.
- There was a disproportionate number of questionnaires completed by white people. Even though we made efforts to target the BME groups in the city, only 10% of responses came from this group, the largest group of which (7%) were from Asian/Asian British people.
- A quarter of respondents indicated that they have no access to a car, with a further 12% stating that they only have access on certain occasions. These figures show that car-ownership is higher than the overall figures for Birmingham, as quoted in the 2001 census (38% have no car or van, 42% have one car or van).
- Around 1% of respondents stated that they were disabled or suffered from an impairment. Although the 2001 census does not ask people directly whether they are disabled, 20% state they have a long-term limiting illness, which is the closest approximation we have. The concerns disabled users expressed related to access and surfaces.



The main areas for improvement which emerged from the questionnaire were;

- poor quality of pavements
- poor lighting
- inadequate signing of paths
- safety concerns and antisocial behaviour
- poor levels of path cleanliness
- general path maintenance
- provision of and improvement to pedestrian crossings.

Table 14: Questionnaire responses compared to actual condition survey results

Questionnaire results		Condition survey results	
Rating	%	Rating	%
Excellent	4	Excellent	3
Good	22	Good	1
Average	42	Fair	75
Poor	15	Poor	13
Very Poor	4	Failed	9
Don't Know	13		

For a detailed breakdown of the consultation results, please see Appendix C.

Abandoned car on a public right of way

6.2.2. Focus groups

The walking and rights of way questionnaire was also taken to three neighbourhood forums to give us more detailed information on local rights of way in specific areas. The neighbourhood forums were in:

- Sutton Coldfield (Falcon Lodge)
- Perry Barr (Booths Farm)
- Sheldon (Chestnuts).

The overriding themes which emerged from the focus groups were:

- Poor condition and maintenance of rights of way.
- Safety concerns on popular local routes.
- Obstructions to public rights of way and confusion over gating policy.
- Not enough signs and markings of rights of way.
- Fear of crime and antisocial behaviour by youths, preventing use of paths.
- Too few safe cycle routes.
- General awareness of rights of way is low in some areas.
- Misuse of rights of way by motorbike users.



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Below are samples of the comments and experiences of rights of way users, gained from visiting the neighbourhood forums.

“It would be fantastic to be able to walk and/or cycle safely from our home in Penns Lake Road to Walmley Village to go to the Doctors, the pub, the shops, the library, the school etc. i.e. a proper village where people walk and meet...” (female, white 36-49)

“My husband is registered blind. Poor lighting and uneven pavements make it impossible for him to walk in the evening with me except for summer months” (female white 36-49)

Further details of the results of the focus groups can be seen in Appendix D.



6.3 – Draft ROWP public consultation

During December 2006 and February 2007, the draft RoWIP was published for consultation. This was to ensure that we had considered all of the points which had been raised in the previous consultation and also to ensure that we were meeting the needs of the local community. As before the document was circulated in local libraries, leisure centres and neighbourhood offices, to local councillors at the time of consultation and other Council directorates. They were also distributed to the 169 Stakeholders referred to in appendix B.

The Draft RoWIP was presented to Constituency meetings on the dates shown in table 15.

Comments from constituency committees are identified in appendix E.

Appendix F contains the feedback and comments that were received from members of the public and interested groups.

The draft was welcomed by the constituencies and the connections between Constituency Community Plans were highlighted. Some comments were made on specific schemes and these are summarised in appendix E. Where specific schemes were considered appropriate and worthy of further investigation these have been moved from the appendices to the Constituency proposed actions in section 9.

Table 15 dates RoWIP presented to Constituency Committees

Constituency Committee	Date	Constituency Committee	Date
Sutton Coldfield	12/12/06	Yardley	25/1/07
Northfield	16/1/07	Ladywood	25/1/07
Edgbaston	18/01/07	Selly Oak	30/1/07
Erdington	22/1/07	Hodge Hill	15/2/07
Hall Green	24/1/07		