



West Berkshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2023 – 2033

Evidence Report 2
Surveys and Stakeholders
FINAL July 2023



West Berkshire
COUNCIL

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Executive Summary

Extensive public and stakeholder consultation was carried out between April 2021 and September 2022 to provide insight for West Berkshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). This was through online public, local council and landowner surveys, invitations to elected councillors to provide comments, engagement with stakeholder organisations and individuals and through the Local Access Forum.

Consultation took place during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which use of greenspaces and the countryside increased, providing insight into the use of public rights of way during this time.

This report forms part of the evidence base for the ROWIP, alongside Evidence Report 1 - Network and Needs Analysis.

The main findings are summarised here.

Value and Use of Public Rights of Way

Public rights of way are highly valued and are an important part of everyday life.

Overwhelmingly people valued public rights of way. All of the local councils, 92% of the public and 88% of landowners agreed that that they were an important asset for West Berkshire.

Public rights of way are an important part of everyday life for those who use them, with 91% of people responding to the surveying using them once a week or more frequently and 40% of people in the survey using them every day.

Public rights of way support a wide range of activities.

The most popular activity on public rights of way was walking, either without a dog (58% of people doing this activity) or with a dog (41% doing this).

A quarter used surfaced cycle paths and the same number used off-road cycling routes. One in ten respondents took part in horse riding, 5% used motorised vehicles and 1% took part in carriage driving.

Public rights of way were also used for commuting to work or school, with 18% of the public using them for this purpose.

Public rights of way are valued and used for improving health and wellbeing and quality of life.

'Quality of life' reasons for using public rights of way featured highly with the public, with 81% of people using them to enjoy the landscape or countryside; the top answer. Using public rights of way for relaxation and peace and quiet (72%) and to enjoy a view (65%) were also important. All of the local councils said that public rights of way are important for enjoying and exploring nature, along with 92% of the public. Just under half of people using public rights of way used them for watching wildlife (48%).

Public rights of way offer opportunities for socialising, or for solitude. Over half (56%) use them to spend time with family and friends and just under a quarter visit with children (24%). Conversely, 44% also explore on their own.

Over 90% of the public, local councils and landowners all agreed that public rights of way are important to support the health and wellbeing of West Berkshire residents. Using public rights of way to improve health was the second highest reason given by members of the public with 75% of people using them for this reason.

Public Rights of Way were important for supporting health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Use increased during this time and the level of use is likely to remain higher than prior to the pandemic. However, the increase in use did present some issues.

An extremely high proportion of the public (98%) and all of the local councils said that public rights of way had been important during the pandemic and associated lockdowns. This was also reflected in the interviews with stakeholders, many of which highlighted how important public rights of way had been during the pandemic.

A majority of the public (60%) reported that they had used public rights of way more. This was echoed in other surveys, with 96% of councils and 80% of landowners reporting that the number of people using public rights of way had increased during the pandemic. Nearly all (96%) of the public who had increased use of public rights of way during the pandemic indicated they intended to continue to use public rights of way more often than prior to the pandemic.

However, both local councils (74%) and landowners (88%) reported that the increase in use had caused some problems. Both landowners and local councils indicated there had been increases in littering and dog fouling. Landowners also reported visitors not keeping to public rights of way and some local councils reported disputes between users, issues with social distancing not being adhered to and the deterioration of surfaces. There were also anecdotal comments in the public survey around lack of social distancing and very busy paths. Increased pressure on popular routes was reporting, for example the Kennet and Avon Canal.

There is a deficit of information and accessible routes available for people living with disabilities.

Organisations representing people living with a range of limiting conditions – including physical disabilities, dementia and visual impairment – took part in interviews, along with discussions with individuals living with these conditions themselves. The discussions were helpful in beginning to gain an understanding of what these users need to help them explore the countryside and natural spaces. This needs to be built on and developed, with better representation of people living with disabilities, and many of those consulted expressed an interest in helping the public rights of way team in the future.

It was clear from these discussions that more needs to be done to consider these users in both the level of accessibility of routes and in the information provided. People enjoyed accessing the countryside and greenspaces but there is no information available which provides sufficient information for them to do this confidently. Whilst it is not possible to make the entire network accessible, actions like removing stiles and ensuring that new infrastructure is as accessible as possible would help these users.

The provision of a route, aiming in time for several routes, which is accessible and for which comprehensive information is provided, was a high priority and was raised by several individuals and organisations.

There are some tensions arising from the use of public rights of way.

The surveys revealed that there were some tensions around the use of public rights of way.

Landowners were asked if they had experienced any problems related to the presence of public rights of way on their land - 90% had experienced issues with trespassing, littering, disturbance or damage to the nature conservation interest of their land and illegal use, e.g. by motorbikes. All of the landowners had experienced an issue with dogs off of leads bothering stock. Conversely, 40% of the public reported issues with livestock in fields, the third highest problem experienced.

It was also clear that some tensions exist between different users. Under additional comments, the most mentioned problem related to 4 x 4 and motorbike users, citing intimidating behaviour, damage to surfaces and presence on paths that these users are not entitled to use. The use of public footpaths by horse riders and cyclists was also an issue raised. Conversely, there were comments made from 4 x 4, motorised vehicle / motorbike users and equestrians about intimidating behaviour towards them from walkers.

Overall, however, 8% of the public reported that they had experienced threatening behaviour by path users and 7% from landowners, both at the lowest end of the list of problems encountered.

Priorities and Ensuring the Quality of the Network

Protecting public rights of way affected by development and maintaining and investing in the current network were viewed as the highest overall priorities for the public rights of way service.

Making sure public rights of way are protected and new routes created through development and other projects and maintaining and investing in the current network were the two highest priorities for both the public and local councils.

The other priority choices - connecting missing links on the public rights of way network, supporting parish councils and other community organisations to take a more active role in maintaining local public rights of way, improving accessibility so that more people can use public rights of way and providing information and promotional material to encourage more people to use public rights of way – were all also supported.

Developing new partnerships could help to develop and deliver initiatives and to ensure the public rights of way network adapts to meet future needs of all West Berkshire residents.

The consultation process engaged with many organisations including Walking for Health, Age UK, Berkshire Vision, groups representing those with mobility impairments, Canal and River Trust, Community United, North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, West Berkshire heritage team and Newbury Business Investment District, amongst several others. Some of these were existing partners of the public rights of way team but several were new contacts. The

stakeholders devoted time to express their views and all viewed the public rights of way network as a resource which was of value to their members or the aims of their organisations. Many of these expressed an interest in developing future partnerships and projects with the rights of way team to expand on the existing benefits.

Some of the suggestions included:

- Working more closely with Walking for Health, to upgrade accessibility of routes used, expand the scheme and help people to walk independently;
- Incorporate heritage and local businesses in promotional material to help to bring economic benefits, working with West Berkshire heritage team, Newbury Museum and Newbury BID;
- Work with several of the organisations which represent people living with a range of disabilities to improve understanding of the needs of these users and to develop projects including accessible routes and improved information;
- Work with other partners to develop joint funding bids for access projects, including the North Wessex Downs AONB;
- Increase working with volunteers to take forward maintenance, wardening and to develop projects, especially as resources are limited.

Most people had encountered a problem on a public right of way, with overgrown paths and surface issues the most common problems.

Just over half (55%) of the public had experienced a problem with a public right of way.

The problem most frequently encountered by the public was overgrown paths (54% of people experiencing this). This was also the highest issue of concern for local councils.

The second most common problem encountered by the public (51% of people) was surfaces in poor condition. Overall local councils were dissatisfied with surface condition and this was their third highest issue of concern.

The public also reported issues with waymarking and signposting – 37% had encountered a lack of waymarking and 27% a missing fingerpost at the start of the public right of way. Providing and maintaining waymarking were the second highest priorities for landowners and the third highest for local councils.

There appeared to be generally good public awareness that West Berkshire Council is responsible for public rights of way, but less clarity around how problems should be reported. Most councils and landowners responding to the survey had reported a problem, but most members of the public had not.

There seemed to be good awareness amongst the public that West Berkshire Council was responsible for public rights of way as when asked how they would report problems the highest scoring response was to West Berkshire Council (28%), and the second highest response was to 'the council' (unspecified) (27%) (although this may

have been due to the survey being hosted on West Berkshire Council's website). However, 22% said they didn't know or wouldn't report a problem and 77% of the public had not reported a problem. In comparison, 72% of councils and 63% of landowners had reported a problem.

West Berkshire Council's online 'Report a Problem' function was well-used by the public, who were generally satisfied with the service. Local councils and landowners preferred to report problems directly to the public rights of way team but had also used the 'Report a Problem' service.

Most members of the public who had reported problems with public rights of way had used 'Report a Problem' (59%) and 39% had contacted the public rights of way team directly.

Amongst the local councils, 61% had reported a problem direct to the public rights of way team and 56% had used 'Report a Problem'. Most landowners, 80% had reported issues directly to the public rights of way team and 40% had used 'Report a Problem'.

Satisfaction that 'Report a Problem' met the needs of customers was high, with 90% of local councils and 63% of the public reporting that it met their needs.

There were high levels of satisfaction in how West Berkshire Council responded to reported problems.

All aspects of service provision in dealing with reported rights of way problems were rated as 'good'. The highest scoring aspect with both the public and local councils was the council officer's manner when dealing with the problem. Landowners also rated this aspect as good.

All other aspects of response to problems - information on how to report a problem to the council, the overall service received, timeliness of response and resolution of the problem – were scored good overall by both the public and local councils.

However, of these, the lowest scoring aspect was information on the progress of the problem. This was rated as poor by landowners. Some local councils mentioned in additional comments that feedback on progress was needed.

Information on Public Rights of Way

The Kennet and Avon Canal and the Ridgeway long distance routes were popular, but there was low awareness and usage of routes promoted by West Berkshire Council.

The Kennet and Avon Canal had been used by 70% of the public, 63% had used the Ridgeway National Trail and 42% had used the Thames Path National Trail.

Use of the circular routes promoted by West Berkshire Council was very low and 73% of the public had not used any of them. The most used local promoted route was the Lambourn Valley Way which 11% of people had used, followed by the Speen Moor Circular route used by 9% of people.

There is demand for information on public rights of way and where to go. It is less clear how this should be provided and the role of West Berkshire Council in information provision.

Amongst people who don't use public rights of way the top two reasons given for not using them were lack of information (56% of people) and that they didn't know where to go' (44%). Amongst the public, 63% wanted more promotional material for walking routes, 29% wanted more cycling routes and 12% wanted more horse riding routes and promotional material for people living with disabilities.

However, there is already promotional material on West Berkshire Council's website but 75% of the public were not aware of this resource. When the public were asked where they would look for promotional material, West Berkshire Council's website was the fifth most popular answer after local knowledge, ordnance survey maps,

word of mouth, the web, apps and guidebooks, and only 18% of people used this source. This was reflected in the additional comments suggesting how promotional material could be improved, with the highest number of comments around letting people know it already existed. Several suggestions were made around how this could be achieved, including using social media better, local magazines, regular features in the emails and updates direct from West Berkshire Council and printed leaflets in shops, garages and pubs.

Promotional material is available for several parishes and these could be a useful local resource. However, there was very low use of these routes. Most respondents (82%) had not used any of the parish walks on West Berkshire Council's website. Of those which had been used, Bucklebury and Inkpen were the most popular but only around 5% of people had used them. There was a mixed picture on these routes from the local councils. They were asked two questions around whether they were satisfied with promotional material in their parish. In one, they were dissatisfied overall and in another they were satisfied with how promoted routes were publicised and maintained. Councils supported more promotional material and 64% wanted more promoted walking routes, 55% more cycling routes, 46% more routes for those living with disabilities and 27% for horse riders. Some councils who did not have promoted material made requests for these to be developed. However, more promoted routes was 5th out of 6 priorities for the work of the public rights of way service.

Specific types of users considered they were under-represented in terms of promotional material and wanted more routes and promotion – including equestrians, cyclists and motorised vehicle users.

Promoted material for walkers scored highest in the surveys, but these users were the highest represented amongst the respondents. Amongst the public, 29% wanted more promoted cycling routes and 12% more horse riding routes. Requests for more promotional material for these groups was also made in additional comments. Motorised vehicle users noted that there were no promoted routes for them and that this option had not been provided in the survey.

There was strong desire to improve responsible enjoyment of the countryside, with the provision of information raised as a priority.

Encouraging the responsible enjoyment of the countryside was a theme which recurred throughout the survey responses. All of the landowners wanted improved education of the public around the Countryside Code and their responsibilities while in the countryside, and this was their highest priority. When asked about improvements to promotional material, providing information to encourage responsible use of the countryside was the second highest priority for both the public and the local councils. The issue was also raised in several sections of additional comments throughout the surveys, including around the increase of use during the pandemic lockdowns.

Introduction

This report sets out the results of the public and stakeholder engagement carried out prior to the drafting of the West Berkshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2022 – 2032 (ROWIP). The results of this engagement have informed the priorities and actions in the ROWIP and this report forms part of the evidence base supporting the new ROWIP.

Several activities were carried out to gather evidence on the views and needs of the public stakeholders. The public online survey in particular generated a high level of interest, with c1500 responses. The consultation with stakeholders also made contact with several new stakeholder organisations and individuals. The consultation exercise took place during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which use of greenspaces and the countryside increased, and gave useful insight into usage of public rights of way during this time.

Online Public Survey

A public survey was posted online on West Berkshire Council's website between March and May 2021. The survey was promoted on West Berkshire Council's social media feeds and website. Stakeholder organisations were also encouraged to circulate the survey. The survey received over 1500 usable responses, giving a high degree of statistical significance to the results. For the population of West Berkshire, at a 95% confidence level, this provides a confidence interval of approximately 2.5%. It should be noted that the survey was 'self-selecting' and therefore those responding are more likely than the overall population to have an interest in the countryside and outdoor activities.

Parish and Town Council Survey

All parish and town councils received an emailed letter and were invited to complete a survey, between March and May 2021.

Elected Councillors

All West Berkshire elected Councillors were sent a briefing on the ROWIP and a link to the online public survey.

Landowner Survey

An online survey for landowners was set up. The National Farmers Union and Country Land and Business Association were approached to discuss public rights of way and asked to encourage their members to complete the survey. The Public Rights of Way Team also contacted some landowners direct.

Engagement with Stakeholders

A further 66 stakeholder organisations were contacted to encourage them to comment (see Appendix). These included neighbouring highway authorities, user and interest groups and community organisations. Meetings or telephone calls were held with some of these stakeholders. Stakeholders were also encouraged to share the link to the online survey. Meetings of the Community Conversation and West Berkshire Advisory Group were attended.

Local Access Forum

The Local Access Forum was briefed on progress of the ROWIP revision at all regular meetings during the process. All members within West Berkshire were invited to comment. In addition, an extraordinary meeting of the LAF was held September 2022.

