

# Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025-2035

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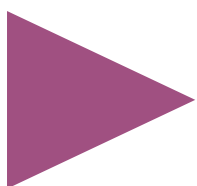




# Northumberland ROWIP Consultation Draft

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The content of this ROWIP is now open to public scrutiny through consultation. Some questions for consultees are provided on page 53 - these are intended as a guide to support consultation. Consultees need not limit themselves to these questions - you may choose to answer all, some or none of the questions we have provided.

**The consultation ends on 18/10/2024 - <https://nland.cc/PROWIP>**







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# Glossary and definitions

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now known as National Landscapes)
BOAT	Byway Open to All Traffic
CROW Act 2000	Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
DMS	Definitive Map & Statement: A legal record of PROW in England & Wales
DMMO	Definitive Map Modification Order: a legal order which allows the Definitive Map to be amended
DRT	Disused Railway Track
JLAF	Joint Local Action Forum: a statutory advisory body created under the CROW Act 2000 and made up of appointed volunteers who have relevant interests with respect to public access and PROW
KCIIIECP	King Charles III England Coast Path
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LTP	Local Transport Plan
MENE	Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: 2009-19 survey by Natural England about outdoor recreation, pro-environmental behaviours and attitudes towards/engagement with the natural environment
Miles Without Stiles	An initiative to provide well-surfaced, easy access routes without stiles, steps or steep gradients in National Parks across Britain
NCN	National Cycle Network
NCNL	Northumberland Coast National Landscape
NCC	Northumberland County Council
NNR	National Nature Reserve

NNPA	Northumberland National Park Authority
NPNL	North Pennines National Landscape
OS	Ordnance Survey
PPO	Public Path Order (usually creation, diversion or closure)
PROW	Public Rights of Way
ROWIP	Rights of Way Improvement Plan: a statutory ten-year plan required by the CROW Act 2000
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest







# Executive Summary

**Our vision is for a well-managed, accessible, safe and interconnected network of Public Rights Of Way and countryside access for all users.**

The Northumberland ROWIP is a statutory document which is required by law. It sets out how Northumberland County Council will identify, prioritise and plan improvements across the PROW network for the next ten years, working towards a vision which is shared with our partners and local stakeholders. It sets out nine policies and associated actions focussing on maintenance, recording, access, information, connectivity, communities, tourism, partnership and climate change. These form our strategy for the next ten years and will be delivered through rolling three-year Delivery Plans to be developed in consultation with the JLAF and community stakeholders.

## Summary of ROWIP policies:

1. Ensure the PROW network is well **maintained** and, where possible, **enhanced** to maximise the value of resources
2. Ensure the PROW network is accurately **recorded**
3. Make the PROW network more **accessible** to a wider range of users
4. Provide **information** about the PROW network for residents and visitors
5. Improve **connectivity** of the network for all users
6. Working with **communities** to maximise the benefits of the PROW network
7. Enhance Northumberland's **tourism** offer by providing access to a rich natural and cultural landscape
8. Work in **partnership** to maximise the potential of the PROW network
9. Recognise and respond to the impacts of **climate change** on the PROW network

For the next ten years we must seek to strengthen our green infrastructure, to encourage more people and a wider range of people to explore Northumberland's rich natural and cultural heritage and to reduce carbon emissions by using the PROW network to access services, recreation, settlements and destinations. Across the network we plan to improve access and accessibility to provide more opportunities to residents and visitors to benefit from experiences in our great outdoors.

We intend to strengthen relationships with our partners and stakeholders to create and take advantage of more opportunities to improve maintenance and increase access to our PROW. The PROW network has the potential to contribute to Northumberland's health, economic, inequalities and climate change agendas. By working in partnership, we can ensure that more stakeholders recognise the opportunities provided by our rural and urban greenspaces.

- ▶ Enables residents and visitors to access, explore and enjoy Northumberland's landscapes, countryside and green spaces
- ▶ Provides access to towns, villages, services, destinations and activities
- ▶ Helps to address inequalities in access to countryside and greenspace
- ▶ Supports people's physical and mental wellbeing
- ▶ Contributes to the visitor and wider economies
- ▶ Increases opportunities for car-free travel
- ▶ Conserves the rich heritage of routes in Northumberland, some of which have been used for centuries

This ROWIP acknowledges and responds to changes over the last ten years including the increasing need to make access more equitable across an urban and rural landscape, the urgent need to both respond to and prepare for a changing climate, and the changing landscape of digital communications and opportunities to engage with new technologies to raise awareness and improve engagement.

The ROWIP has been written by Katherine Williams, Consultant, on behalf of NCC PROW team and in consultation with the JLAF. It will be finalised after a 12-week statutory consultation period.



A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark jacket and black leggings, is walking away from the camera on a snow-covered hill. She is holding a leash for a small, light-colored dog. The hill is covered in a thick layer of snow, with some dark rocks visible. In the background, there are more snow-covered hills and a small building. The sky is a mix of orange and blue, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. A large, semi-transparent circular graphic is overlaid on the image, and the word "DRAFT" is written in a large, white, serif font across the center.

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# Introduction

Northumberland is the fifth largest and one of the most rural counties in England. Much of the county is characterised by sparsely populated upland or coastal areas encompassing three protected landscapes where communities are dependent on rural farming, fishing and tourism economies. Across much of the county, market towns and villages provide a focal hub for access into the countryside. The south-east of the county, characterised by more substantial urban settlements that have developed around the Northumberland coalfield, brings a mix of more urban access demands alongside gateway links to rural areas.

Whether in rural or an urban landscape, our PROW are essential for both purposeful journeys and recreation. An accessible PROW network supports local residents, communities and visitors. It connects people and communities, providing routes to and between services, school, employment, recreation, tourism destinations and our towns and villages. In itself, it provides opportunities for

activities which support physical and mental wellbeing. It increases access to urban and rural greenspace and it makes car-free travel possible.

Our extensive and varied PROW network comprises more than 3,340 miles (5,375km) of footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways which, together with permissive access routes and access land, provide:

- ▶ Opportunities for physical, recreational and sporting activity
- ▶ Opportunities to enhance individual wellbeing and health
- ▶ Access to services, school and work without using a car
- ▶ Support for the tourism industry and local businesses
- ▶ A local educational and cultural resource

This is Northumberland's second Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)<sup>1</sup>. There have been many changes since the publication of the first ROWIP. Demands on expectations for public access have increased, legislation has developed, and resources have reduced. This Plan reflects these changes and the new dynamic of managing and improving access in the

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<sup>1</sup> Previous plan: Northumberland ROWIP 2006-2016





forthcoming years. It is a ten-year long term plan, brought together in consultation with local partners and stakeholders in alignment with the Local Authority's strategic vision and values, which sets out a vision for improving Northumberland's PROW network.

The focus of this ROWIP is to improve and enhance opportunities for access and enable more people to get more benefit and enjoyment from the network, whether on foot, horse or bicycle. The PROW network can be an important factor in tackling some aspects of inequality, and a driver for some areas of economic growth so improvements made within the life of this Plan will have long term effects for many aspects of Northumberland.

In line with current statutory guidance, the new ROWIP is more strategic than the previous Plan. It presents a ten-year vision for Northumberland's PROW which will be delivered through nine policies and associated long term strategic actions. The new ROWIP will be supported by a dynamic PROW Delivery Plan which will define the specific shorter-term actions needed to achieve the ROWIP policies.

The last ROWIP facilitated 10+ years of partnership working with Northumberland

National Park Authority (NNPA), parish councils and members of the Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF). These partnerships continue to support NCC to manage, enhance and promote PROW and have informed the content of the new ROWIP. It is through partnership collaborations that we have been able to identify changes in our local environment, landscape and communities to ensure that the PROW network continues to meet local needs and opportunities.

In particular, this new ROWIP

(i) acknowledges the role that PROW must play in addressing inequalities in access to greenspace and supporting wellbeing; (ii) places increased emphasis on the need to improve connectivity within the network; and (iii) highlights the increasing impact of severe weather events and climate change on our PROW network. Enhancements on the ground to improve access and usability, together with the accurate recording of PROW through the Definitive Map & Statement are core to the new ROWIP as they were previously.

The ROWIP 2025-35 is aligned to the NCC Corporate Plan and other local strategies (see pages 18-19).



# Writing the ROWIP

All Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility, under the CROW Act 2000, to provide a ROWIP which explains how improvements to the local PROW network will provide a better experience for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, horse and carriage drivers, people with restricted mobility and people using motorised vehicles.

It is also a requirement of the CROW Act that the ROWIP is informed by consultation with interested parties including highway authorities whose areas adjoin the authority area, parish councils, National Park Authorities, Natural England and Local Access Forums.

This draft ROWIP has been developed in line with national guidance and the requests of key stakeholders, such as the JLAF, and presents a strategic Action Plan for the next ten years. The statutory consultation period received comments from... [to be completed after consultation period].



## Developing the 2024-34 ROWIP:

- 2022** ▶ JLAF consultation at Northumberland County and Bellingham Shows
- 2022-23** ▶ Review of ROWIP 1 by NCC Officers and JLAF
- Oct 23 - Apr 24** ▶ New plan developed and proposed in consultation with JLAF Task & Finish group
- May 24** ▶ Draft ROWIP 2025-35 accepted by JLAF
- June 24** ▶ Draft ROWIP approved by NCC PROW committee
- July-Sept 24** ▶ Public consultation (12-week statutory consultation period, including press notices)
- tbc** ▶ Final ROWIP 2025-35 presented to JLAF
- tbc** ▶ Final ROWIP 2025-35 presented to NCC PROW committee for comment
- tbc** ▶ Final ROWIP submitted to cabinet for approval
- 2025** ▶ ROWIP adopted



## Our Land (excerpt from the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-2026)

"Northumberland is England's northernmost county, stretching from the Scottish Border in the north and east to Tyneside and County Durham in the south.

