



Rights of Way Improvement Plan  
Wiltshire County Council  
County Hall  
Bythesea Road  
TROWBRIDGE  
Wiltshire  
BA14 8JD

25<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

Dear Richard,

**Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Wiltshire County Council, Consultation Draft.**

Thank you for inviting the Cotswolds Conservation Board to comment on the draft ROWIP.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board was established by Parliamentary order under part iv of the Countryside and of Rights Of Way Act 2000 (the CRoW Act). The duties of the Board are:

- *To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB*
- *To increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB, ensuring these are compatible with its conservation and enhancement.*

*In carrying out its twin duties, the Board shall seek to foster the economic and social well-being of its local communities*

Unlike the other AONBs in Wiltshire, the Cotswolds Conservation Board's second purpose of increasing understanding and enjoyment means we have a particular interest in access and the ROWIP and in the consistency of ROWIPS across the AONB.

A management plan was completed for the Cotswolds AONB in March 2004 as required by section 89 of the CRoW Act. The management plan has been adopted by the Conservation Board and all the 17 local authorities with territory within the Cotswolds AONB including Wiltshire County Council.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board, through its management plan, is seeking the following points within the ROWIP:

- Ensure that the public are aware of the new opportunities for access to open country, for example by collating information and publishing details on an AONB basis.
- Manage and improve access to and recreational use of the countryside, ensuring that the natural beauty, special landscape character, historic features and sensitive and remote areas and habitats are conserved and enhanced.
- Adopt a sustainable approach within ROWIPs including walking, cycling and horse riding.
- Develop and promote links between the rights of way network and public transport.
- Conserve and enhance local distinctiveness. This includes stone stiles and other local features such as stone bridges and locally distinctive patterns of gates and stiles. (NB. A report on local distinctiveness has been produced and is on the website.)
- Use local materials including stone for surfacing and structures and where possible, timber for stiles and gates etc.
- Work with accessibility groups to ensure access for all.

The Wiltshire ROWIP complements the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan, covering most of the areas the Board is seeking. It has good provision within the actions for information provision, increasing access for disabled and increasing opportunities for horse riders and cyclists.

To fulfil the elements required by the Board, the ROWIP needs to include within the actions measures to conserve local distinctiveness, use of materials appropriate to the area and to manage access in a way that ensures the conservation of natural beauty, landscape character, historic features, habitats and sensitive and remote areas. Whilst these measures are briefly mentioned in the text of the ROWIP, there are no relevant actions in the plan.

### **Other comments**

Page 4, paragraph 2.2 – Landscape Character Areas – is the document referring to the Joint Character Areas?

Page 13, paragraph 2.9.1 – Agricultural stewardship schemes. This needs clarifying. ESA and Countryside Stewardship agreements still exist alongside the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme. Agri-environment scheme is a useful

name to cover all of these. Also, the England Woodland Grant Scheme includes access options.

Page 16, paragraph 3.2.5 – ‘sympathetic to the needs of landscape and conservation protection’ needs expanding and inclusion in the actions. See comments above.

Action plan, page 25 – partnership working. This action should include working with neighbouring highway authorities to ensure consistency across administrative boundaries.

Action plan, page 28 - use of public transport. The ROWIP seems to focus on using existing routes and stops. The ROWIP, linking to the transport plan, should also consider developing new stops and routes/route variations to improve links for access.

Action Plan, page 32 – margins on verges. Fine, but with the caveat of where appropriate. Highway verges can be priority habitats, important in the landscape or have historic importance. However, use for access can provide the opportunity for clearance and proper management. The Board is to produce guidance on road verge management later this year and will be consulting Wiltshire County Council.

If you need clarification or would like to discuss any of the points above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. A. Connelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Mark Connelly  
Land Management Officer