Online Public Survey

Demographic Profile and Location of Respondents

Gender

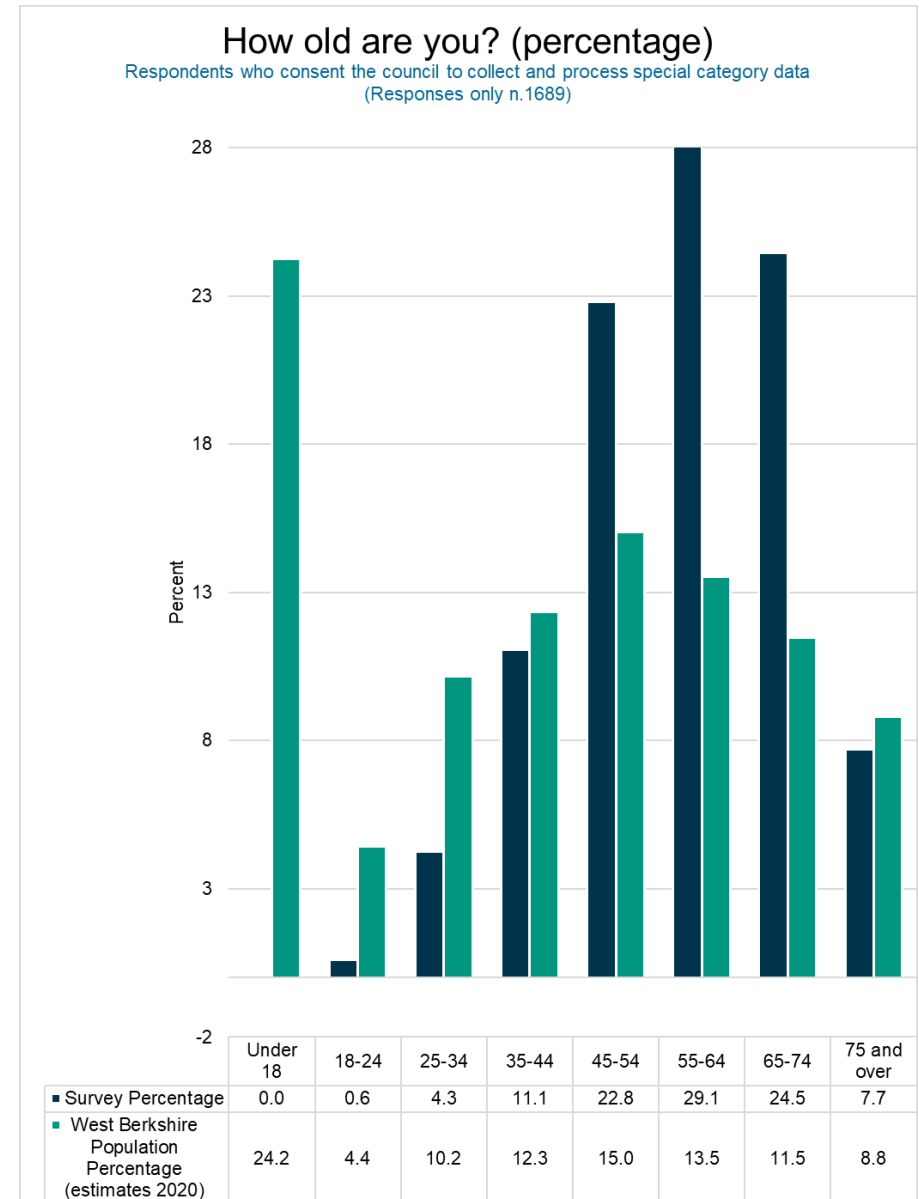
- 51.2% of respondents were female;
- 46.8% of respondents were male;
- 0.4% of respondents identified as 'other'.

Age

- The highest responses to the survey came from the older age groups. The age group with the highest number of responses were 55-64 year olds (29.1%);
- The age group with the second highest number of responses were 65-74 year olds (24.5%) and third were 45-54 year olds (22.8%);
- Overall, people between the ages of 45 – 74 accounted for 76.4% of responses. This is a higher representation than in the population of West Berkshire,¹ where 40% of people fall into this age range;
- The responses from ages 35-44 and 75 and over were roughly in line with the population of West Berkshire;
- Younger age groups were less well-represented, with only 4.9% of survey respondents in this age range, compared with 14.6% of the West Berkshire population.

¹ West Berkshire Observatory population estimates 2020.
https://westberkshire.berkshireobservatory.co.uk/population/#/view-report/7b359e1a998a4d1189294ef4d2383cda/_iaFirstFeature

Chart 1: Age of Survey Respondents vs. West Berkshire Population 2020



Ethnicity

Most people answering the survey were White or White British (97.2%). This is in line, but slightly higher, than the West Berkshire population, see Table 1. Other ethnic groups were less represented in the survey than in the West Berkshire population.

Table 1: Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Survey Percentage (n.1663)	West Berkshire Population Percentage (estimates 2020)
Asian or Asian British	0.5	2.5
Black or Black British	0.3	0.9
White or White British	97.2	94.8
Mixed or multiple ethnic group	0.3	1.6
Other ethnic group	1.7	0.2

Disability, Long-term Illness or Health Condition

Respondents were asked if they had a disability, long-term illness or health condition.

- 17.1% indicated they did;
- 82.9% indicated they did not.

Location of Respondents

Respondents were asked to provide a partial postcode of their home address. These were then geocoded to a location. 1408 responses were geocoded; 4 could not be geocoded. Some of the partial postcodes, particularly those in rural areas, cover a wide geographic area and some cross local authority boundaries, therefore categorising the responses is not completely accurate. A summary of the local authority areas is shown in Table 2 and a summary with main location shown in Table 3. Plans 1 and 2 show the geographic extent of the responses.

Table 2: Location of Respondents - Summary by Local Authority

County / Unitary Authority	Number	Percentage
West Berkshire	1169	83.0%
Reading	84	6.0%
West Berkshire / Hampshire	45	3.2%
Oxfordshire	41	2.9%
Hampshire	27	1.9%
Wokingham	15	1.1%
West Berkshire / Oxfordshire	9	0.6%
Windsor and Maidenhead	5	0.4%
Wiltshire	4	0.3%
Bracknell Forest	3	0.2%
Surrey	2	0.1%
Buckinghamshire	1	0.1%
Camden	1	0.1%
South Gloucestershire	1	0.1%
Swindon	1	0.1%
Total	1408	100.0%

Table 3: Location of Respondents - Summary by Local Authority and Location

West Berkshire	1169
Aldermaston Wharf	35
Beenham / Lower Padworth and surrounding area	45
Burghfield Common / Mortimer Area	89
Calcot	36
Central Newbury	23
Chapel Row / Bucklebury / Tutts Clump and surrounding area	52
Chieveley	2
Clay Hill, Newbury	38
Compton	19
Curtis's Wood	12
East Garston	36
Hermitage / Little Hungerford / Rural north West Berkshire	105
Hungerford	31
Hungerford Newtown	29
Kintbury	24
Lambourne	64
Newbury	16
Pangbourne	62
Peasmore / Brightwalton and surrounding area	49
Shaw, Newbury	2
South Newbury	44
Speenhamland, Newbury	40
Streatley	5
Thatcham	141
Upper Woolhampton	2

West Newbury	87
Winterbourne / north Newbury	72
Yattendon	9
West Berkshire / Hampshire	45
Ball Hill	22
Headley / Cookham Common	11
Mortimer area	12
West Berkshire / Oxfordshire	9
Lower Basildon	9

Reading	84
Caversham	3
Churchend	5
Prospect Park	5
Reading	1
Tilehurst	67
West Reading	1
Whitley Wood	2

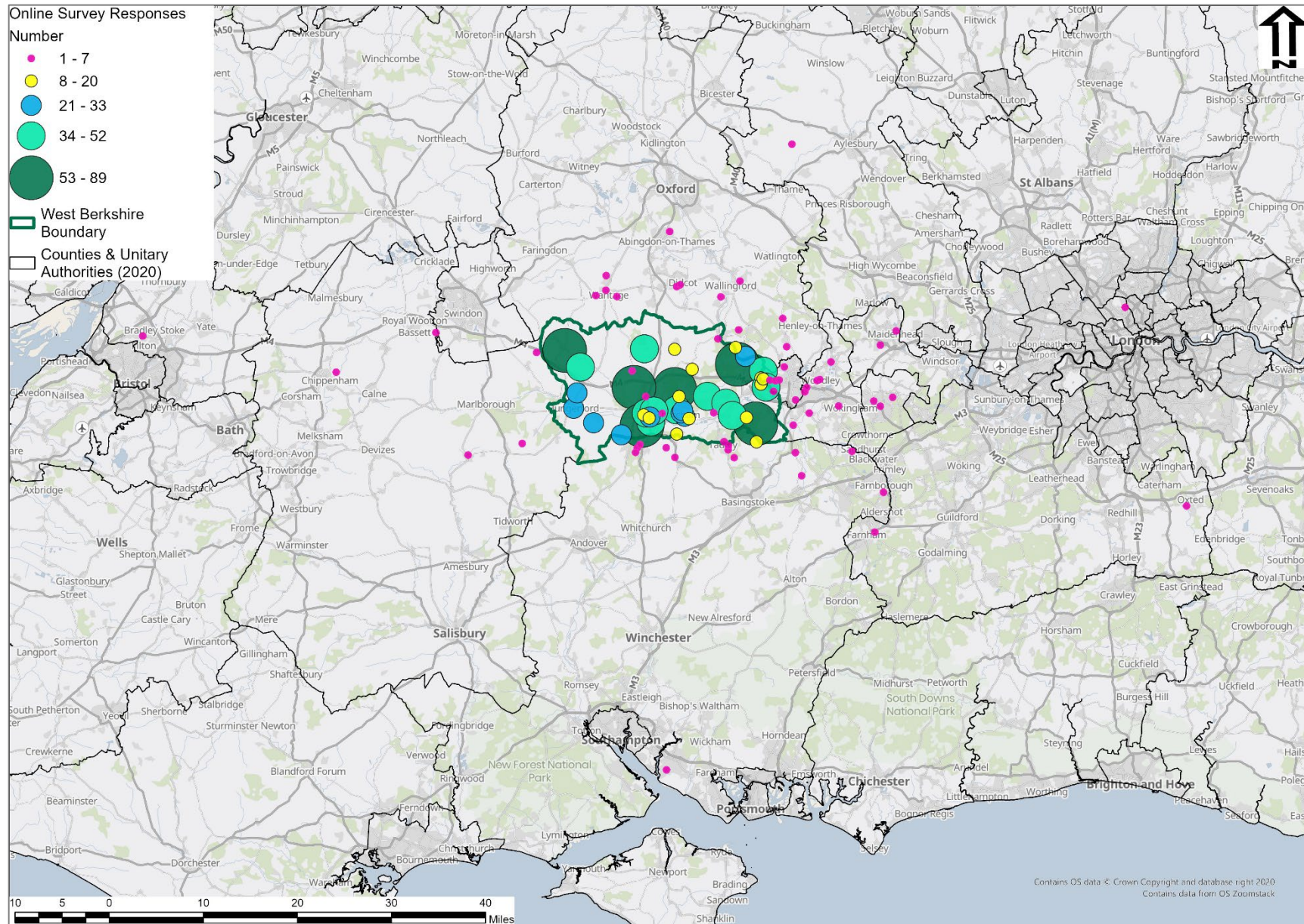
Oxfordshire	41
Abingdon on Thames	1
Cholsey	1
Crowmarsh Gifford	1
Didcot	2
Highmoor Cross	2
Sonning Common	1
Wantage	9
Whitchurch on Thames	21
Woodcote	3

Hampshire	27
Headley	1
Heckfield	1
Highclere / Burghclere	9
Kingsclere	3
Lock's Heath, Southampton	1
Near Hook	2
South Farnborough	1
Tadley	8
Yateley	1

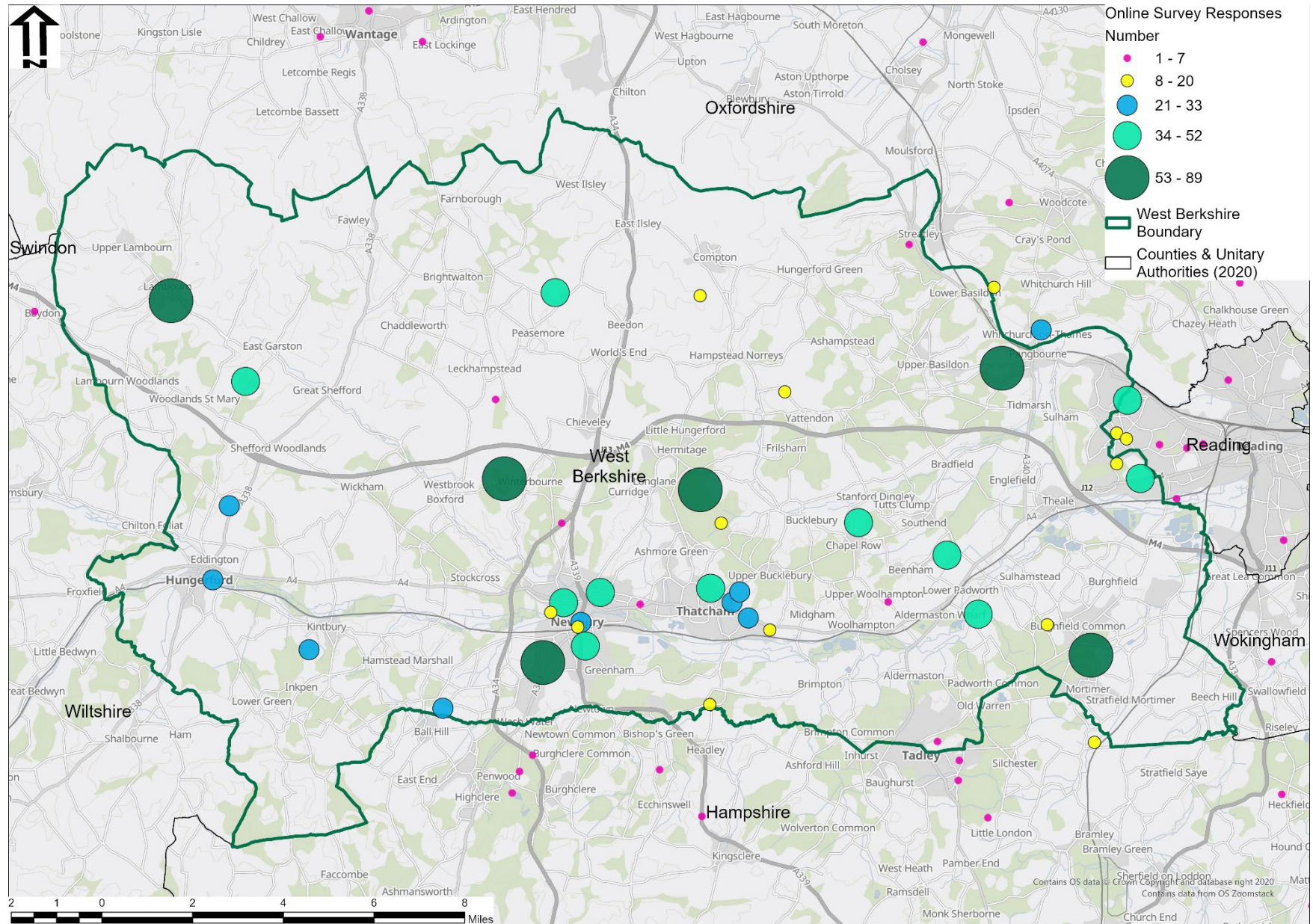
Wokingham	15
Arborfield	1
Earley	1
Spencers Wood	6
Twyford	1
Wokingham	3
Woodley	3

Windsor and Maidenhead	5
Maidenhead	5
Wiltshire	4
Baydon	1
Chippenham	1
East Grafton	1
Pewsey	1
Bracknell Forest	3
Bracknell	3
Surrey	2
Farnham	1
Oxted	1
Buckinghamshire	1
Long Crendon	1
Camden	1
Kentish Town	1
South Gloucestershire	1
Bristol	1
Swindon	1
Swindon	1

Plan 1: Location of Respondents - All Responses



Plan 2: Location of Respondents - West Berkshire Area



Use of Public Rights of Way

Reasons for Using Public Rights of Way

Respondents were asked why they used public rights of way. More than one answer could be chosen. See Table 4 and Chart 2.