Northumberland is a county of stunning contrasts. From ancient castles to high-tech industry, from pristine beaches to wild countryside - Northumberland has something for everyone.

It's a huge space. The county is the largest unitary authority by geographic coverage with the greatest area of Green Belt of any Local Planning Authority. With an area of 1,936 square miles (5,013 km<sup>2</sup>) and a population of 323,820 (2020), Northumberland is the least densely populated of the North-East region's 12 local authority areas and the sixth most sparsely populated in England.

The different parts of the county have distinct characteristics, from urban to rural, coastal to upland and well-connected to remote.

These are the contrasts that make Northumberland so special, whether it's a place to live, work or visit. It's easy to see why the county is one of the UK's top tourist destinations.

The south-east of the county is the most densely populated, with the three largest

towns, Blyth, Cramlington and Ashington.

These act as main employment centres, drawing from a wider area than just south-east Northumberland.

Beyond the south-east, the county's main settlements are located along the Tyne Valley corridor and along the coast. Morpeth, Hexham, Prudhoe, Berwick and Alnwick are the main market towns, all of which have significant rural hinterlands.

Almost 97% of the county's land area is classed as rural, with just under half of the population living in this area and over half of the population living in 3% of the land area, mainly in the south-east of the county."



**97%**  
of its area classed as  
rural, the county is  
sparsely populated  
with 64 people  
per km<sup>2</sup>





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# Needs Analysis

The Northumberland PROW network comprises:

- ▶ 3,340 miles (5,375km) of PROW - 63% footpaths, 27% bridleways, 3% restricted byways and 8% byways
- ▶ Three National Trails which cross the county (Hadrian's Wall Path, Pennine Way and KCIIECP)
- ▶ Six important regional long-distance trails which are wholly or substantially within the county (St Oswald's Way, St Cuthbert's Way, The Sandstone Way, Tyne River Trail, Tyne & Wear Heritage Way and Ravenber Way)
- ▶ Five National Cycle Route Trails (including Pennine Cycleway, Hadrian's Way Cycleway, Coast and Castles Route, and Sea to Sea Cycle Route)
- ▶ Numerous locally promoted walking and riding trails and short walks
- ▶ Significant strategic access routes within areas of green space linking communities and recreation sites

This is a green network of footpaths, bridleways and byways which, together with other access routes, connect services, settlements and destinations and provide opportunities for recreation and exercise. The PROW network is important to both residents and visitors

The significance of green infrastructure is recognised in Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework (2023) which highlights the value of greenspace and countryside for nature, for people, for communities and for landscapes. During the Covid pandemic, the value of green spaces and countryside access in preventing ill health and supporting wellbeing came to the fore, as did inequalities in the availability of such sites.

This is particularly relevant in the south-east of the county where there are higher levels of poverty and disadvantage than in the rest of Northumberland.

Approximately 12% of Northumberland's population live in one of the 10% most deprived areas of England and, in these areas, there is higher unemployment, lower income, higher childhood poverty and shorter life expectancy than the rest of the county or national averages<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Northumberland County Council Corporate Plan 2023-26





**“The differences between the most deprived and least deprived areas can be stark, from the number of children receiving free school meals and educational attainment through to unemployment levels”**

NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26

Natural England’s MENE survey (2009-2019)<sup>3</sup> identified that most people’s experience of nature is close to home highlighting that, although visits to urban greenspaces almost doubled over the period of the survey, engagement is unequal, with income, ethnicity and old age all identified as barriers to accessing nature and greenspace. It recommended that “promoting people’s access to nature should be an aim in itself because of the benefits it provides for society,” and that “time spent in the natural world provides large benefits to the economy.”

The MENE survey also identified that most people travelled to greenspaces and other nature destinations by foot, highlighting the importance of accessible

rights of way to enable more people to make use of greenspaces in their vicinity.

The PROW network in Northumberland must provide opportunities for more people (residents and visitors) to access our rich natural environment and it must ensure that this is equitable across our county by contributing to the government’s recent commitment to ensure that everyone lives within a 15-minute walk of green and blue spaces<sup>4</sup>.

**“We will work across government to fulfil a new and ambitious commitment that everyone should live within 15 minutes walk of a green or blue space”**

DEFRA Environmental Improvement Plan 2023

Our PROW network must provide routes for all types of user including:

- ▶ Walkers
- ▶ Horse riders
- ▶ Horse drawn vehicles
- ▶ Cyclists
- ▶ People with dogs

<sup>3</sup> Natural England (2022) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)

<sup>4</sup> DEFRA (2023) Environmental Improvement Plan



- ▶ Drivers or riders of motorised vehicles
- ▶ Disabled people including those who use a wheelchair, mobility scooter or any other mobility aid
- ▶ People who are blind or partially sighted
- ▶ People pushing a pram or pushchair

It must connect users to green spaces, services and other destinations as well as linking our towns and villages. It must facilitate active transport (purposeful journeys without the use of a car/other motorised vehicle) and it must also support recreational journeys including walking, running, riding and cycling individually and in groups.

**“Promoting people’s access to nature should be an aim in itself because of the benefits it provides for society”**

Natural England MENE survey, 2009-19

We must also acknowledge that not all PROW can be appropriate for all types of user. Some usage will be limited by the legal path designations whilst, on other routes, access by some users may be limited by the gradient or surface of a path. Ecological and historic sensitivities

must also be considered and the improvement of the PROW network must not be to the detriment of our local biodiversity or cultural landscape. Whilst it is NCC’s intention that the PROW network will facilitate greater access to the countryside and greenspaces for people without a car and those with disabilities, it will not be possible or appropriate to make all routes accessible.

Local consultation, led by the Northumberland JLAF in 2022, has provided some further insight about user needs. It highlighted ‘honey pot sites’ which are already well used and well known, including Rothbury, north Northumberland Coast and the Tyne Valley areas. Most people who took part in the consultation said they use the PROW network for walking short to medium distances of up to 10 miles and that they enjoy the views, beautiful scenery and peace and quiet that Northumberland has to offer. Issues identified included the need to promote less well known areas and routes, to manage expectations with regard to facilities and for suitable parking areas, (carparks and laybys) to be made available. There was also support for





**“Northumberland County Council will work towards improving access to the countryside for a wider range of users, in particular people without a car and those with disabilities. The Council will work towards policies and procedures that make opportunities to enjoy the countryside available to all residents and visitors, so that physical and intellectual capabilities, income level, gender, age or race should not be a barrier to participation.”**

### NCC Statement of Intent on Access for All

opening up Disused Railway Tracks (DRTs) as multi-use green routes.

We also recognise the need to improve awareness of the Definitive Map and Statement (DMS) and to identify new ways to communicate information and promote our PROW network to residents and visitors.

As mentioned above, the ROWIP must also seek to improve the PROW network in a way that both increases resilience or responds to the impacts of climate change and supports people to use more climate-friendly means of transport.

Increasingly severe weather events are creating short- or long-term barriers in the Northumberland PROW network with fallen trees, increased erosion and flooding leaving paths impassable. Over the next ten years there is a need to ensure there is sufficient capacity or resource to respond to these events and also to begin to build resilience into areas of the PROW network which are particularly susceptible.

Within the PROW network there are areas where, within the next ten years, investment will be needed to improve PROW. In particular, these are:

- ▶ Areas where accessibility improvements will significantly enhance the user experience
- ▶ Areas where provision and connectivity of bridleway links can be improved
- ▶ Routes of strategic significance (including National Trails and promoted regional routes)
- ▶ Routes which provide connections between and within communities
- ▶ Improvements which will facilitate active transport by enabling safer, connected journeys on foot, horse and bicycle
- ▶ Popular leisure routes with high footfall/usage



A person wearing a blue helmet and dark riding attire is seen from behind, riding a light brown horse through a muddy puddle on a dirt path. The horse's legs are splashing through the water, and its reflection is visible in the puddle. The path is flanked by green hedges and grassy fields under a clear blue sky. A large, semi-transparent circular frame is centered over the image, and the word "DRAFT" is written in a large, white, serif font across the middle of the circle.

# DRAFT

Bridleway at Greenrigg near Alnwick (© Ingrid Hardy)

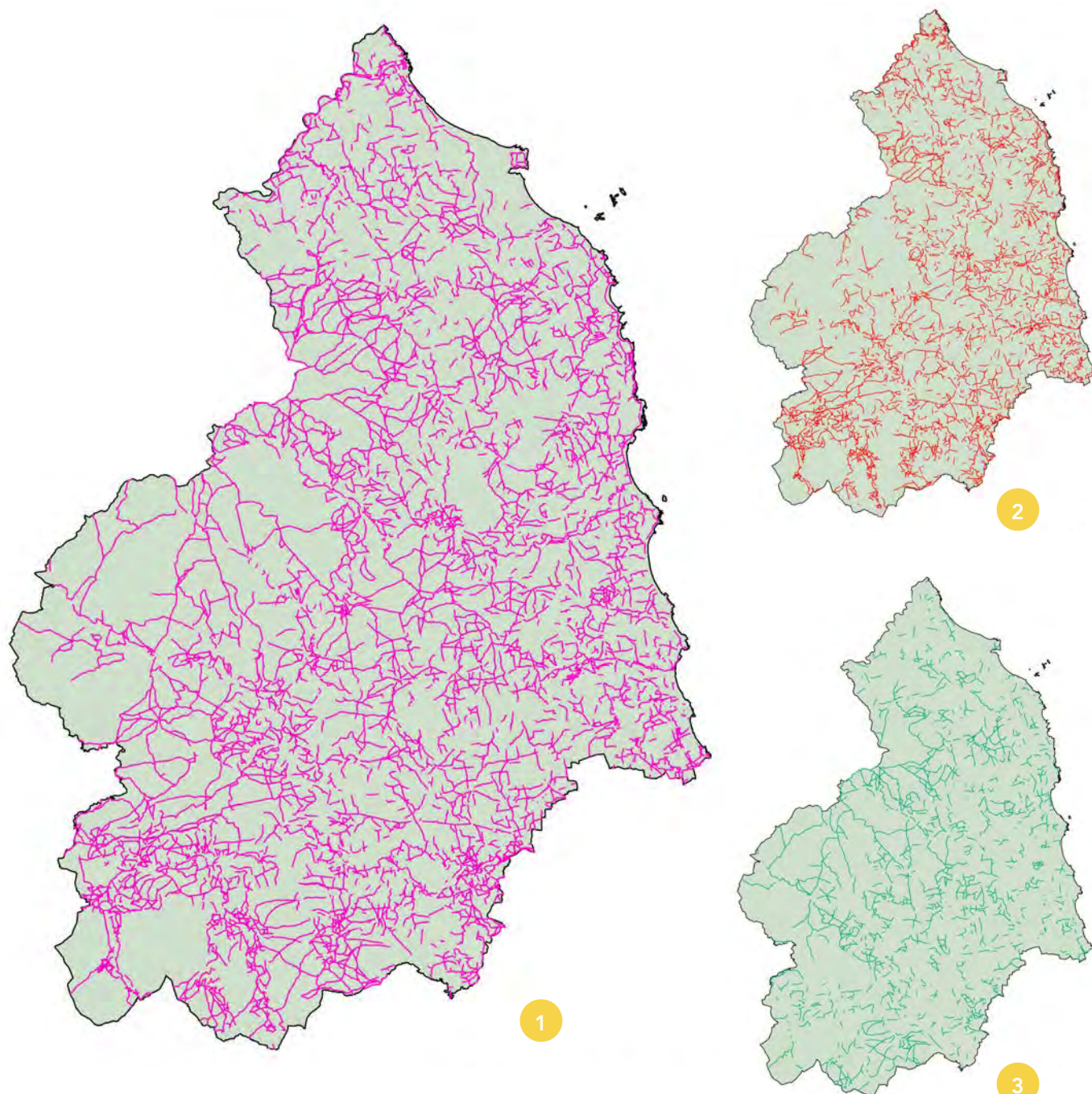


# Map 1: Northumberland trails and destinations





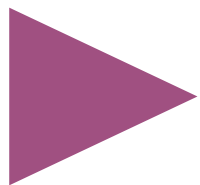
## Map 2: Northumberland Public Rights of Way



- ① All Public Rights of Way
- ② Public Footpaths
- ③ Public Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways



# Vision



Our vision is for a well-managed, accessible, safe and interconnected network of Public Rights Of Way and countryside access for all users

The PROW network in Northumberland will deliver seven objectives which are to:

- 1 Enable residents and visitors to access, explore and enjoy Northumberland's landscapes, countryside and green spaces
- 2 Provide access to towns, villages, services, destinations and activities
- 3 Help to address inequalities in access to countryside and greenspace
- 4 Support people's physical and mental wellbeing
- 5 Contribute to the visitor and wider economies
- 6 Increase opportunities for car-free travel
- 7 Conserve the rich heritage of routes in Northumberland, some of which have been used for centuries

A well-managed network of Public Rights of Way and other routes will facilitate equitable access to Northumberland's countryside, greenspaces and local services. It will enhance local communities, contribute to local economies and support enjoyment, inspiration and health benefits to users. It will enable more people to get around the county for both purposeful and recreational journeys.

**This will contribute to the NCC vision for Northumberland: a land of great opportunities.**

The Northumberland PROW network is important to both residents and visitors, providing a green network of footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways which, together with other access routes, connect services, settlements and destinations and provide opportunities for recreation and exercise.





Brynn Hauxwell, first wheelchair user to complete  
the Hadrian's Wall Path (National Trail) in 2022



The Covid pandemic highlighted the value of green infrastructure with people across the UK seeking opportunities to spend time in the great outdoors, including increased visitors to protected landscapes, beaches and urban greenspace in Northumberland and the rest of the country. At the same time, inequalities in availability of greenspace exist with people who live in the most economically deprived areas having less access to good quality greenspace and those who are the greatest risk of poor physical and mental health having the least opportunity to benefit from access to high quality green space.<sup>5</sup>

Through the ROWIP we have an opportunity to co-ordinate efforts to improve access across our urban and rural landscape. Working in partnership, we must ensure that delivery of the plan is equitable, working across our communities, supporting different types of users and connecting destinations, services and routes in our protected landscapes, in the more densely populated urban communities and everywhere in-between. This will bring

benefits to individuals, communities and the county as a whole.

For the next ten years we will continue to strengthen and promote our green infrastructure, to encourage more people and a wider range of people to reduce carbon emissions by using the PROW network for purposeful and recreational journeys. We will also work towards increasing resilience in our PROW network to cope with the disruption caused by severe weather events and rising sea levels.

Above all, the goal of this ROWIP is that, by 2035, our residents and visitors will be able to travel around our county using a PROW network which is better managed, more accessible, better connected and feels safer than it does currently.

The ROWIP vision and objectives will be delivered through nine strategic policies and associated actions (below). It will be delivered in partnership by NCC, NNPA, NPNL, NCNL, Forestry England, Natural England, town and parish councils, landowners and volunteer groups, and will support local strategies for walking and cycling, destination management, climate

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<sup>5</sup> Public Health England (2020), Improving Access to Greenspace  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f202e0de90e071a5a924316/Improving\\_access\\_to\\_greenspace\\_2020\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f202e0de90e071a5a924316/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf)



change action, landscape management and physical activity, amongst others (see pages 18-20). By working together we can maximise the potential of and add value to the PROW network for all users.



# Strategic alignment

This section will briefly provide a national, regional and local perspective, identifying the partner and local authority policies and services, across planning, transport, environmental management, leisure and recreation, culture and the arts, which will both support green infrastructure and be supported by it.

## National significance

- ▶ The ROWIP is a statutory document required by the **CROW Act 2000**.
- ▶ The **CROW Act 2000** also sets out a requirement to maintain the Definitive Map & Statement with provision for a cut off date for historical Rights of Way to be recorded (deadline January 2031).
- ▶ **Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles 2023** for developing stronger green infrastructure policy and delivery. These are reflected in the Vision, Objectives and Policies for this ROWIP.
- ▶ **DEFRA Environmental Improvement Plan 2023** sets an ambitious target for everyone to live within a fifteen-minute walk of green or blue space. It also provides a commitment to invest in active travel, with a vision for half of all journeys in towns and cities to be cycled or walked in 2030.

## Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles (2023)

### Benefits Principles

- ▶ Nature rich beautiful places
- ▶ Active and healthy places
- ▶ Thriving and positive places
- ▶ Improved water management
- ▶ Resilient and climate positive places

### Descriptive Principles

- ▶ Multifunctional
- ▶ Varied
- ▶ Connected
- ▶ Accessible
- ▶ Responds to local character

### Process Principles

- ▶ Partnership and vision
- ▶ Evidence
- ▶ Plan strategically
- ▶ Design
- ▶ Managed, valued and evaluated





## Regional Connections

Northumberland PROW (including three National Trails) continue across county boundaries into neighbouring Local Authorities Cumbria, Durham, Newcastle and Tyne & Wear. In the north of the county, routes cross over the border into Scotland.

Our PROW network has the potential to contribute to developing tourism and green economies across the region as well as supporting the health and wellbeing agenda. The new North East Combined Authority is championing the region as an outstanding place to live, work, visit and invest, with a vision to create a better way of life which includes connecting communities and improving wellbeing for all. In Northumberland, the PROW can help to deliver North East portfolios on

Transport, Culture, Creative Tourism and Sport, and Environment, Coastal and Rural.

The North East Transport Plan (2024-35) includes major improvements to regional walking, wheeling and cycle routes, amongst other activities.

The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal sets out objectives to Enable Infrastructure, Improve Places and Encourage Green Growth which are also directly relevant to PROW.

### NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26:

#### Achieving value for money

- ▶ Residents receive the best customer service
- ▶ Working better, more efficiently

#### Tackling inequalities

- ▶ Empowered and resilient communities
- ▶ All adults living well, regardless of age, illness or disability

#### Driving economic growth

- ▶ Thriving places and culture
- ▶ Skilled and aspirational people

**Delivering our Climate Change Action Plan to be carbon neutral by 2030**



## NCC Strategies

The Northumberland ROWIP will contribute to and be supported by:

- ▶ NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26
- ▶ Northumberland Local Plan
- ▶ NCC Climate Change Action Plan
- ▶ Northumberland Cultural Strategy
- ▶ Northumberland Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- ▶ Northumberland Physical Activity Strategy

## Local Stakeholder Strategies

Relevant stakeholder strategies in the Authority are:

- ▶ Northumberland National Park Authority Management Plan
- ▶ Our Way - Northumberland Walking & Cycling Strategy
- ▶ Northumberland Coast National Landscape Management Plan
- ▶ North Pennines National Landscape Management Plan
- ▶ Kielder Water & Forest Park Strategic Development Plan
- ▶ Forestry England Growing the Future: 2021-26
- ▶ Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022-32








Active Northumberland Wellbeing Walk near Hexham (© Lisa Scott)



# Action

The ROWIP will be delivered through strategic policies and actions which are set out below. In addition, annual delivery plans will set out shorter-term and more specific actions aligned to needs and opportunities which may vary from year to year. It is important to note that all policy actions identified in this plan are subject to the availability of funding.