- 'Quality of life' reasons featured highly in the responses – 80.9% of respondents gave 'To enjoy the landscape or countryside' as one of their responses (top answer). 'For relaxation and peace and quiet' was third, with 72.1% giving this as an answer, and at fourth 'To enjoy a view' was a reason given by 65.3% of people.
- Health improvement was the second highest reason, given by 74.5% of people;
- The most popular activity was 'Walking without a dog' (58.1% of people and fifth most popular reason for using public rights of way).

A range of other responses were given, see Table 5. The most popular of these was 'running or jogging', given by 45% of people who provided additional comments.

Table 4: Reasons for Using Public Rights of Way

Reasons for using public rights of way (n. 2094)	Number	Percent of all responses	Percent giving this as one of their answers
To enjoy the landscape or countryside	1694	12.0%	80.9%
To improve my health	1561	11.1%	74.5%
For relaxation and peace and quiet	1510	10.7%	72.1%
To enjoy a view	1367	9.7%	65.3%
Walking without a dog	1217	8.6%	58.1%
Spending time with family and friends	1150	8.2%	54.9%
For watching wildlife	1009	7.2%	48.2%
Exploring on my own	917	6.5%	43.8%
Walking with a dog	857	6.1%	40.9%
Cycling on surfaced cycle paths	539	3.8%	25.7%
Cycling off-road, e.g. mountain biking	524	3.7%	25.0%
As an activity with children	493	3.5%	23.5%
As a route to school, to work to the shops or to other facilities, e.g. station	366	2.6%	17.5%
For arts and crafts, e.g. photography, drawing, painting	217	1.5%	10.4%
Horse riding	215	1.5%	10.3%
Other (please specify):	167	1.2%	8.0%
For geocaching	125	0.9%	6.0%
Driving a motorised vehicle, e.g. 4x4, motorbike, quad bike	95	0.7%	4.5%
For fishing and field sports	59	0.4%	2.8%
Carriage driving	22	0.2%	1.1%

Chart 2: Reasons for Using Public Rights of Way

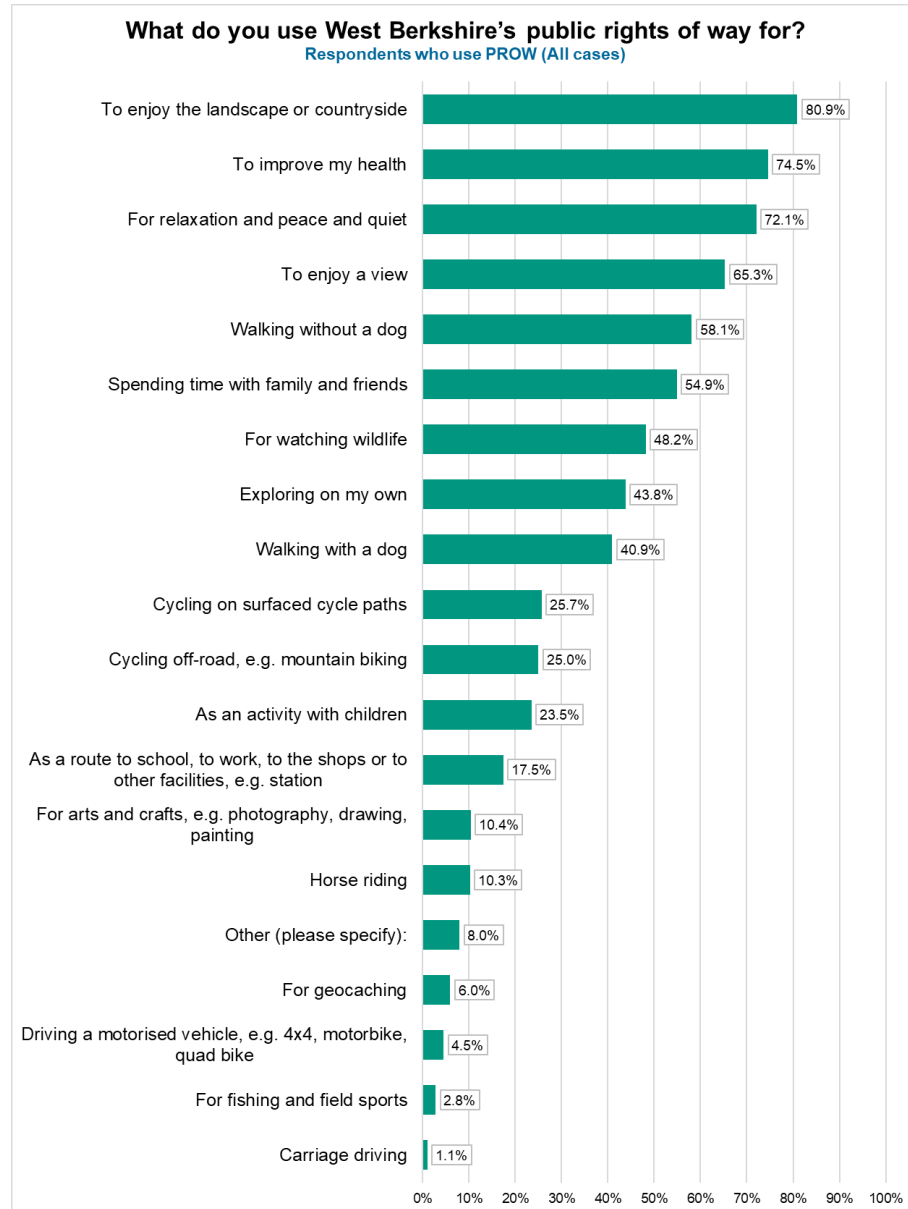


Table 5: Reasons for Using Public Rights of Way - Other Responses

Response (n. 146)	Number	Percentage
Running or jogging	65	45%
Utilitarian (access to home / short cut / for work / to get to place of other activity)	17	12%
Walking group	12	8%
Wildlife recording / appreciating wildlife	10	7%
Mental health / peace and quiet / to get away from people	10	7%
Trail riding	5	3%
Walking with friends and family	4	3%
Exercise	4	3%
D of E / scouting	4	3%
Using electric wheelchair or mobility scooter	3	2%
Visiting heritage sites	3	2%
Foraging	3	2%
Conservation volunteering	2	1%
Nordic walking	2	1%
Canicross	2	1%

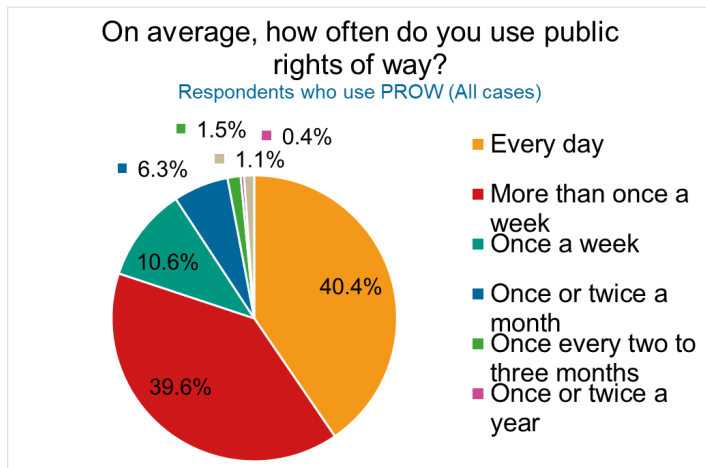
Frequency of Public Rights of Way Use

Respondents were asked, on average, how often they used public rights of way (Table 6 and Chart 3). They could only give one answer. There was a very high level of frequent use of public rights of way - 90.6% used public rights of way once a week or more often.

Table 6: Frequency of Use of Public Rights of Way

Frequency	Frequency	Percent
Every day	847	40.4
More than once a week	830	39.6
Once a week	223	10.6
Once or twice a month	131	6.3
Once every two to three months	31	1.5
Once or twice a year	8	0.4
Other (please specify)	24	1.1
Total	n.2094	100.0

Chart 3: Frequency of Use of Public Rights of Way

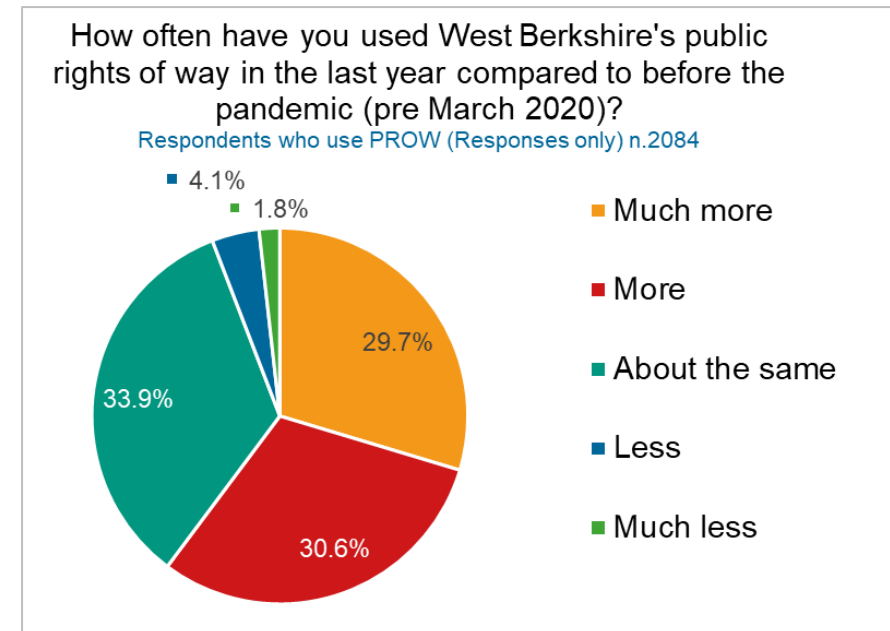


Change in Use of Public Rights of Way During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Respondents were asked whether they had used public rights of way more during the past year (March 2020 to April 2021) compared to the prior to the pandemic (March 2020) (Chart 4).

- 60.3% of people said they had used public rights of way 'more' or 'much more';
- 33.9% said they had used them about the same amount;
- 5.9% said they had used them 'less' or 'much less'.

Chart 4: Frequency of Public Rights of Way Use During vs. Before the COVID-19 Pandemic



Respondents who had used public rights of way more were then asked whether they thought they would continue to use them more often (Table 7).

- 96% of respondents indicated that they intended to use public rights of way more often than they had prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

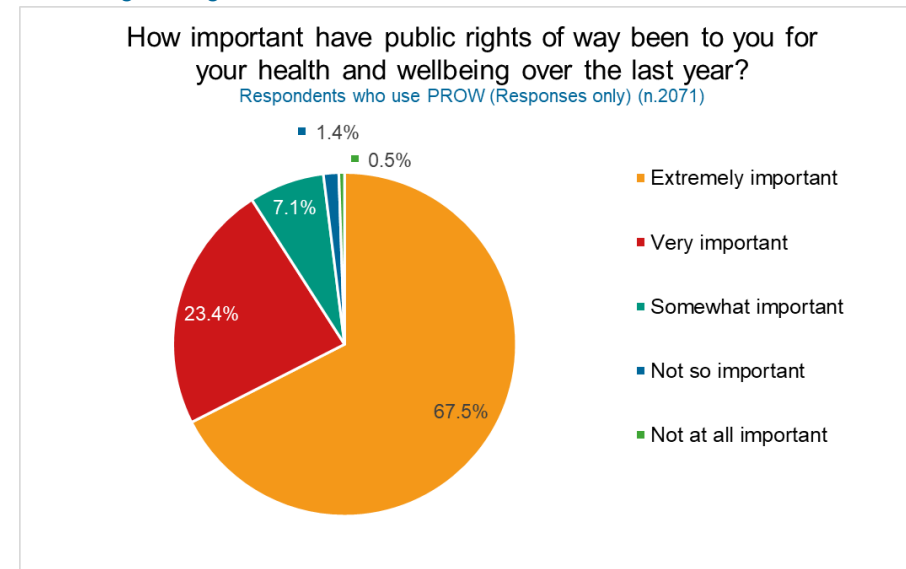
Table 7: Use of Public Rights of Way During vs. Prior to the Pandemic and Intention to Continue to Use Public Rights of Way More

Frequency of Public Rights of Way Use During vs. Before the COVID-19 Pandemic	Number	Percent
Much more	618	29.7
More	637	30.6
About the same	707	33.9
Less	85	4.1
Much less	37	1.8
Total (n.)	2084	100.0
Intention to Continue Using Public Rights of Way More	Number	Percent
Yes	1196	96.0
No	26	2.1
Don't know	24	1.9
Total (n.)	1246	100.0
Not answered	9	

Respondents were also asked how important public rights of way had been to their health and wellbeing during the pandemic year (Chart 5 and Table 8).

98% of people said that public rights of way had been important to them, with 90.9% saying they were 'very important' or 'extremely important'.