## Policy 1: Ensure the PROW network is well maintained and, where possible, enhanced to maximise the value of resources

The first priority for the ROWIP is to maintain and, where possible, enhance the network of PROW and other routes. We will:

- a. Improve maintenance of the PROW network, seeking to ensure that paths are maintained in a condition appropriate for their location and with consideration of the expectation and demand of users

- b. Take appropriate action to address routes which have become impassable
- c. Maintain and improve PROW signage
- d. Facilitate legitimate use of footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways, byways and other routes in line with legislation
- e. Train and support volunteers to monitor and help maintain key routes

These actions will ensure that, by 2035, the network of footpaths, bridleways, byways and other routes in Northumberland will be in better condition than they are now. It will be important that improvements are targeted across the county to benefit local residents and visitors.

Data collected since 2002 indicates that key performance indicators for the usability of PROW have declined in recent years (see pages 48-50). We will continue to monitor this by assessing a random sample of the county's PROW annually, aiming to reverse the trend by 2035.

More people must be aware of and involved in reporting and recording issues and helping to maintain the network. However, increased reporting will inevitably lead to more concerns being





## Case study: Enhancing footpaths in Berwick

This popular footpath on the north bank of the River Tweed, between New Road and Plantation, was identified by Berwick Ramblers as a route that had become difficult to use for many people. The surface had degraded making the path uneven and often muddy.

In 2021/22, with funding through the LTP and a contribution from Berwick Ramblers, over half a mile of path surface was enhanced and drainage improved.

A local walker commented, *"what was always a pleasant but sometimes slippery and muddy route has been made much safer and easier to walk and the 'serpentine' stretch up the hill at the beginning is excellent."*

The path now forms part of an easy-to-use circular walk from Berwick upon Tweed.

Before and after  
path improvement works



raised and it is therefore a priority, if resources become available, to increase capacity in these terms to meet these anticipated demands.



### Policy 2: Ensure the PROW network is accurately recorded

NCC will continue to provide up to date and accurate information relating to our PROW network. We will:

- a. Maintain the DMS
- b. Maintain a register of claims
- c. Maintain the List of Streets
- d. Register, evaluate and process DMMO applications in a chronological order



based on submission, unless strategic benefits to the network or other legal factors dictate otherwise; also giving higher priority to user evidence-based claims, particularly where the public is now being prevented from using a route

- e. Register and process PPO applications in a timely manner and in accordance with requirements of any future legislation that may be enabled
- f. Support diversion proposals where there is a net benefit for access

Maintaining the Definitive Map and recording any changes to it is a statutory requirement and central to a PROW network which is well maintained and well used. An increased awareness of the need to claim currently unrecorded rights of way is likely to lead to a further increase in the number of DMMO Claims submitted to NCC before the cutoff date in 2031. The introduction of the 'right to apply' may increase the number of PPO applications and would add to the overall demands on both the Definitive Map and Countryside Teams. It is therefore a priority to ensure that level of demand is closely monitored and tracked, so that

these services are able to keep pace with any increase in demand.



### Policy 3: Make the PROW network more accessible to a wider range of users

NCC recognises the need to improve access to the PROW network in order to deliver our ROWIP objectives. We will:

- a. Ensure new PROW and infrastructure improvements result in the least restrictive options for use, having regard to the Equalities Act 2010 as well as any constraints of the natural environment and land management objectives
- b. Take opportunities, when they arise, to improve PROW provision in areas which are poorly served by the existing path network
- c. Prioritise works to improve accessibility where they are:
  - (i) Close to towns and villages
  - (ii) On National trails, promoted routes or access routes to visitor destinations/sites
  - (iii) On bridleways





## Case Study: Recording 'lost ways'

With a deadline for recording historical Rights Of Way approaching, Sue Rogers, local volunteer and JLAf member, has been recording ancient routes to ensure they are included in the DMS.

*"As someone who has always enjoyed exploring the countryside, map in hand and preferably on horseback, it was the signal for merging my interest in local history with my desire to get to know the less well-known corners of the Northumbrian countryside."*

Sue has researched routes on foot, horseback and in the local record office, revealing historical routes and 'lost ways' which were missing from the public record (or where access rights had not been fully recorded) and therefore at risk of being extinguished. Sue's diligence, supported by landowners and Parish Councils, has improved the record of PROW in Northumberland. In Sue's own words, *"local history gives flavour to landscape."*

Giving an insight into her research, she explains, *"It all started with Scots Pines! Did you know that clumps of these old trees were the blue motorway signs of past centuries? Placed close to fords or on high points where an ancient trackway passed through a gap in the hills, they guided drovers or other travellers on their way. They aided safe travel through remote and dangerous terrain and could indicate places for overnight shelter."*

If these paths, which may have been trodden for centuries but, for whatever reason, have not been mapped, are not recorded now they could be lost forever. Researching these routes is helping to provide the documentary evidence that NCC's Definitive Map team need to update the DMS and ensure the routes are included in the public record. Anyone can submit evidence as Sue has done to support this process and ensure ancient but as yet unrecorded rights are not lost.





- d. Adopt a *Miles Without Stiles* approach to improve access opportunities from village and town hubs
- e. Improve more routes for multi-access use where opportunities arise and the route is appropriate

By 2035, our plan is that a wider range of users, in particular people without a car and those with disabilities, will be able to access Northumberland's countryside and green spaces. We want our PROW network to be accessible to a wide range of users including those who use mobility aids (wheelchairs or walking aids), pushchairs, users who are visually impaired, dog walkers, cyclists and equestrian users.

Everyone should be able to access an experience in the countryside or greenspaces and it is an ambition of this ROWIP that physical and intellectual capabilities, income level, gender, age or race should not be a barrier to this. In particular, we will prioritise replacing stiles with gates, improving path surfaces, ensuring easy access to paths from disabled parking areas, and creating new accessible routes.

The Northumberland JLAF's new 'rails to trails' initiative supports and advises on

the conversion of disused railway tracks (DRT) as traffic-free shared-use greenways. These have potential to provide multi-use routes, linking urban and rural communities and bringing our industrial heritage back into use. Where new routes can be agreed and delivered, the County Council will work with stakeholders to make necessary Orders and undertake establishment works.

We will seek to provide the least restrictive access whilst maintaining landscape character and protecting our rich natural and historic environment. Working with other NCC departments, our partners and local stakeholders, we will engage with communities, user groups and communities of interest, to better understand their needs. We will identify new opportunities to improve accessibility through PROW maintenance, signage, improving information and linking to public transport networks.

We will ensure that accessibility is a driver for change when making decisions about improvements to the PROW network and that monitoring of routes includes assessing the accessibility of path infrastructure.



## Case Study: Gates for Stiles in the South Tyne Valley

Sometimes the barriers to access for users come in the form of familiar structures such as stiles that are limiting to those with restricted mobility. Working with the agreement of numerous landowners in the South Tyne Valley, a series of access improvements have been carried out on promoted and strategic routes and since 2019. With a focus on the Pennine Way and Isaac's Tea Trail, and the paths linking to them, over 15 stiles have been replaced with self-closing wicket gates, or removed entirely, making some sections of these well used routes completely stile free.



### Policy 4: Provide information about the PROW network for residents and visitors

A PROW can only achieve its full potential if local people and visitors can easily access information about it. We will:

- a. Provide accessible information about the PROW network, promoted routes, local trails and other paths via digital, social media and printed material and
- b. embrace new methods of providing this as they become available
- b. Improve the availability of information on permissive and other access routes not shown on the Definitive Map
- c. Provide information about off road routes in order to help promote car-free journeys and travel
- d. Utilise NCC and partner news outlets (including digital and social media) to provide information about published routes, other routes/trails and to keep



the public up to date with any changes to the PROW network

- e. Improve information links with partner organisations on recreational access and tourism
- f. Highlight the 'Miles Without Stiles' more accessible paths focused on village and town hubs

Information and communications have developed significantly since the previous ROWIP. It is important that we utilise the most up to date means of sharing information to engage a wider range of people in accessing the PROW network. At the time of writing, this will include providing printed information at visitor destinations,

### Case Study: Promoting the Riever Trails at Kielder

The promotion of new trails for off road cycling is the focus of a project between Forestry England, NCC, Kielder Water & Forest Park and NNPA.

Branded and waymarked gravel trails linking the National Park and Kielder through Wark and Kielder Forest area are being developed. The routes will be provided as pdf downloads, gpx files and hard copies and will be promoted via social media channels and organisational websites, as well as being made available to pick up in key visitor areas.

According to Alex MacLennan, Recreation, Public Affairs Manager Northumberland for Forestry England, *"These trails will allow more people to make use of some exceptional forest trails. With new clearly identifiable branding and signage, coupled with detailed digital and conventional mapping, these routes are going to be much easier to follow. This is important as these are areas where navigation can be challenging! The trails will also enable visitors to connect better with local rural communities for local services while they are in the area."*





hot spots and communities and sharing information via NCC/partner websites and social media. It is expected that, by 2035, there will be new platforms (particularly in the digital sphere) available and we will seek to understand and utilise these as much as we can.

We recognise that more and more frequent information/updates could be provided about the DMS to make users aware that it exists and how to access. We will also seek to utilise NCC information channels to share updates about path closures or other changing situations.

As with other areas of the ROWIP, working in partnership will add value to our communications. There is already a wealth of information made available via partner agencies, parish councils, volunteer groups and others and NCC will support this wherever possible. Through this ROWIP we will also strengthen links with other statutory bodies and departments. This will include seeking to provide PROW information via the county's tourism networks; to target information through health settings so that those who will most benefit can access our countryside and green spaces; and to work with those who support communities to increase awareness of local PROW.



## Policy 5: Improve connectivity of the network for all users

A high quality PROW network must be well connected to facilitate both recreational and purposeful journeys. The Northumberland ROWIP will:

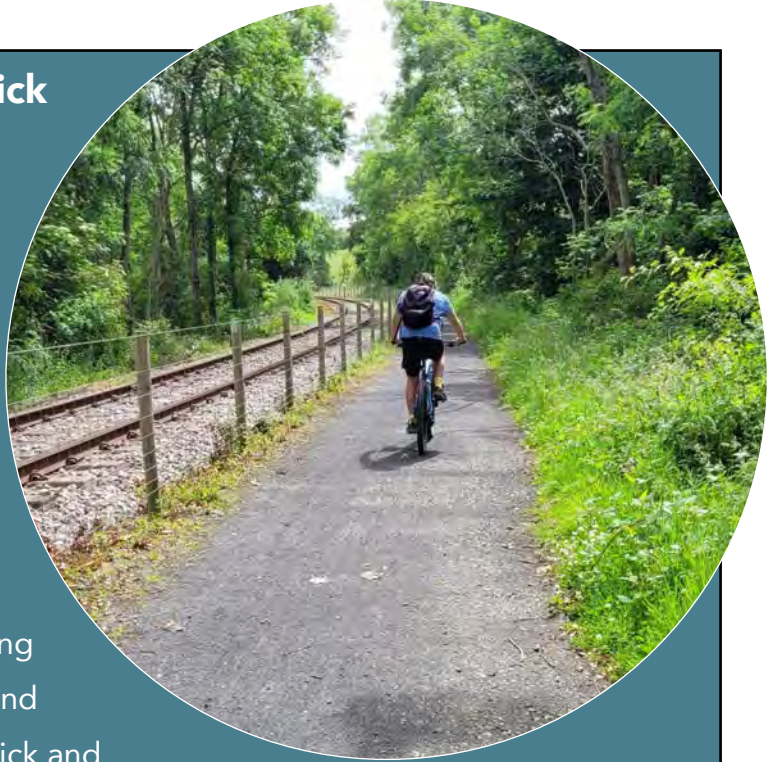
- a. Enhance connectivity by addressing missing links and gaps in the network, particularly for equestrian users and cyclists, where opportunities arise
- b. Take advantage of opportunities to establish or improve public access to areas of open access land
- c. Take opportunities when considering DMMO claims to establish meaningful connections to other parts of the network

Connectivity has consistently been raised as a concern through the JLAF. This includes connecting routes within the PROW network, addressing gaps where, for example, a bridleway is broken by a short stretch of footpath, maintaining PROWs which connect settlements or destinations, enabling access and exit from National Trails and ensuring connectivity across borders or county boundaries. Disused Railway Tracks may



## Case Study: Connecting Alnwick to the rail network

In 2020 a new cycle route was opened between Lionheart Station in Alnwick and Greenrigg near Alnmouth where it joins the local road network which connects to the coastal cycle route. This new route, which runs alongside the Aln Valley Railway, provides an alternative to cycling along the busy A1068, giving cyclists (and other users) a safe route between Alnwick and Alnmouth railway



station and facilitating car-free commutes into Newcastle or Edinburgh or for days out at Alnmouth or the surrounding coastal area.

Councillor Glen Sanderson, Leader of Council, said, *"The County Council has made climate change a key priority and amongst a number of new initiatives we think it's important to place more focus on improving and investing in walking and cycling which not only improves health but also reduces car use. We were delighted to work with the Aln Valley Railway Trust to provide this route."*


The route is well used by people on wheels, horseback and on foot. The development of this route from Greenrigg on towards Alnmouth is now being progressed.

provide opportunities for new routes which will improve connectivity.

essential for the successful implementation of this policy.

With more than 3,000 miles of PROW, effective mapping and recording is





## Policy 6: Work with communities to maximise the benefits of the PROW network

We want the Northumberland PROW network to provide valued local routes for local people who use them most and have the greatest attachment to them. We will:

- a. Improve and enhance traffic free rights of way networks around communities to increase use of sustainable transport for accessing work, schools and services, and to support public health and wellbeing
- b. Empower local communities to become custodians of their local network by facilitating and supporting community/volunteer engagement in PROW management, maintenance and improvement activities
- c. Work with planners to ensure PROW are protected and respected in new housing developments and identify opportunities for new/enhanced routes linking developments with local amenities

We will provide a safe, green network of routes which enable car-free journeys to school, work, other services and for

### Case study: Acklington parish footpath volunteers

Since forming in 2019, the Acklington Parish Council Rights Of Way volunteers have made a huge impact on their local path network. With support from the NCC Area Countryside Officer the group surveyed their parish network and identified a range of works required to bring paths up to a higher standard. With ongoing support, the volunteers have expanded their skills and activities, becoming trained in the use of path maintenance equipment and establishing a regular programme of work within the parish. From repairing structures to replacing waymarkers and keeping summer vegetation in check, they are playing a vital role in keeping paths well maintained and accessible, providing many hours of work that could not be undertaken otherwise.


The community now has access to well-maintained routes on their doorstep and the volunteers are enjoying the physical, social and mental wellbeing benefits of their involvement.





recreation. We will work with local communities and communities of interest to understand needs and identify opportunities where PROW can be improved.

We also want local people to be more involved in looking after their PROW and we will support parish councils and other voluntary groups to develop opportunities led by local people. We will celebrate and promote best practice where this can be replicated in other areas.



### Policy 7: Enhance Northumberland's tourism offer by providing access to a rich natural and cultural landscape

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Northumberland is a spectacular landscape with a rich cultural and natural history. Our PROW network facilitates access to the landscape, providing opportunities for local residents and visitors to explore and experience all that it has to offer. We will:

- a. Support initiatives which will increase the value of walking, horse riding and

cycling to the rural economy of Northumberland

- b. Maximise the value of partner contributions to the management and enhancement of National Trails
- c. Work in partnership to enhance access on regionally promoted routes and to facilitate access to tourism destinations

10 million people visit Northumberland every year. Our PROW network provides opportunities to explore a landscape which encompasses one National Park, two National Landscapes, three National Trails, one International Dark Skies Park, >70 castles, >60 miles of coast, nine National Nature Reserves, 23 Local Nature Reserves, >1000 scheduled ancient monuments and numerous other sites of interest.

Destination Northumberland has identified the quality of our landscape and countryside and our heritage culture as important attributes for tourism. They report that nature, space and landscapes are important factors for people choosing a destination to visit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Visitor Survey 2021 cited in Northumberland Destination Management Plan



The PROW network is an integral part of Northumberland's visitor offer and a significant contributor to the local tourism

economy, providing access to destinations and outdoor activities including walking and cycling.

## Case Study: King Charles III England Coast Path

The Northumberland stretch of the King Charles III England Coast Path provides a 100km easy-to-follow walking trail starting just north of Berwick-Upon-Tweed, England's most northern town, and completing a continuous path to Bridlington in East Yorkshire.

The Northumberland stretch, which largely follows the very popular Northumberland Coast Path (Cresswell to Berwick-upon-Tweed) which opened in 2006, takes in stunning beaches, often backed by rolling dunes, internationally important inter-tidal mudflats and geological diversity. More than half of the route is within the Northumberland Coast National Landscape. The KCIIECP in Northumberland has improved signage and access, helping more visitors to enjoy the beauty, wildlife and heritage of our coast.

The King Charles III England Coast Path will be the country's longest National Trail. It will encourage and enable more people (and a wider range of users) to access and enjoy our coastal landscape.



## Policy 8: Work in partnership to maximise the potential of the PROW network

We will continue to work in partnership with all the key stakeholders who have an interest in the PROW network to add value to what NCC can achieve in isolation. This will include working with Northumberland National Park Authority, Northumberland Coast National Landscape, North Pennines National Landscape, Forestry England and Natural England to maximise capacity and resources in our protected landscapes and continuing to engage with parish councils, statutory bodies, JLAF members and other partnerships to ensure that, across the county, resources are directed to areas where they can provide most benefit. In particular, we will:

- a. Work with landowners to secure improvements to PROW and to ensure that legal obligations for keeping routes unobstructed and for maintaining infrastructure are fulfilled
- b. Support and facilitate active involvement by local communities, volunteers and communities of interest to facilitate management,

maintenance and monitoring of local path networks

- c. Work with partner organisations to maximise any opportunities available through grant funding or other revenue schemes to enhance provision and improve accessibility
- d. Work with tourism partners to promote PROW as part of our rich natural and cultural landscape
- e. Engage with health sector partners to recognise the value of PROW in facilitating access to greenspace and the associated wellbeing benefits
- f. Develop a relationship with NCC Planning to protect PROW in housing developments
- g. Ensure PROW maintenance, enhancement or provision of new routes respects the needs to protect habitats, species or cultural landscape features

NCC will continue to liaise with the JLAF to monitor the progress of the ROWIP and to maximise the potential and value of new opportunities which will be incorporated into Delivery Plans. We will promote best practice from within Northumberland and beyond, seeking to





## Working in partnership to improve walking access in Redesdale

NCC was a partner in the Revitalising Redesdale Landscape Partnership led by Natural England which secured £1.8 million over five years from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to celebrate Redesdale's rich cultural heritage and to protect and enhance the area's landscape and wildlife from 2018 to 2022. This funding supported a wide range of heritage activities, including a project to enhance walking and cycling routes in the Redesdale area.

As a result of the Revitalising Redesdale funding, this project improved paths, gates, way marking, signage and stiles on a number of PROW in order to make routes more visible and more accessible. Six new self-guided walk leaflets with 18 walks were also produced.

None of this would have been possible without external funding and partnership support.



realise new ambitions and deliver to the highest quality possible, within available resources.

It is likely that, within the lifetime of this plan, currently unknown partnerships and new opportunities will arise that will benefit the

PROW network and strengthen the resources available to enhance and improve it. We must be aware of a changing landscape of opportunities and build capacity to respond to any potential new schemes, initiatives and partnerships.