Chart 5 and Table 8: Important of Public Rights of Way to Health and Wellbeing During the Pandemic



	Number	Percent
Extremely important	1398	67.5
Very important	485	23.4
Somewhat important	147	7.1
Not so important	30	1.4
Not at all important	11	0.5
Total	n. 2071	100.0

Non-Users - Barriers to Use of Public Rights of Way

A small number of people who do not use public rights of way (n.16) completed the survey. These respondents were asked what prevented them from using public rights of way. They could choose more than one answer.

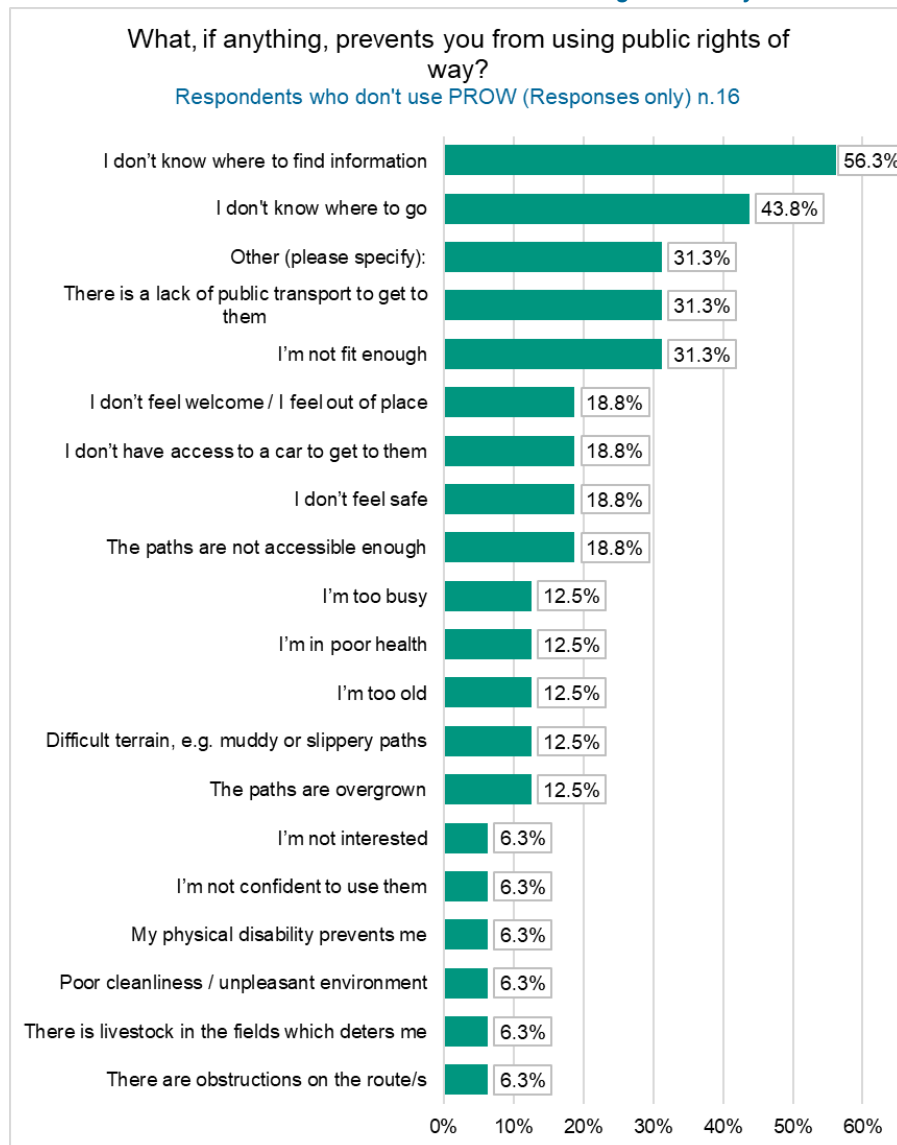
- Lack of information was the highest response, given by 56.3% of people;
- Second highest, given by 43.8% of people was 'I don't know where to go';
- Lack of transport and 'I'm not fit enough' were third equal, given by 31.3% of people;
- Other responses given related to personal circumstances and did not provide further insight.

Respondents were asked what, if anything, would encourage them to use public rights of way. The top four answers related to provision of information, see Table 9.

Table 9: What Would Encourage Non-Users to Use Public Rights of Way

Responses (n.16)	Number	Percent	Percentage giving this as one of their answers
Information on places I could visit using public rights of way	12	20.7%	70.6%
Online guides for walks	11	19.0%	64.7%
Information on public rights of way close to where I live	10	17.2%	58.8%
Printed guides for walks	7	12.1%	41.2%
Public rights of way that are in better condition	6	10.3%	35.3%
Better signposting	3	5.2%	17.6%
Public rights of way that are more accessible, e.g. fewer stiles	3	5.2%	17.6%
Organised walks led by guides	2	3.4%	11.8%
Information on walking groups I could join	2	3.4%	11.8%
Nothing would encourage me to use public rights of way	1	1.7%	5.9%
Other (please specify):	1	1.7%	5.9%

Table 10: Reasons Non-Users do not Use Public Rights of Way

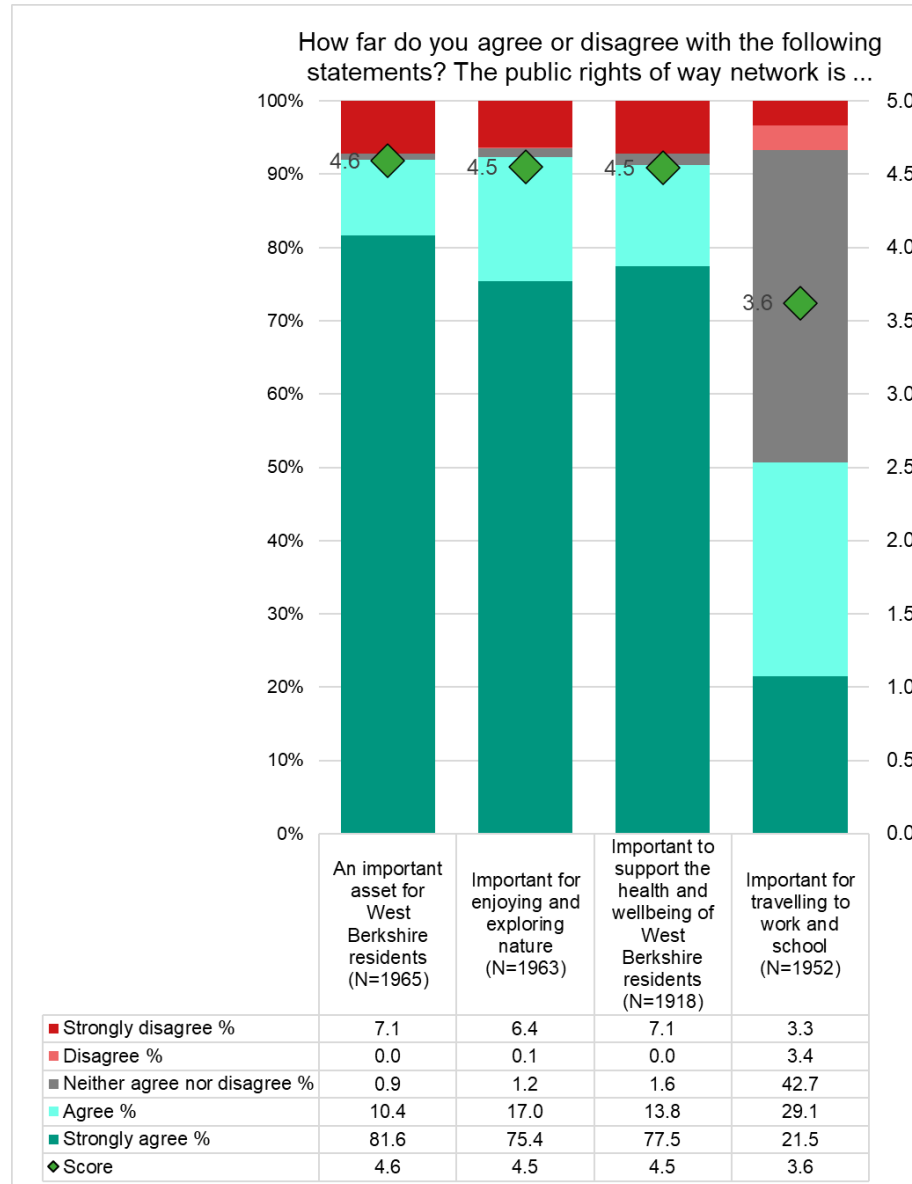


Views on the Importance of Public Rights of Way

Respondents were asked a series of questions around how they viewed the importance of public rights of way, see Chart 6:

- 92% agreed or strongly agreed that public rights of way were an important asset for West Berkshire residents;
- 91.2% agreed or strongly agreed that public rights of way are important to support the health and wellbeing of West Berkshire residents;
- 92.4% agreed or strongly agreed that public rights of way are important for enjoying and exploring nature.
- 50.6% agreed or strongly agreed that public rights of way are important for travelling to work or school.

Chart 6: Views on the Importance of Public Rights of Way



Maintenance and Issues with Public Rights of Way

Problems Encountered on Public Rights of Way

Respondents were asked if they had encountered problems when using West Berkshire’s public rights of way.

- 55.2 % of people had encountered a problem;
- 44.8% of people had not encountered a problem.

People were then asked what problems they had encountered from a list as shown in Table 11 and Chart 7. They could give more than one response.

- The problem most frequently encountered was ‘overgrown paths’, with 54% of people giving this response;
- Second highest, with 50.8% giving this as one of their answers, was ‘surfaces in poor condition’;
- Third was ‘Issues with livestock’ with 39.4% of people;
- There were also issues with waymarking and signposting – 37.1% had encountered a lack of waymarking and 27.4% a missing fingerpost at the start of the public right of way;
- 24% had encountered paths being deliberately blocked.

Some respondents gave responses under ‘other comments’. These are collated in Table 12.

Table 11: Problems Encountered on Public Rights of Way – Answers from Lists Provided

	Number (Total n.1126)	Percent	Percent of people giving this as one of their answers
Overgrown paths	608	13.3%	54.0%
Surfaces in poor condition	572	12.6%	50.8%
Issues with livestock	444	9.7%	39.4%
Other (please specify):	431	9.5%	38.3%
Lack of waymarking along routes (directional signs on the route showing you where to go)	418	9.2%	37.1%
Fallen trees or other obstructions on the route	413	9.1%	36.7%
Stiles in poor condition	345	7.6%	30.6%
Lack of fingerpost signs showing the start of public rights of way from the road	309	6.8%	27.4%
Paths deliberately blocked	270	5.9%	24.0%
Routes blocked by crops	210	4.6%	18.7%
Aggressive dogs	170	3.7%	15.1%
Dog fouling	128	2.8%	11.4%
Threatening behaviour by path users	85	1.9%	7.5%
Bridges in poor condition	79	1.7%	7.0%
Threatening behaviour by landowners	75	1.6%	6.7%

Chart 7: Problems Encountered on Public Rights of Way

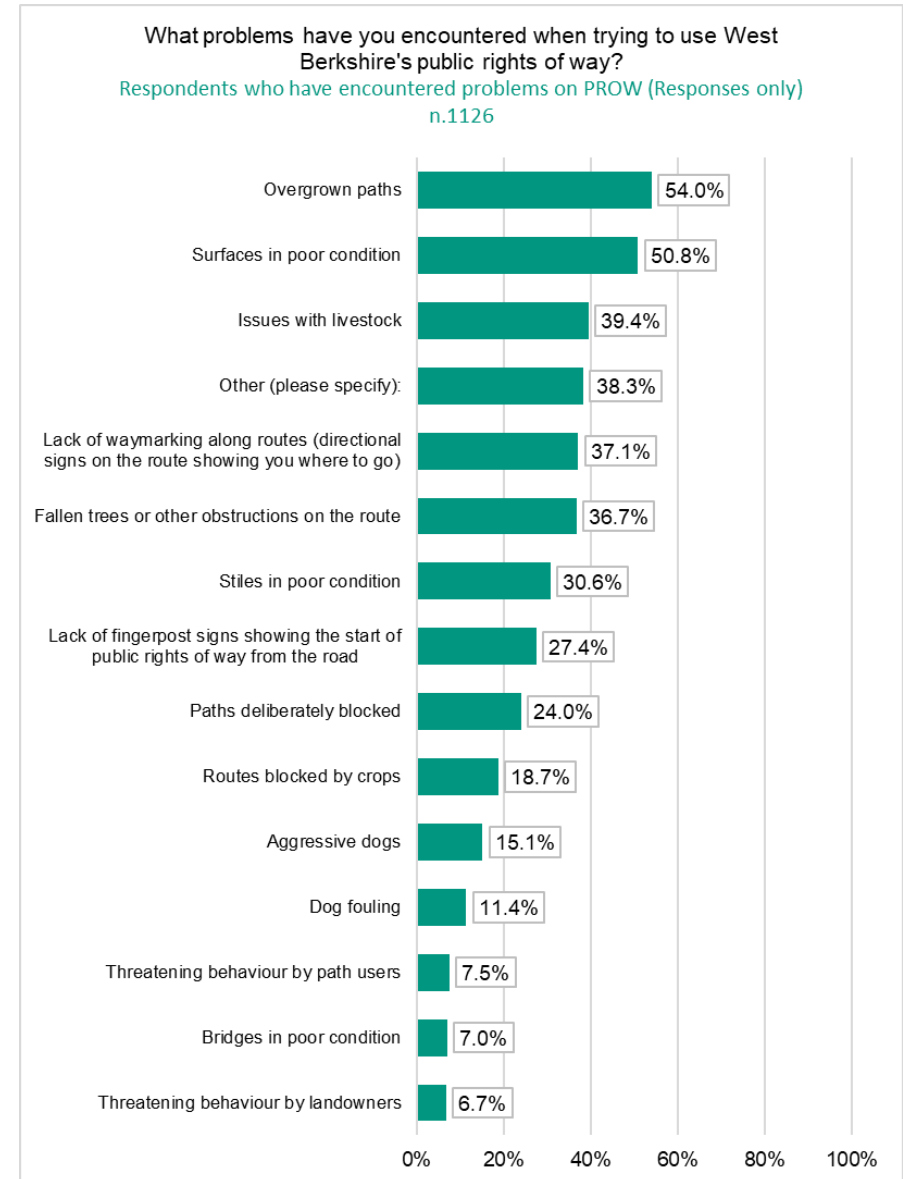


Table 12: Problems on Public Rights of Way - Other Comments

Response	Number (n.487)	Percent
4 x 4 and motorbikes users (intimidating, damage to surface, using paths not entitled to)	71	15%
Fly-tipping / litter	51	10%
Obstructions / hazards	45	9%
Cyclists (on public footpaths or pavements, aggressive, giving no warning, travelling too fast)	42	9%
Other	38	8%
Surface issue / muddy paths	38	8%
Dogs (aggressive, not on leads, dog mess)	37	8%
Accessibility - lack of gates, stiles which are impassable to people with mobility issues or dogs,	33	7%
Disconnected network	22	5%
Lack of signs / misleading signs	20	4%
Maintenance issues	18	4%
Flooding	17	3%
Lack of social distancing / too busy in pandemic	15	3%
Use of footpaths by horse riders	12	2%
Walkers aggressive / intimidating to cyclists, horse riders, 4x4 or motorbike users	11	2%
Ploughed fields	8	2%
Aggressive or intimidating landowner	5	1%
Issues with bridleway gates	4	1%