### Policy 9: Recognise and respond to the impacts of climate change on the PROW network

Over the next ten years we must increase our ability to respond to damage in the PROW network caused by our changing climate. We will:

- a. Act on advice from partners and specialists to future proof our PROW



network by providing green engineering or other sustainable solutions to the problems arising from climate change (including riverbank deterioration and risks to bridges and other structures over watercourses)

- b. Utilise the powers of 'roll back' where it applies at locations on the KCIIIECP which are at risk of coastal erosion
- c. Mitigate where necessary for any works undertaken that could contribute to climate change
- d. Work with partners in landscapes that are vulnerable to damage from heavily used paths to ensure that appropriate path maintenance and improvement techniques are used to reduce the impact on fragile environments.

The impacts of climate change on our PROW are, arguably, the biggest change since the last ROWIP. Severe weather events are becoming more frequent and NCC and our partners are increasingly having to repair paths which have been blocked by fallen trees or flood debris, or where the surface is eroding due to flooding, high river levels or surface water. Riverside, coastal and floodplain paths are particularly at risk from rivers in full spate and rising sea levels. Upland and forested

areas are vulnerable to damage caused by surface water and fallen trees.

In 2021, Storm Arwen left extensive damage across the county with thousands of trees brought down as a result of high winds. Many PROW and other routes were blocked with some forestry paths remaining closed long into 2022. The legacy of Storm Arwen remains across large parts of Northumberland, with many smaller woodlands still devastated, whilst subsequent storms continue to bring down more trees where they have become weakened or exposed by previous events.

Heavy and persistent rainfall resulting in flash flooding and damage to path surfaces and riverbanks is also becoming a more frequent occurrence in many areas.

We must build capacity to respond to damage caused by severe weather events as well as to keep up with increased maintenance needs caused by ongoing/ increasing path erosion. This will include exploring opportunities to improve the resilience of the PROW network, perhaps by reinforcing riverbanks in some areas, upgrading path surfaces or rerouting paths which are particularly vulnerable.



## Case Study: Hareshaw Linn

In May 2023, a localised period of heavy rainfall around Bellingham resulted in torrents of water cascading down the Hareshaw Burn. Amongst other flooding and damage in the immediate area, the footpath to Hareshaw Linn was severely damaged by landslips, bankside collapses and path surface washouts resulting in the closure of the path for two months.

Repairs to the path involved removal of tonnes of debris from landslips, the re-routing and building of a 50m section of the path away from a riverbank collapse and the reconstruction of 200m of damaged path surface. Fortunately, the footbridges on the Hareshaw Linn path that had previously been renewed with more robust and sustainable structures, survived the torrent. The path may still be subject to damage in similar circumstances, but implementing resilient solutions will hopefully minimise future problems.







Rothbury footpath during Storm Babet in 2023 (© Neil Armstrong)



# Delivery plans

The Delivery Planning process will begin in 2024 and will allow activities to be defined to each ROWIP policy area, depending on the needs, opportunities and resources available.

The PROW team will agree a rolling three-year Delivery Plan which will set out annual actions and targets including

identifying priorities for core activity, partnership working and the LTP (informing plans, strategies and bids which will draw down additional resources). The Delivery Plan will be informed by the JLAF and ongoing consultation with parish councils, communities and other stakeholders. This will provide some measurable outputs and outcomes which will be monitored by NCC and the JLAF to ensure that the ROWIP will achieve its vision over its ten-year period.

Actions	Delivery Planning	Links to other policies
<b>Policy 1: Ensure the PROW network is well <i>maintained</i> and, where possible, <i>enhanced</i> to maximise the value of resources</b>		
1a. Improve maintenance of the PROW network (seeking to ensure that paths are maintained in a condition appropriate for their location and with consideration of the expectation and demand of users)	Identify opportunities working with JLAF and local community consultation  Delivery Plans may also require immediate response to weather events or vandalism  Promote the <i>Fix My Streets</i> system for public reporting of issues on the PROW network	Policy 3: Access
1b. Take appropriate management action to address routes which have become impassable for any reason		
1c. Maintain and improve PROW signage		
1d. Facilitate legitimate use of footpaths, bridlepaths, byways and other routes in line with legislation		Policy 5: Connectivity
1f. Train and support volunteers to monitor and help maintain key routes		Policy 6: Communities



Actions	Delivery Planning	Links to other policies
Policy 2: Ensure the PROW network is accurately recorded		
2a. Maintain the Definitive Map & Statement	Annual targets to be defined  Ensure timely action is taken to respond to and address increases in demand as usage and awareness increases	
2b. Maintain the List of Streets		
2c. Maintain a register of claims		
2d. Register, evaluate and process DMMO applications in a chronological order based on submission, unless strategic benefits to the network or other legal factors dictate otherwise; also giving higher priority to user evidence-based claims, particularly where the public is now being prevented from using a route		
2e. Register and process PPO applications in a timely manner and in accordance with requirements of any future legislation that may be enabled		
2f. Support diversion proposals where there is a net benefit gain for access		Policy 3: Access
Policy 3: Make the PROW network more accessible to a wider range of people		
3a. Ensure new PROW and infrastructure improvements result in the least restrictive options for use, having regard to the Equalities Act 2010, the constraints of the environment and landscape management objectives.	Identify opportunities working with JLAF and local communities (including communities of interest)  Create and promote new accessible circular routes where the opportunity arises  Facilitate use of DRTs if to provide new accessible routes if opportunities arise  Improve collaboration between PROW and Local Walking & Cycling teams	Policy 1: Maintenance and enhancement
3b. Take opportunities, when they arise, to improve PROW provision in areas which are poorly served by the existing path network		Policy 5: Connectivity
3c. Prioritise works to improve accessibility where they are: (i) Close to towns and villages (ii) On National trails, promoted routes or access routes to visitor destinations/sites (iii) On bridleways		Policy 6: Communities Policy 7: Tourism





Actions	Delivery Planning	Links to other policies
3d. Adopt a <i>Miles Without Stiles</i> approach to improve access opportunities from village and town hubs	As above	Policy 6: Communities
3e. Improve more routes for multi-access use where opportunities arise and the route is appropriate		Policy 5: Connectivity
Policy 4: Improve <i>information</i> for residents and visitors		
4a. Provide accessible information about the PROW network, promoted routes, local trails and other paths via internet, social media and printed material and investigate/embrace new methods of providing this as they become available	Annual targets to be defined  Seek new partnership or funding opportunities to improve information	Policy 3: Access
4b. Improve the availability of information on permissive and other access routes not shown on the Definitive Map		Policy 2: Recording
4c. Provide information about off road routes in order to help promote car-free journeys and travel		Policy 9: Climate change
4d. Utilise NCC and partner news outlets (including digital and social media) to provide information about published routes, other routes/trails and to keep the public up to date with any changes to the PROW network		Policy 8: Partnership
4e. Improve information links with partner organisations on recreational access and tourism		Policy 7: Tourism Policy 8: Partnership
4f. Highlight ' <i>Miles without Stiles</i> ' more accessible paths focused on village and town hubs		Policy 3: Access Policy 6: Communities



Actions	Delivery Planning	Links to other policies
<b>Policy 5: Improve connectivity of the network for all users</b>		
5a. Enhance connectivity by addressing missing links and gaps in the network, particularly for equestrian users and cyclists, where opportunities arise	Identify needs and opportunities working with JLAF and local communities	Policy 3: Access
5b. Take advantage of opportunities to establish or improve public access to areas of open access land	Consider opportunities to develop DRTs to establish recreation access links as they arise	Policy 3: Access
5c. Take opportunities when considering DMMO claims to establish meaningful connections to other parts of the network		Policy 2: Recording
<b>Policy 6: Work with communities to maximise the benefits of the PROW network</b>		
6a. Improve and enhance traffic free rights of way networks around communities to increase use of sustainable transport for accessing work, schools and services, and to support public health and wellbeing	Identify needs and opportunities working with JLAF and local community consultation	Policy 9: Climate change
6b. Empower local communities to become custodians of their local network by facilitating and supporting community/ volunteer engagement in PROW management, maintenance and improvement activities		Policy 1: Maintenance and enhancement
6c. Work with planners to ensure PROW are protected and respected in new housing developments and identify opportunities for new/enhanced routes linking developments with local amenities		Policy 9: Partnership



Actions	Delivery Planning	Links to other policies
Policy 7: Enhance Northumberland’s <i>tourism</i> offer by providing access to a rich natural and cultural landscape		
7a. Support initiatives which will increase the value of walking, horse riding and cycling tourism to the rural economy of Northumberland	Identify needs and opportunities working with JLAF and local community consultation	Policy 3: Access
7b. Maximise the value of partner contributions and funding to the management and enhancement of National Trails		Policy 8: Partnership
7c. Work in partnership to enhance access on regionally promoted routes and to facilitate access to tourism destinations		Policy 8: Partnership
Policy 8: Work in <i>partnership</i> to maximise the potential of the PROW network		
8a. Work with landowners to secure improvements to public rights of way and to ensure that legal obligations for keeping rights of way unobstructed and stiles and gates maintained are fulfilled	Identify needs and opportunities working with JLAF and local community consultation	Policy 1: Maintenance and enhancement
8b. Support and facilitate active involvement by local communities, volunteers and communities of interest to facilitate management, maintenance and monitoring of local path networks		Policy 6: Communities
8c. Work with partner organisations to maximise any opportunities available through grant funding or other revenue schemes to enhance provision and improve accessibility		Policy 1: Maintenance and enhancement Policy 3: Access
8d. Work with tourism partners to promote and celebrate PROW as part of our rich natural and cultural landscape		Policy 7: Tourism
8e. Engage with health sector partners to recognise the value of PROW in facilitating access to greenspace and the proven wellbeing benefits that this provides		





Actions	Delivery Planning	Links to other policies
<b>Policy 9: Recognise and respond to the impact of <i>climate change</i> on the PROW network</b>		
9a. Act on advice from partners and specialists to future proof our PROW network by providing green engineering or other sustainable solutions to the problems arising from climate change (including riverbank deterioration and risks to bridges and other structures over watercourses)	Identify needs and opportunities working with JLAF and local community consultation	Policy 1: Maintenance and enhancement
9b. Utilise the powers of 'roll back' where it applies at locations on the KCIIIECP which are at risk of coastal erosion		Policy 1: Maintenance and enhancement
9c. Mitigate where necessary for any works undertaken that could contribute to climate change		Policy 1: Maintenance and enhancement
9d. Work with partners in landscapes that are vulnerable to damage from heavily used paths to ensure that appropriate path maintenance and improvement techniques are used to reduce the impact on fragile environments		Policy 8: Partnership



A child with long brown hair, wearing a dark quilted jacket and blue corduroy pants, is captured from behind as they jump over a series of large, cylindrical concrete stepping stones in a river. The child's feet are in mid-air, and their colorful sneakers are visible. The river water is dark and calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery. The background is a dense, lush green bank with various plants and trees. A large, semi-transparent circular watermark with the word "DRAFT" in a bold, serif font is centered over the image.

**DRAFT**

# Resources

This ROWIP sets out policies and priority actions for PROW improvements over the next ten years. Achieving the full potential of the ROWIP will depend on the ability of the Council to respond in a timely manner to the anticipated growth in PROW requests, reports and complaints. and to DMMO/PPR applications and claims as awareness and usage of the PROW network increases. Improving our systems and processes and securing the necessary resources to support delivery of the ROWIP will be key priorities for NCC and we must seek to identify and capitalise on any funding opportunities as they arise.

It is not possible to predict all potential funding opportunities over this period and it is likely that there will be new prospects that we are not currently aware of. It is essential that the PROW team has adequate opportunities to respond to new opportunities, build connections within the Local Authority, and realise the full potential of local partnerships to add value to what they are able to achieve in isolation. Annual delivery plans will seek to make best use of available resources

including identifying and responding to any new funding opportunities as they arise.

At the time of writing, potential sources of additional resource include:

- ▶ Increasing capacity through partnership, working with NNPA, NCNL, NPNL, parish councils and landowners to identify resources which can contribute to ROWIP priorities
- ▶ Using the ROWIP (and subsequent Delivery Plans) to inform the LTP to draw down additional resources
- ▶ Working with planners to secure Section 106 funding for new and improved PROW as part of new planning applications
- ▶ Working with communities to maximise the potential of volunteers
- ▶ Identifying opportunities to support activities that mitigate the impact of climate change or increase access to car-free travel
- ▶ Ensuring access to PROW is included within new NCC initiatives that, for example, improve visitor destinations, support people to be more physically active or create spaces which support wellbeing and reduce loneliness
- ▶ Identifying new partnership opportunities for external funding





# Measuring Success

This section will briefly set out how we will understand whether the ROWIP has been implemented successfully.

Since 1998 annual monitoring of a random sample of paths has assessed three different performance indicators which together provide an assessment of ease of use:

- ▶ Signposted/waymarked
- ▶ Free from unlawful obstructions
- ▶ Surface and barriers in good repair

The PROW team will continue to monitor these on an annual basis, seeking to reverse the trend of decline which has been observed across all indicators in the last ten years.

Other measures will be defined through the Delivery Planning process as different activities are identified to deliver policy actions.

The JLAF will play an important role in supporting NCC to understand the impact that ROWIP activities are achieving. JLAF partners and other agencies will

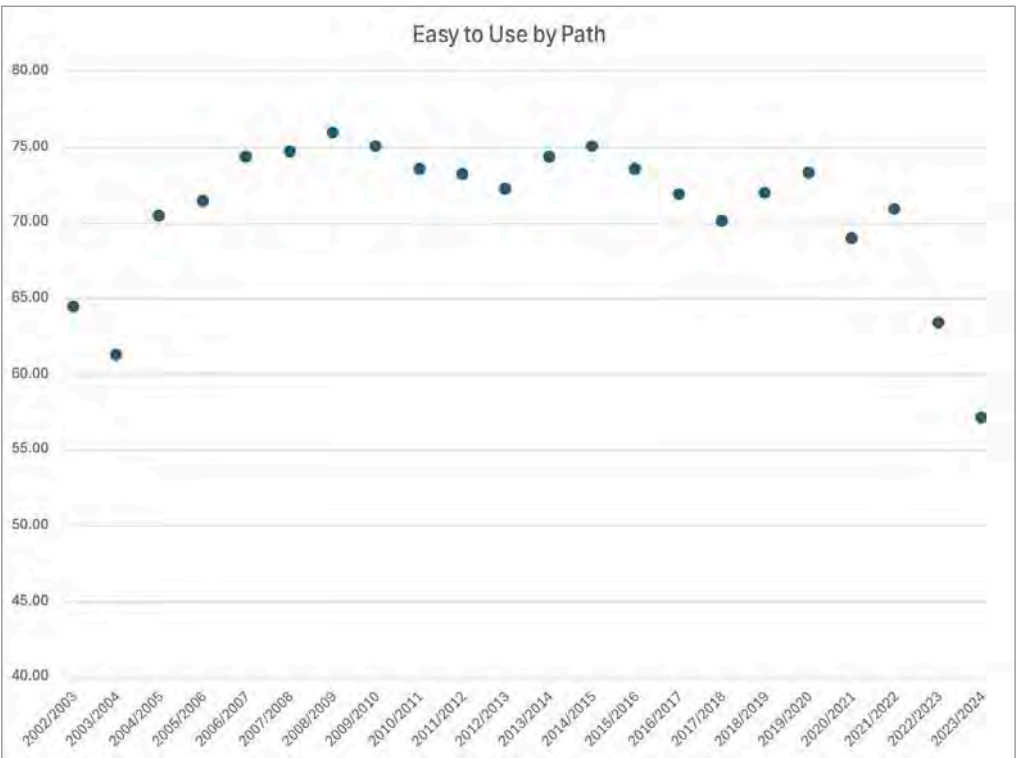
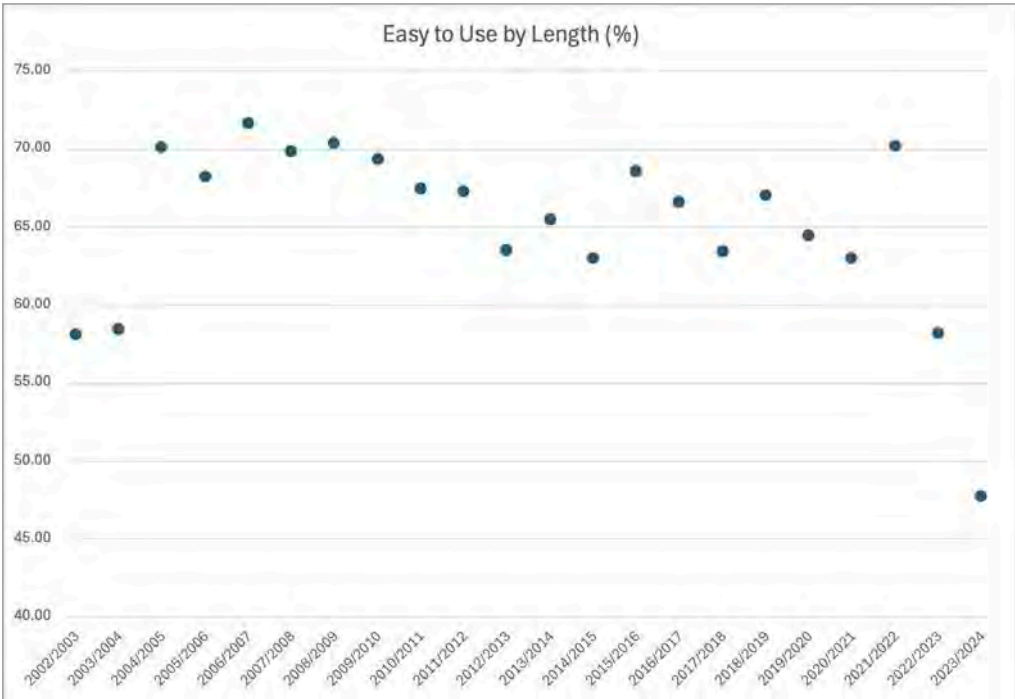
particularly be able to provide insight into user experiences, landowner engagement, gaps in the PROW network and any routes which have deteriorated due to severe weather events or other causes. We have the opportunity to work in partnership with the JLAF to collect qualitative feedback from PROW users at consultation events, visitor sites and via partner projects.