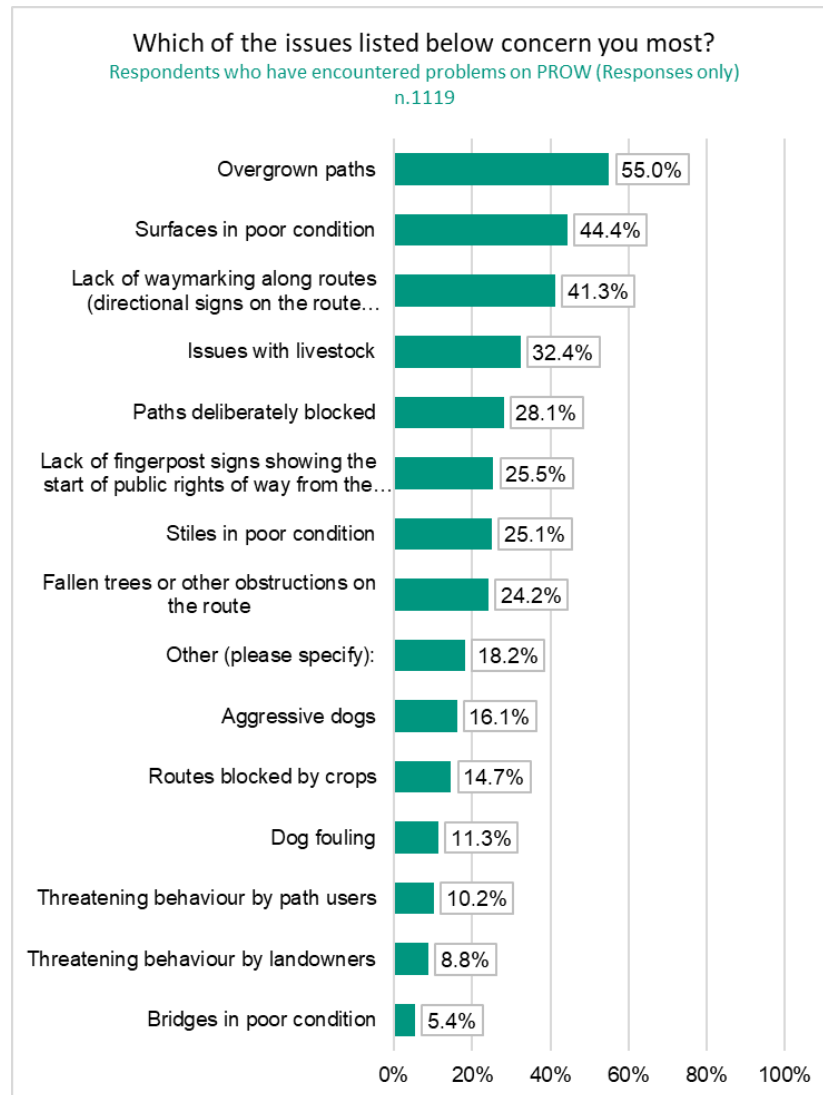
Levels of Concern Over Issues

Respondents were asked which of the problems concerned them the most, see Chart 8 and Table 13. The priorities given to problems was similar to the problems which had been encountered. The largest differences were 'Paths deliberately blocked' which was three ranking places higher in the priority list and 'Fallen trees or other obstructions' which moved down three ranking places in the priority list.

Table 13: Difference in Rank - Problems Encountered vs. Priority of Problem with Users

	Rank – Problem Encountered	Rank - Priority	Difference in Ranking
Overgrown paths	1	1	Same
Surfaces in poor condition	2	2	Same
Issues with livestock	3	4	-1
Lack of waymarking along routes	4	3	1
Fallen trees or other obstructions	5	8	-3
Stiles in poor condition	6	7	-1
Lack of fingerpost signs showing the start of public rights of way from the road	7	6	1
Paths deliberately blocked	8	5	3
Routes blocked by crops	9	10	-1
Aggressive dogs	10	9	1
Dog fouling	11	11	Same
Threatening behaviour by path users	12	12	Same
Bridges in poor condition	13	14	-1
Threatening behaviour by landowners	14	13	1

Chart 8: Level of Concern Around Issues



² Although the survey was hosted and run by West Berkshire Council so this may have influenced this result.

Reporting Problems on Public Rights of Way

How People Report Problems

Respondents were asked how they would report a problem on a public right of way. This was a free text answer to gauge the level of awareness of ways to report problems (rather than 'guessing' from a list). Respondents sometimes gave more than one answer (see Table 14 and Chart 9).

- There seemed to be good awareness that West Berkshire Council was responsible for public rights of way² as the highest scoring response was to West Berkshire Council – through a range of methods (28%);
- The second highest result was 'to the council' – through a range of methods (27%);
- The third highest response was 'I don't know / I wouldn't report a problem' (22%);
- 6% of people would report a public rights of way issue to their parish or town council;
- 3% of respondents stated they would report an issue to the rights of way officer or Countryside Team;
- 2% stated they would use the 'Report a Problem' function on the West Berkshire website. Chart 10 shows how people indicated they would contact West Berkshire Council.

Table 14: Where Respondents would Report Problems with Public Rights of Way

Response	Number (n.2027)	Percentage of responses
To West Berkshire Council (various methods)	574	28%
To 'the council' (unspecified)	548	27%
Don't know or 'I would not report a problem'	443	22%
Parish or Town Council	116	6%
I would search the internet	86	4%
Rights of Way Officer or Countryside Team	63	3%
Ramblers' Association	32	2%
By email or phone (not stated to whom)	31	2%
Police	28	1%
'Streetcare', 'Fix my Street' or WBC Highways	27	1%
Councillor	25	1%
Other interest group (BHS, TRF, Wildlife Trust, Ridgeway Officer, Canal Trust)	22	1%
Through social media	16	1%
To the landowner	16	1%

Chart 9: Where Respondents would Report Problems with Public Rights of Way

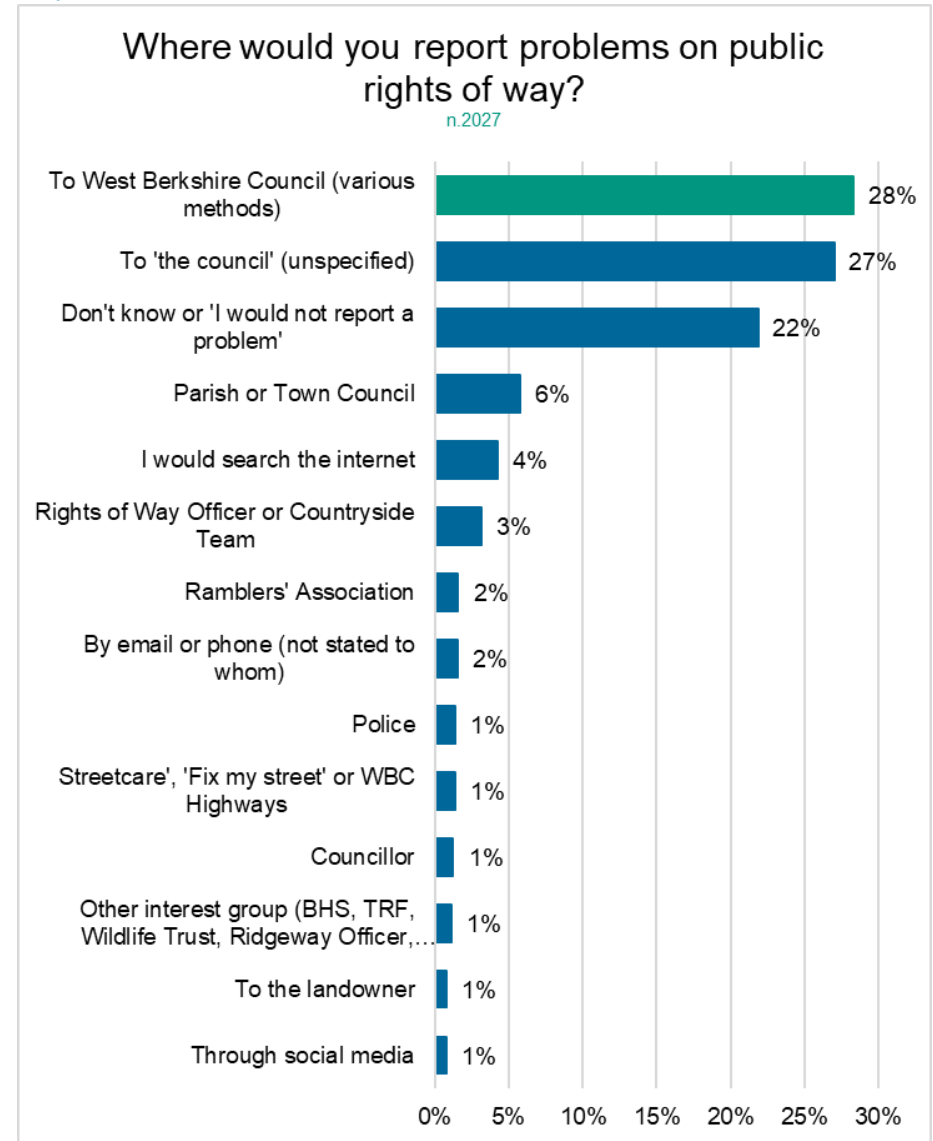
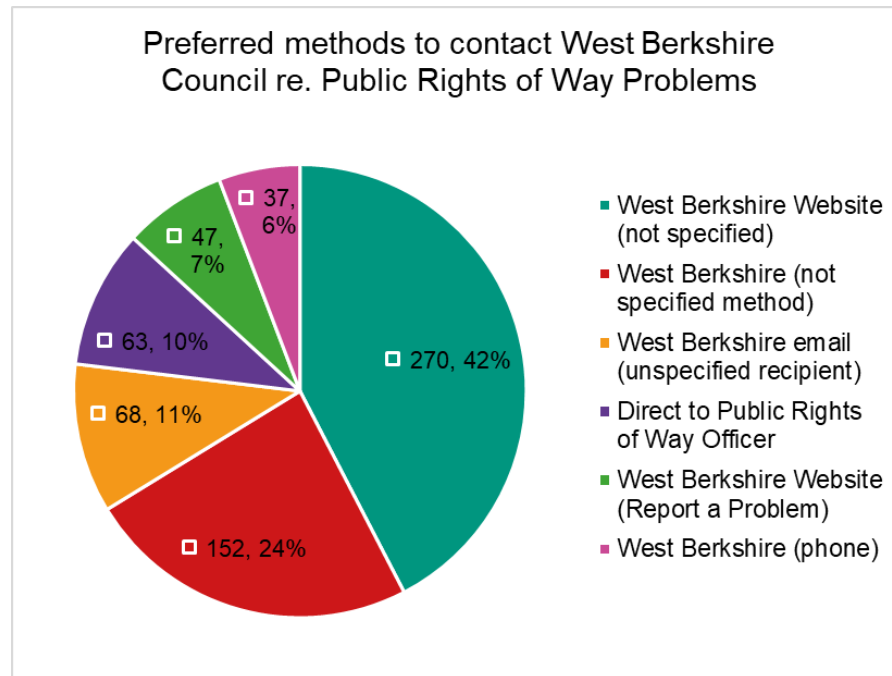


Chart 10: Preferred Methods to contact West Berkshire Council

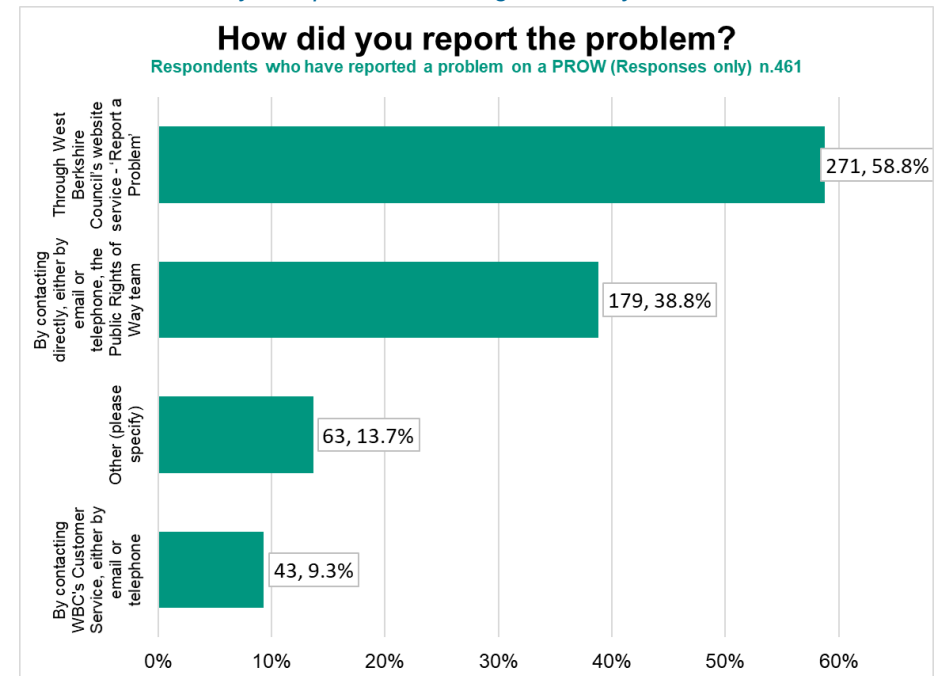


Respondents were then asked if they had ever reported a public rights of way issue to West Berkshire Council:

- 77% (n.1557) of those responding had not reported a problem;
- 23% (n.466) had reported a problem.

Those who had reported a problem were asked how they had reported the problem (more than one method could be given) (see Chart 11). The most popular method was through West Berkshire Council’s ‘Report a Problem’ online service.

Chart 11: How did you report a Public Rights of Way Problem?



63 people gave responses under ‘other’. Those answers which were not a repetition of one of the three previous options or were not ‘I can’t remember’ were:

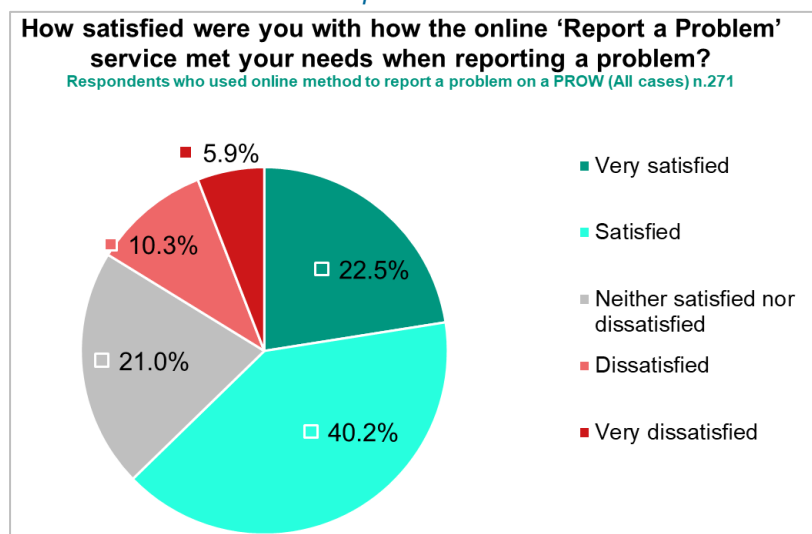
- 12 had reported through the parish council;
- 12 had reported through their local councillor;
- 1 had reported through their Member of Parliament;
- Other responses were ‘Fix my Street’ (2), letter (2), user representative group interest group (5), Tree Officer (1), Police (3); landowner (1), through an app (unspecified) (1), through social media (1).

Satisfaction with 'Report a Problem' Online Service

Those who used the 'Report a Problem' service were then asked how well it met their needs (Chart 12).

- The majority of people (62.7%) using 'Report a Problem' were satisfied or very satisfied that it met their needs when reporting a problem;
- 16.2% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Chart 12: Satisfaction with 'Report a Problem'



Respondents could add reasons for their response and anything which could be done to improve their experience of 'Report a Problem'. The answers given were:

- Although sometimes with excessive delay to action help is often available (satisfied);
- Satisfied on fly tipping clearance. Not satisfied on damage to signage report (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied);

- Repeated issue in the same area, lack of response or recognition of the issue (very dissatisfied);
- Time taken for situation to be fully rectified (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied);
- Unless required little action by WBC unlikely to get action (very dissatisfied);
- The path was cleared however we still get motorbikes every week using bridleway (satisfied);
- West Berkshire Council are a bit slow but Parish Council are much more proactive. Also takes several times of reporting to West Berkshire Council and always get a generic email reply (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied);
- Generally get a response to the listing and response to the site specific problem (very satisfied);
- I and another person reported the unreasonable amount of litter on the road verges through Ashampstead Common which spreads into the woods. Neither of us have had a response (dissatisfied);
- Inability to understand the "hurt" being suffered when other home owners don't comply with the Highways Act of 1980 and the use of signage at 2.3 metres versus foliage growth (very dissatisfied);
- Solve the flooded path, ensure those responsible maintained their property, ensure landowners don't ride roughshod over the rules (very dissatisfied);
- Have more capability available (very dissatisfied);
- Ensure that all departments respond in accordance with your Code of Conduct. Highways are meticulous but - for example - Waste are not (dissatisfied);
- Listen carefully to the problem and take action to apply the Act of Parliament as it was meant to be applied when the act was introduced (very dissatisfied).

Service of West Berkshire Council Responding to Reported Problems

Respondents who had reported a problem were asked to rate the service of West Berkshire Council in dealing with their problem.

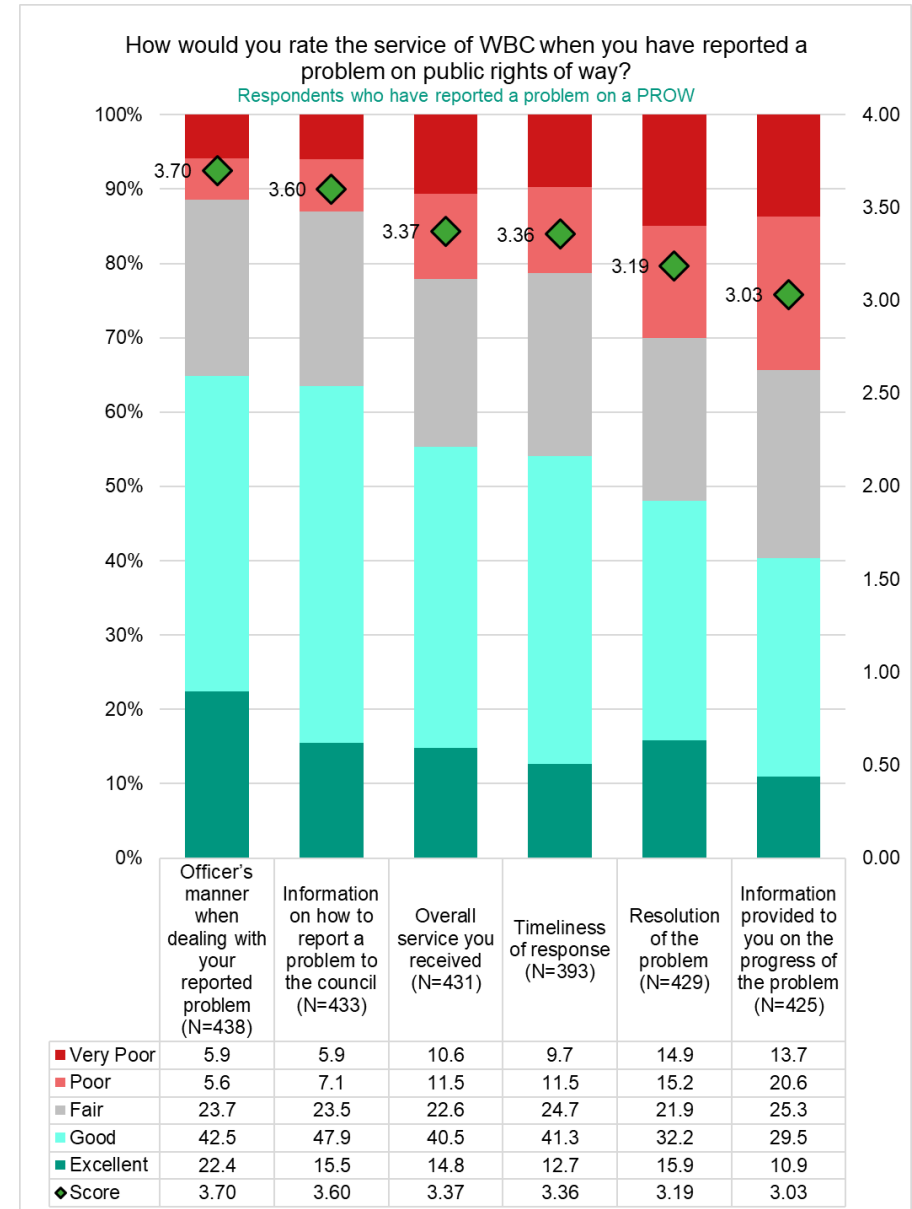
Respondents could choose from very poor, poor, fair, good or excellent. Answers were weighted to determine the level of agreement or disagreement (very poor – 1, poor – 2, fair – 3, good – 4, excellent – 5). A higher score indicates greater satisfaction.

All aspects of service provision had an average score of ‘good’; The ranking of the aspects are shown in Table 15 and Chart 13.

Table 15: Ranking of Satisfaction with Service Provision - Reported Problems

Aspect of Service Delivery	Percentage ‘good’ and ‘excellent’	Average score
Officer’s manner when dealing with your reported problem	64.9	3.7
Information on how to report a problem to the council	63.4	3.6
Overall service received	55.3	3.37
Timeliness of response	54.0	3.36
Resolution of the problem	48.1	3.19
Information provided to you on the progress of the problem	40.4	3.03

Chart 13: Satisfaction of Service Provision to Reported Problems



Some respondents made additional comments. It is likely that some of these comments relate to other services rather than public rights of way (for example potholes). The comments were grouped as below:

- 84 comments were poor – no response / poor response / not satisfied with outcome / no resolution;
- 60 comments were good – good response / resolution to problem;
- 38 comments were mixed – some good points but lacking in some areas;
- There were 41 other comments.

Priorities for Public Rights of Way Service Delivery

Respondents were asked to rank five aspects of the public rights of way service. Respondents could choose from strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree or strongly agree. Answers were weighted to determine the level of agreement or disagreement (strongly disagree – 1, disagree – 2, neither agree nor disagree – 3, agree – 4, strongly agree – 5). A score over 3 indicates that on average respondents agreed with the statement and the closer the value to 5, the higher the level of agreement with the statement (Chart 14 and Table 16).

All aspects of rights of way scored 4 or over, meaning that respondents agreed that all these areas were important aspects of public rights of way delivery.

Chart 14: Priorities for Public Rights of Way Delivery

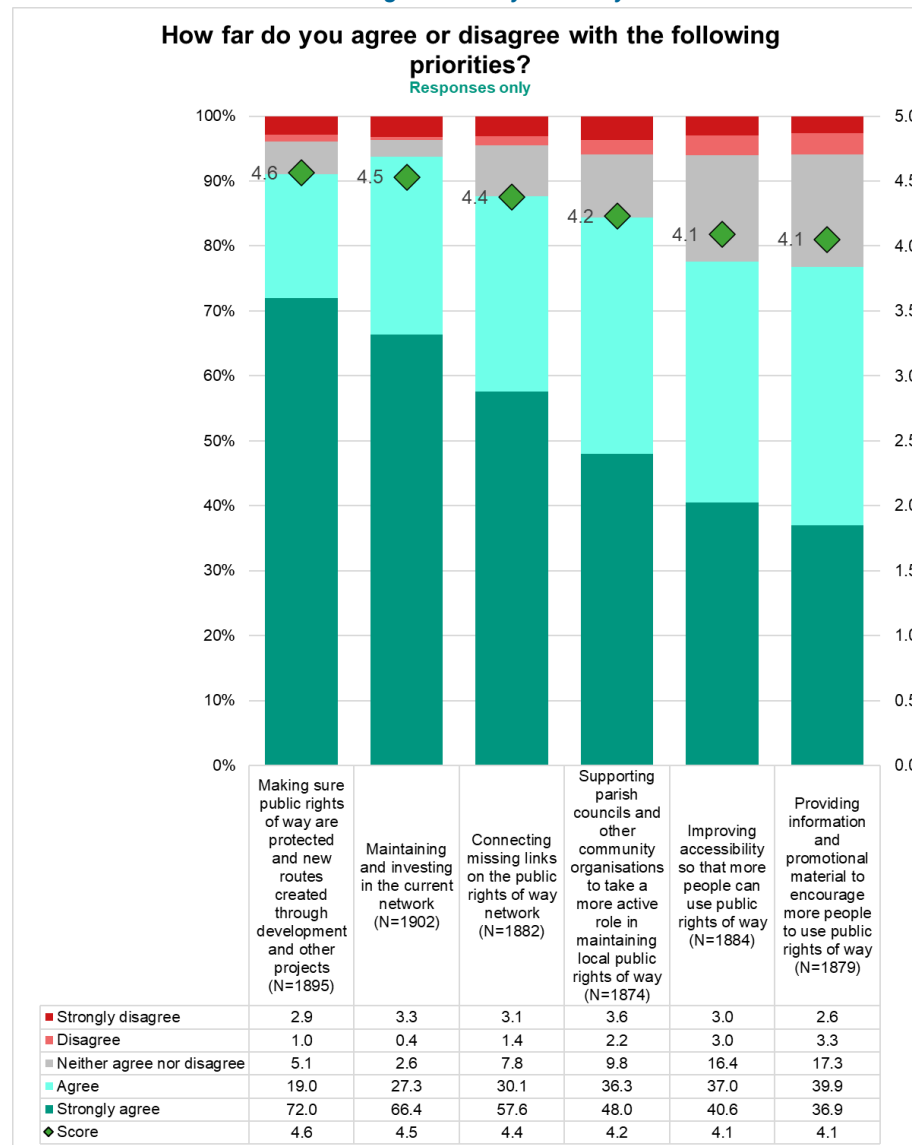


Table 16: Priorities for Public Rights of Way Delivery (Ranked)

Aspect of Service Delivery	Percentage 'agree' and 'strongly agree'	Average score
Making sure public rights of way are protected and new routes created through development and other projects	91.0	4.56
Maintaining and investing in the current network	93.7	4.53
Connecting missing links on the public rights of way network	87.7	4.38
Supporting parish councils and other community organisations to take a more active role in maintaining local public rights of way	84.3	4.23
Improving accessibility so that more people can use public rights of way	77.6	4.09
Providing information and promotional material to encourage more people to use public rights of way	76.8	4.05

Respondents were asked if there were any other priorities which should be considered. 37.3% of people indicated there were additional priorities, see Table 17.

Table 17: Other Priorities

Response	Number (n.215)	Percent
Other	84	39%
Remove / prevent fly tipping, littering, dog mess	25	12%
Stopping unauthorised use (cyclists, horse riders, motorised vehicles where not permitted)	22	10%
Accessibility improvements / information	17	8%
Connecting routes / preventing routes being removed / claiming paths / more public rights of way	14	7%
Education of users / Countryside Code	12	6%
More / better connected / improved bridleways	11	5%
More cycle routes	11	5%
Winter closures of BOATS / downgrades	10	5%
More areas for 4x4 and motorised vehicles / review current closures	9	4%

Information Provision

Finding out About Public Rights of Way

Respondents were asked how they found out about public rights of way in West Berkshire, see Table 18 and Chart 15.

- The most popular responses were 'local knowledge' with 67.8% giving this as one of their answers and Ordnance Survey maps, with 67.2% giving this as one of their answers;
- Third was 'word of mouth' with 42.8% giving this as one of their answers;
- West Berkshire Council's website was the fifth most popular answer, but only 18.2% of people used this source.

Respondents also gave a number of other sources from which they found out about where to go, see Table 19.