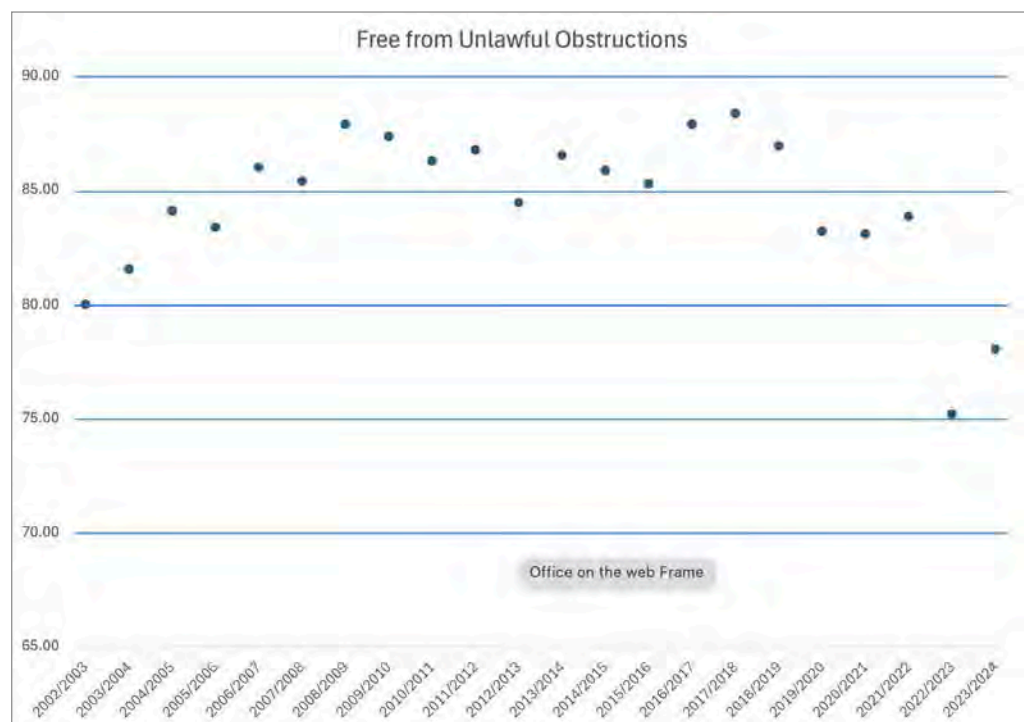
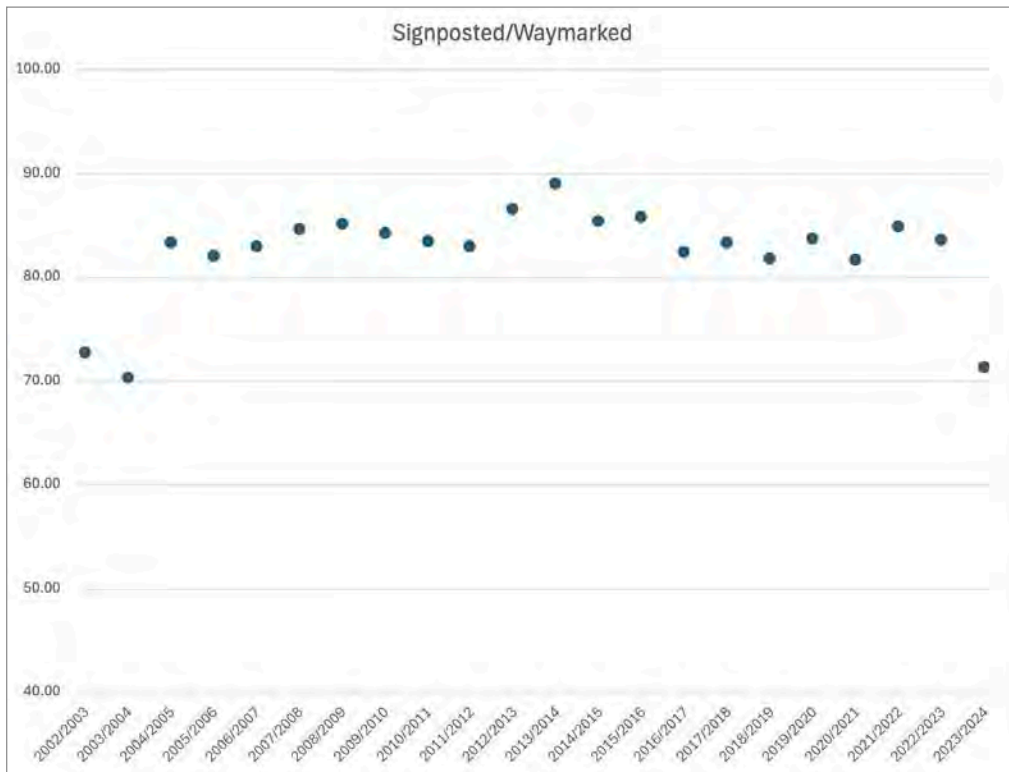
Delivery of policies 6, 7 and 8 will improve relationships with communities and other stakeholders and this, in turn, will establish feedback channels which will inform our monitoring.

The ROWIP will be reviewed in 2034-5 as the next phase of PROW improvements is planned.

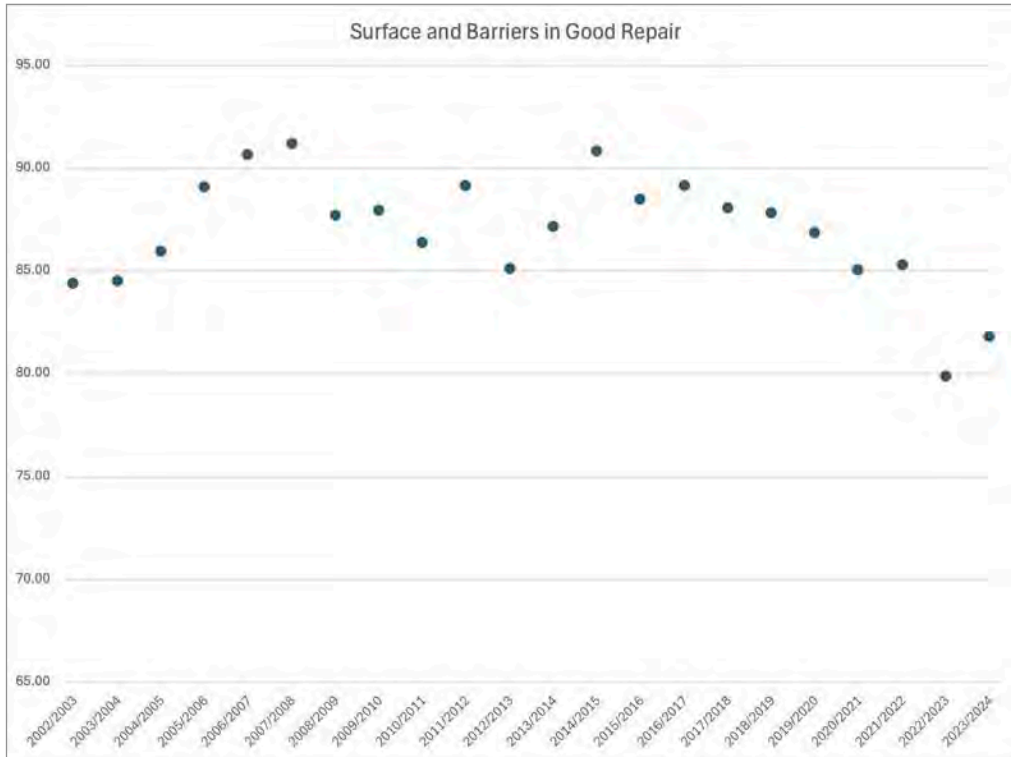


Annual monitoring of PROW  
Performance Indicators since 2002









# Conclusion

This ROWIP is a strategy for managing, enhancing, connecting and improving access to the PROW network in Northumberland.

Being able to access the countryside and urban greenspace is essential for people's wellbeing and this ROWIP sets out actions to improve access and equity of access to the PROW network for all users. Our PROW are also a vital part of our cultural landscape and, as such, play an important role in the tourism economy.

ROWIP actions respond to the challenges and opportunities we are facing in the 2020s. In particular, it acknowledges the impact that climate change is having on our PROW network and the role that our green infrastructure can play in promoting active travel. It also recognises new opportunities provided by digital technology to improve access, engagement and information, and it acknowledges that development in this area will continue during the period of the ROWIP. It is therefore necessary for Delivery Plans to be responsive and flexible to allow the PROW team to take

best advantage of all the resources and opportunities available.

At the heart of the ROWIP are our partnerships and communities. By working with volunteer groups, parish councils and other community stakeholders we can better understand local needs, inform delivery planning and add value to our actions. Working with partners within and external to the Local Authority will enable us to maximise the potential of available resources to deliver a PROW network that supports wider strategic agendas in the county, for the benefit of our residents and visitors.







DRAFT



# Public consultation

The content of this draft ROWIP is now open to public scrutiny through consultation. Some questions for consultees are provided below - these are intended as a guide to support consultation. Consultees need not limit themselves to these questions - you may choose to answer all, some or none of the questions we have provided.



Visit <https://nland.cc/PROWIP> to respond to the consultation. The consultation ends on 18/10/2024.

- 1) Are the objectives we have set out on page 13 right? Is this what you think we should be aiming for? Have we missed anything?
- 2) Do you agree with the nine policies that we have set out? Is this what the NCC PROW team should prioritise?
- 3) What information do you need us to provide about PROW?
- 4) Where are the gaps in the Northumberland PROW network and how could these be addressed?
- 5) Which routes or paths could be made more accessible to different types of user (e.g. those using mobility aids or pushchairs)?
- 6) Should the establishment of new routes be a priority?
- 7) Are there individuals or groups in your community that would like to be more involved in managing, maintaining, monitoring and making decisions about the PROW network?
- 8) How could we better support volunteers to help look after our PROW network?
- 9) Should we place greater emphasis on routes that support and promote tourism?
- 10) Have we adequately addressed the challenges arising as result of climate change and the role that PROW can play in encouraging and supporting active travel?
- 11) Have we missed any opportunities to resource the PROW network?
- 12) How else could we improve monitoring and evaluation of the ROWIP?
- 13) Is there anything else you think we need to add or prioritise?









NCC Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2024-34

Statutory duty, Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000

Front cover image: Katherine Williams

Back cover image: Northumberland National Park

Case study images: page 23, NCC; page 26, Sue Rogers; page 27, NCC; page 30, Joyce & Conrad Clayton; page 33, Northumberland Coast National Landscape; page 35, Katherine Williams; page 37, NCC

The ROWIP 2024-34 was written by Katherine Williams, Consultant, on behalf of Northumberland County Council, 2024

For more information visit <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk>