Table 18: How Users find out About Public Rights of Way

Responses	Number (n.1997)	Percent	Percent giving this as one of their answers
Local knowledge	1353	20.4%	67.8%
Ordnance Survey maps	1342	20.2%	67.2%
Word of mouth	854	12.9%	42.8%
GPS maps/website maps via mobile phone	707	10.7%	35.4%
Guide books	459	6.9%	23.0%
West Berkshire Council's website	363	5.5%	18.2%
Leaflets	346	5.2%	17.3%
Other (please specify):	334	5.0%	16.7%
The Ridgeway National Trail website	206	3.1%	10.3%
Through a club or society (please specify in 'Other')	163	2.5%	8.2%
The Thames Path National Trail website	160	2.4%	8.0%
North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	133	2.0%	6.7%
Visit Newbury website	83	1.3%	4.2%
I don't know how to find out information	68	1.0%	3.4%
Walking Britain website	63	0.9%	3.2%

Chart 15: How Users find out About Public Rights of Way

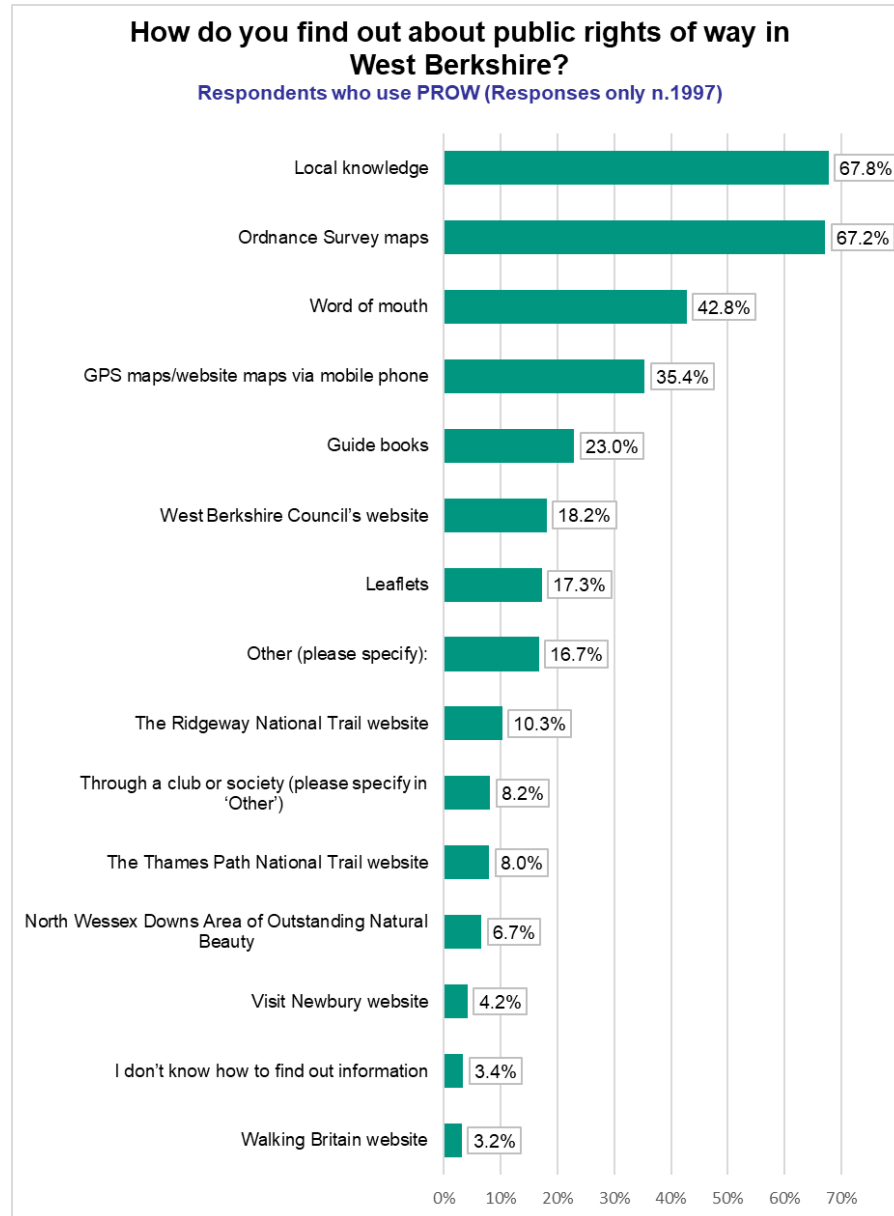


Table 19: Other Sources of Information about Public Rights of Way

Responses	Number (n.354)	Percent
Just explore / look for signs / know the area	47	13%
Other groups	43	12%
Ramblers' Association	39	11%
Other	33	9%
Other website	31	9%
Trail Riders Fellowship / GLASS	30	8%
Internet search / Google	25	7%
Facebook	19	5%
All Trails App	18	5%
Other App	18	5%
Guide books / leaflets	15	4%
Health Walks	14	4%
Parish Council	12	3%
Geocaching	10	3%

Awareness of Promotional Material on West Berkshire Council's Website

Respondents were asked if they were aware that there were downloadable resources for routes available on West Berkshire Council's website.

- 25.5% of respondents were aware of this material;
- 74.5% of respondents were not aware.

Use of Promotional Material on West Berkshire Council's Website

Respondents were then asked whether they had used the leaflets which are available on the website. These were categorised into circular walks, longer distance walks and walks produced for some of the parishes.

Circular Routes

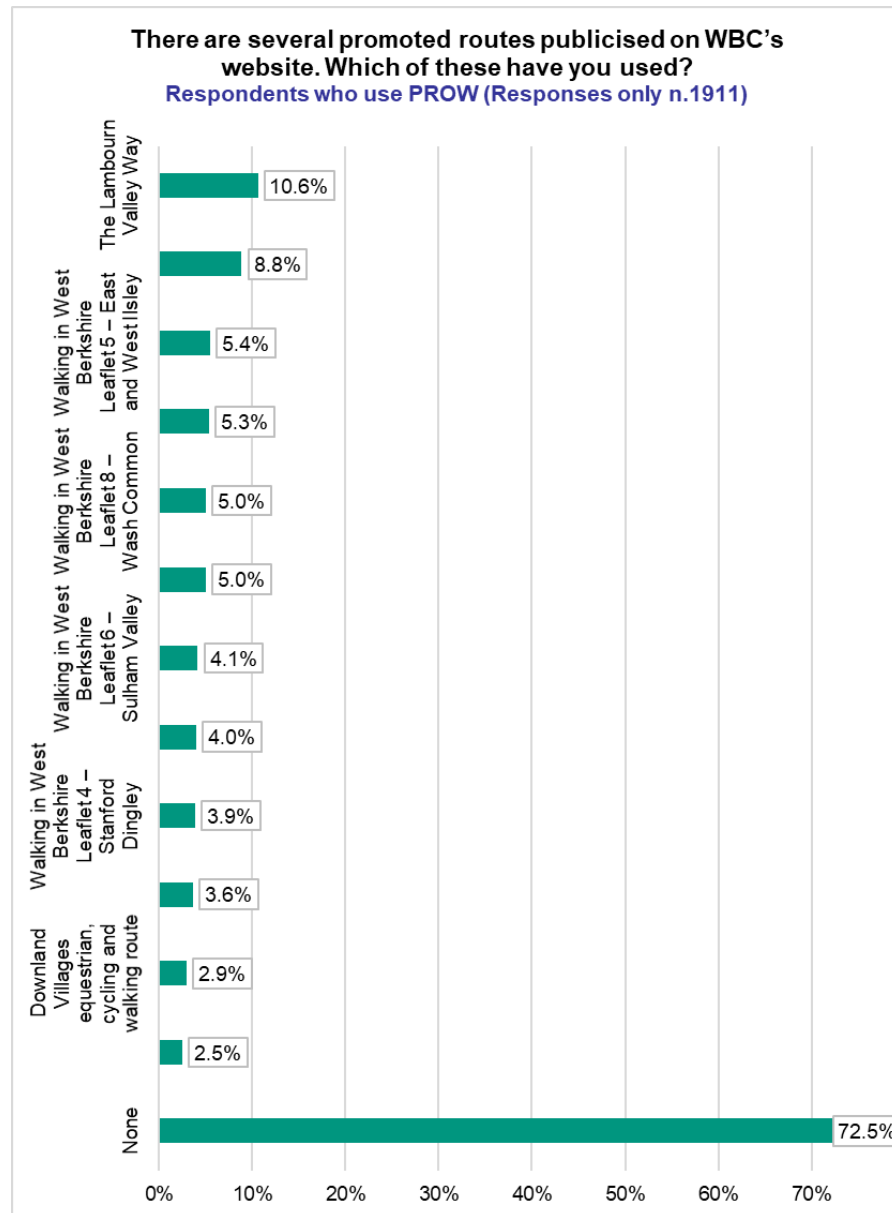
Respondents were asked about their use of 12 circular routes, see Table 20 and Chart 16.

- Most people (72.5%) of people who answered this question had not used any of the circular routes;
- The most popular route was the Lambourne Valley Way, with 10.6% of people having used this route.

Table 20: Use of Circular Routes on West Berkshire Council Website

Responses	Number (n.1911)	Percent	Percentage giving this as one of their answers
None	1385	54.2%	72.5%
The Lambourn Valley Way	203	7.9%	10.6%
Speen Moor Circular Route	169	6.6%	8.8%
Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet 5 – East and West Ilsley	104	4.1%	5.4%
Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet 7 – Inkpen	102	4.0%	5.3%
Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet 1 - Compton	95	3.7%	5.0%
Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet 8 – Wash Common	95	3.7%	5.0%
Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet 6 – Sulham Valley	79	3.1%	4.1%
Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet 2 – Bradfield	76	3.0%	4.0%
Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet 4 – Stanford Dingley	74	2.9%	3.9%
Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet 3 – Mortimer	69	2.7%	3.6%
Downland Villages equestrian, cycling and walking route	56	2.2%	2.9%
Ilsley Downs Riding Route	47	1.8%	2.5%

Chart 16: Use of Circular Routes on West Berkshire Council Website



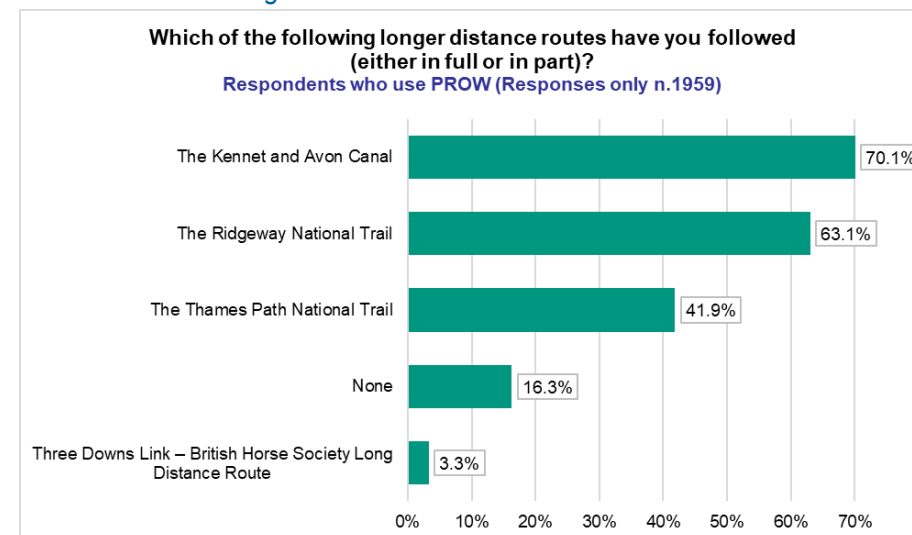
Use of Longer Distance Routes

Use of the longer distance routes was higher than the circular routes. 16.3% of people had not followed one of these routes (in full or in part) (Table 21 and Chart 17).

Table 21: Use of Longer Distance Routes

Responses	Number (n.1959)	Percent	Percent of people giving this as one of their answers
The Kennet and Avon Canal	1374	36.0%	70.1%
The Ridgeway National Trail	1236	32.4%	63.1%
The Thames Path National Trail	820	21.5%	41.9%
None	319	8.4%	16.3%
Three Downs Link – British Horse Society Long Distance Route	65	1.7%	3.3%

Chart 17: Use of Longer Distance Routes



Use of Parish Walks

Most respondents (82.2%) had not used any of the parish walks. Of those which had been used, Bucklebury and Inkpen were the most popular, see Table 22.

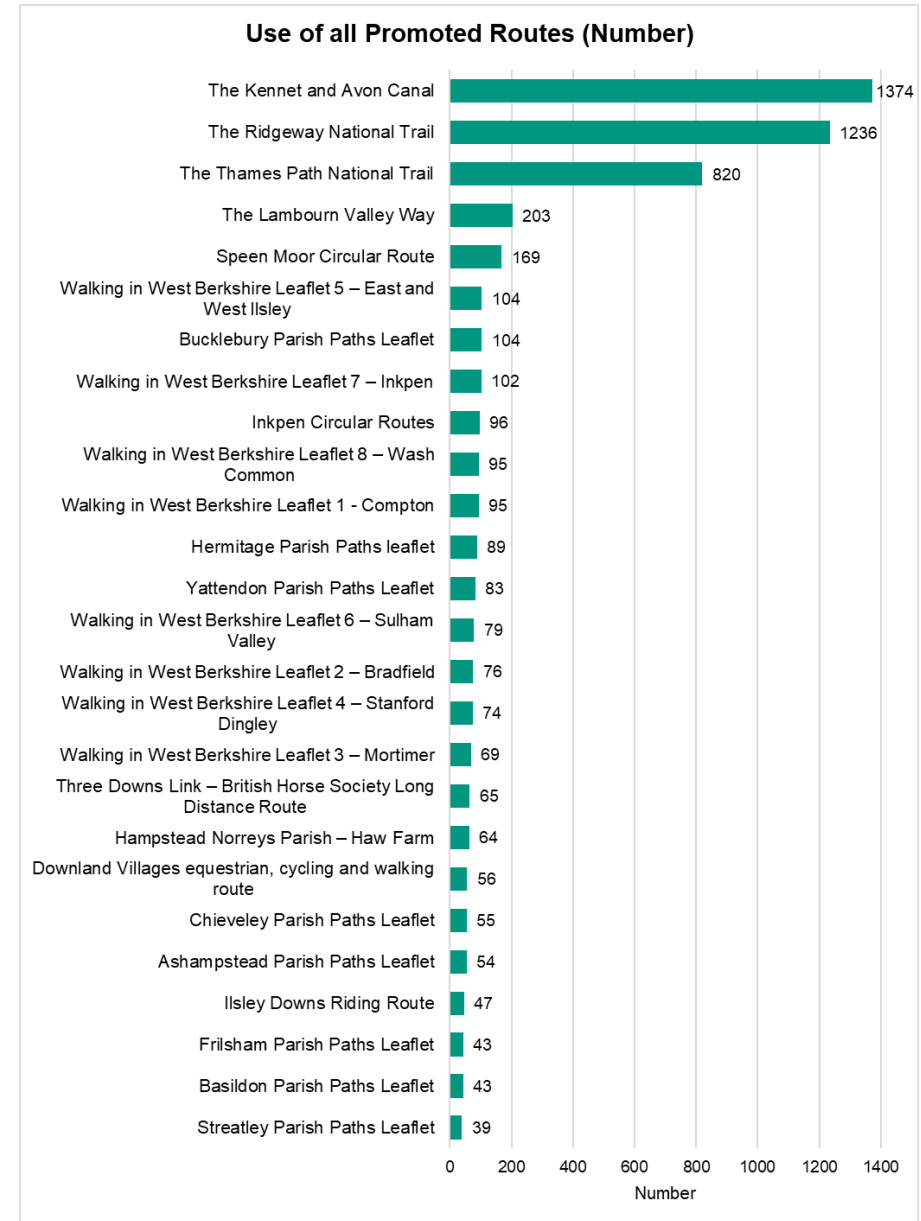
Table 22: Use of Parish Walks

Responses	Number (n. 1915)	Percent	Percent of people giving this as one of their answers
None	1574	70.1%	82.2%
Bucklebury Parish Paths Leaflet	104	4.6%	5.4%
Inkpen Circular Routes	96	4.3%	5.0%
Hermitage Parish Paths leaflet	89	4.0%	4.6%
Yattendon Parish Paths Leaflet	83	3.7%	4.3%
Hampstead Norreys Parish – Haw Farm	64	2.9%	3.3%
Chieveley Parish Paths Leaflet	55	2.5%	2.9%
Ashampstead Parish Paths Leaflet	54	2.4%	2.8%
Basildon Parish Paths Leaflet	43	1.9%	2.2%
Frilsham Parish Paths Leaflet	43	1.9%	2.2%
Streatley Parish Paths Leaflet	39	1.7%	2.0%

Use of Promoted Material – Combined

Chart 18 shows the number of responses for all of the promoted routes. The longer distance routes are the most popular routes, by some margin, with the Kennet and Avon Canal the most popular route.

Chart 18: Use of Promoted Routes – Combined



Improving Promotional Material

Respondents were asked if there was anything which could improve the promotional material provided by West Berkshire Council.

- 33.2% said there were improvements which could be made;
- 8.7% said no improvements were needed;
- 58.1% did not know.

Respondents were asked how promotional material could be improved from a list of options, see Table 23.

- The highest response was 'more promotional material for walking routes' (62.9% giving this as one of their answers);
- After 'other', the second highest was 'information to encourage responsible use of the countryside' (46.7% giving this as one of their answers).

Table 23: Improving Promotional Material

Responses	Number (n.645)	Percent	% people giving this as one of their responses
More promotional material for walking routes	406	25.4%	62.9%
Other (please specify):	337	21.0%	52.2%
More information to encourage responsible use of the countryside	301	18.8%	46.7%
Promotional material which links to local businesses, e.g. pubs	214	13.4%	33.2%
More promotional material for cycling routes	187	11.7%	29.0%
More promotional material for horse riding routes	79	4.9%	12.2%
More promotional material for people living with disabilities	77	4.8%	11.9%

Respondents could also suggest other ways in which promotional material could be improved.

The top response was to make people more aware, without specifying how this could be done. Other responses are shown in Table 24.

Table 24: Suggestions on Improving Promotional Material

Responses	Number (n.363)	Percent
Promote the material / let people know it exists (no method suggested)	98	27%
Better promotion online on WBC's site / residents emails	47	13%
Other	38	10%
Printed leaflets in the local area (pubs, libraries, shops, garages)	37	10%
Use social media to promote	26	7%
Advertise in parish / local magazines / newspapers / community websites	25	7%
Better maps / improved clarity / better format to print at home / ensure up to date	20	6%
Promote through an app / produce GPX of routes to be used on smartphone	17	5%
Produce promotional material for a specified place	16	4%
Provide information for 4x4, motorcycle and motorised vehicle users	8	2%
More information on responsible use of the countryside	8	2%
On site signs / information boards	7	2%
Work with other organisations	5	1%
QR Codes	3	1%
Produce as printed materials not just online	3	1%
Include information on heritage and archaeological interest	3	1%
More promotional material (no location specified)	2	1%

Parish and Town Council Survey

About the Local Councils

26 of the 62 parish and town councils in West Berkshire completed the survey (41.9%):

- Ashampstead Parish Council
- Beech Hill Parish Council
- Beenham Parish Council
- Boxford Parish Council
- Brightwalton Parish Council
- Burghfield
- Chaddleworth
- Chieveley Parish Council
- Cold Ash
- East Garston Parish Council
- East Ilsley
- Enborne Parish Council
- Hampstead Norreys Parish Council
- Holybrook Parish Council
- Midgham Parish council
- Newbury Town Council
- Padworth Parish Council
- Peasemore Parish Council
- Purley on Thames
- Streatley Parish Council
- Sulhamstead Parish Council

- Thatcham Town Council
- Theale
- Tidmarsh with Sulham Parish Council
- Welford Parish Council
- Yattendon

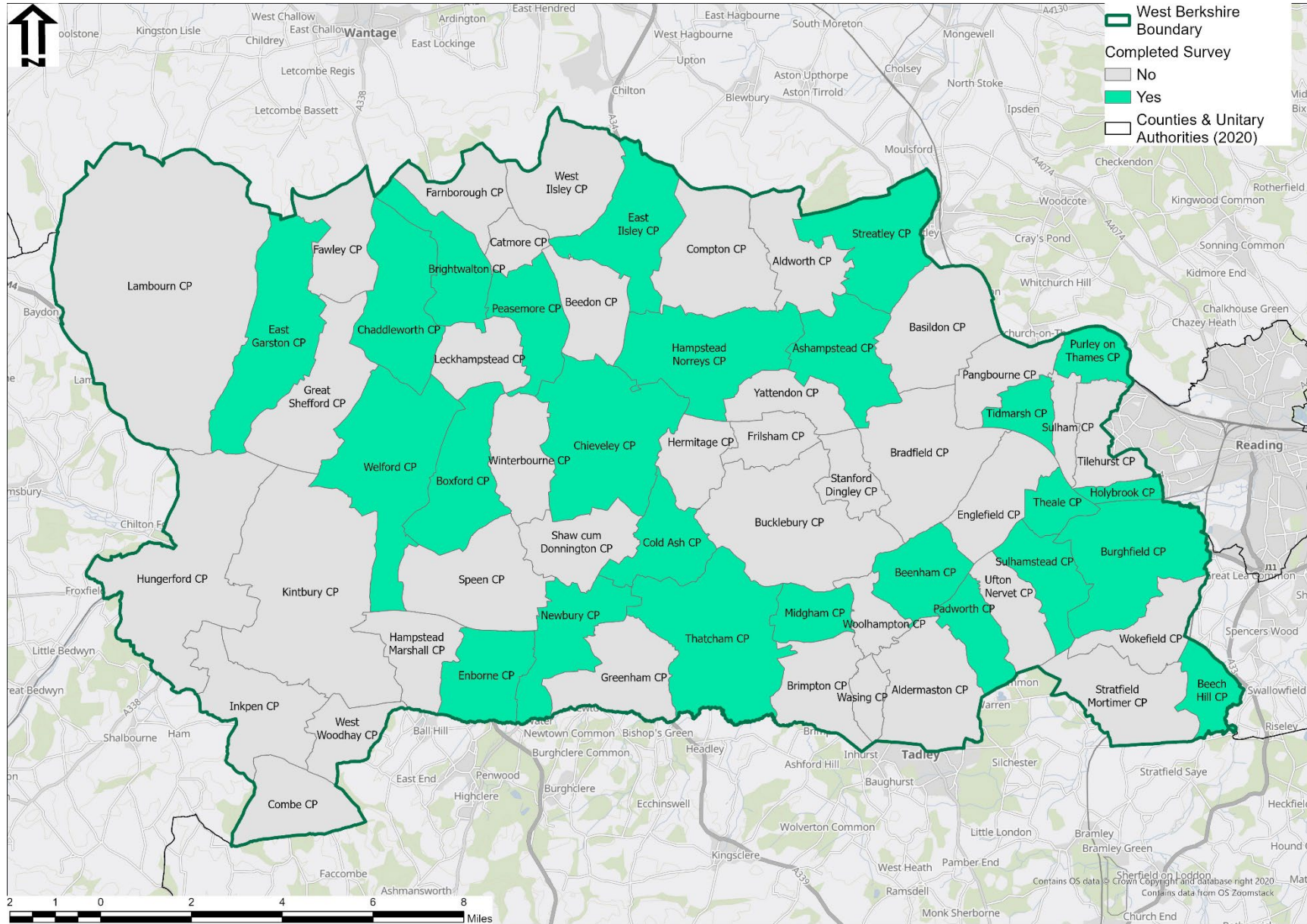
The local councils which responded are shown in Plan 3. There was a good geographic spread across the local authority.

Public Rights of Way or Footpath Warden

The local councils were asked if they had a rights of way officer, footpath warden or other representative with responsibility for public rights of way in the local council area.

- 29.6% had a representative;
- 55.6% did not have a representative;
- 14.8% did not know.

Plan 3: Local Councils Completing Survey



Satisfaction, Concerns and Problem Reporting

Satisfaction

The local councils were asked how satisfied they were with nine aspects of public rights of way in their area.

Respondents could choose from very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, satisfied or very satisfied. Answers were weighted to determine the level of agreement or disagreement (very dissatisfied – 1, dissatisfied – 2, satisfied nor dissatisfied – 3, satisfied – 4, very satisfied – 5). A score over 3 indicates that on average respondents were satisfied and the closer the value to 5, the higher the level of satisfaction (Chart 19 and Table 25).

On average, councils were satisfied with:

- Fingerposts at ends of public rights of way;
- The condition of bridges;
- Waymarking;
- Reinstatement and clearance of paths through crops;
- Vegetation clearance / paths not overgrown;
- The condition of stiles and gates.

Councils were not satisfied with:

- Promotional material / circular walks;
- Surface condition;
- Accessibility for less mobile users.

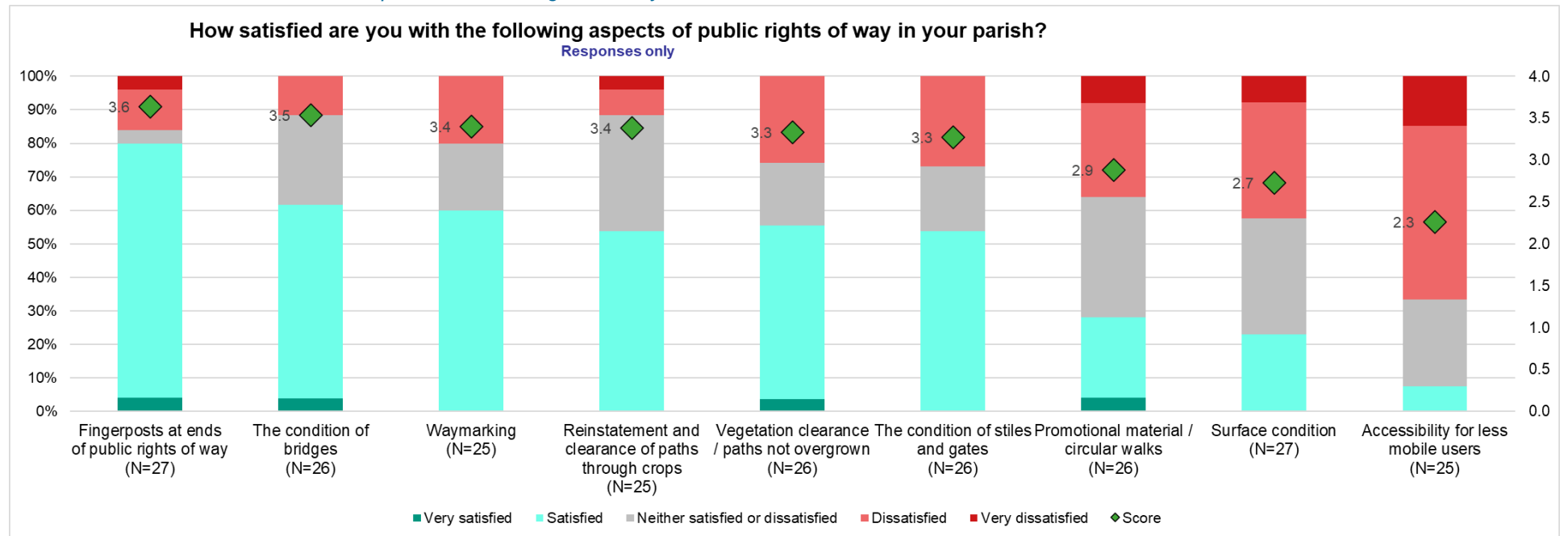
The councils made the following additional comments:

- There are areas where markers are missing or one is lying on the ground;
- Footpaths that are partly absorbed into streets are not always marked along the street sections. Although just outside the parish, footpath COLD/4/3 is extensively used by residents of Thatcham. We are disappointed that the accessibility of this footpath has been impaired by the Tull Way Flood Prevention Scheme (a WBC project). There are now steps over the bund and the gates do not comply with BS5709. Both of these prevent access by mobility scooters and even buggies;
- Some paths are overgrown in the summer and muddy in the winter. No bridges. Uneven state of some paths and numerous hills can make it difficult for less mobile users;
- Byways in the village are suffering from vehicle use making them in accessible for riders and walkers;
- Paths that have been resurfaced have not been resurfaced with the correct material. i.e. Byway 49 for example. Signage needs to be cleared of Vegetation;
- There is a desire to create a flat circular walk in Streatley;
- Overall, the surface of the majority of footpaths are in good order. However, there are a few that become difficult to use during wet weather and securing funding for their improvement can prove difficult;
- Some public footpaths are not well maintained and vegetation such as nettles are not kept in check in others they are mown to oblivion and probably over maintained. I am unclear of how this is monitored;
- Reinstatement of paths can be a problem after ploughing;
- I have walked all the Parish footpaths as I am the Parish representative most apart from being muddy in wet times are in good condition and have been heavily used during the shut down.

Table 25: Levels of Satisfaction with Aspects of Public Rights of Way

Aspects of Public Rights of Way	Very dissatisfied %	Dissatisfied %	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied %	Satisfied %	Very satisfied %	Score
Fingerposts at ends of public rights of way	4.0	12.0	4.0	76.0	4.0	3.6
The condition of bridges	0.0	11.5	26.9	57.7	3.8	3.5
Waymarking	0.0	20.0	20.0	60.0	0.0	3.4
Reinstatement and clearance of paths through crops	3.8	7.7	34.6	53.8	0.0	3.4
Vegetation clearance / paths not overgrown	0.0	25.9	18.5	51.9	3.7	3.3
The condition of stiles and gates	0.0	26.9	19.2	53.8	0.0	3.3
Promotional material / circular walks	8.0	28.0	36.0	24.0	4.0	2.9
Surface condition	7.7	34.6	34.6	23.1	0.0	2.7
Accessibility for less mobile users	14.8	51.9	25.9	7.4	0.0	2.3

Chart 19: Levels of Satisfaction with Aspects of Public Rights of Way



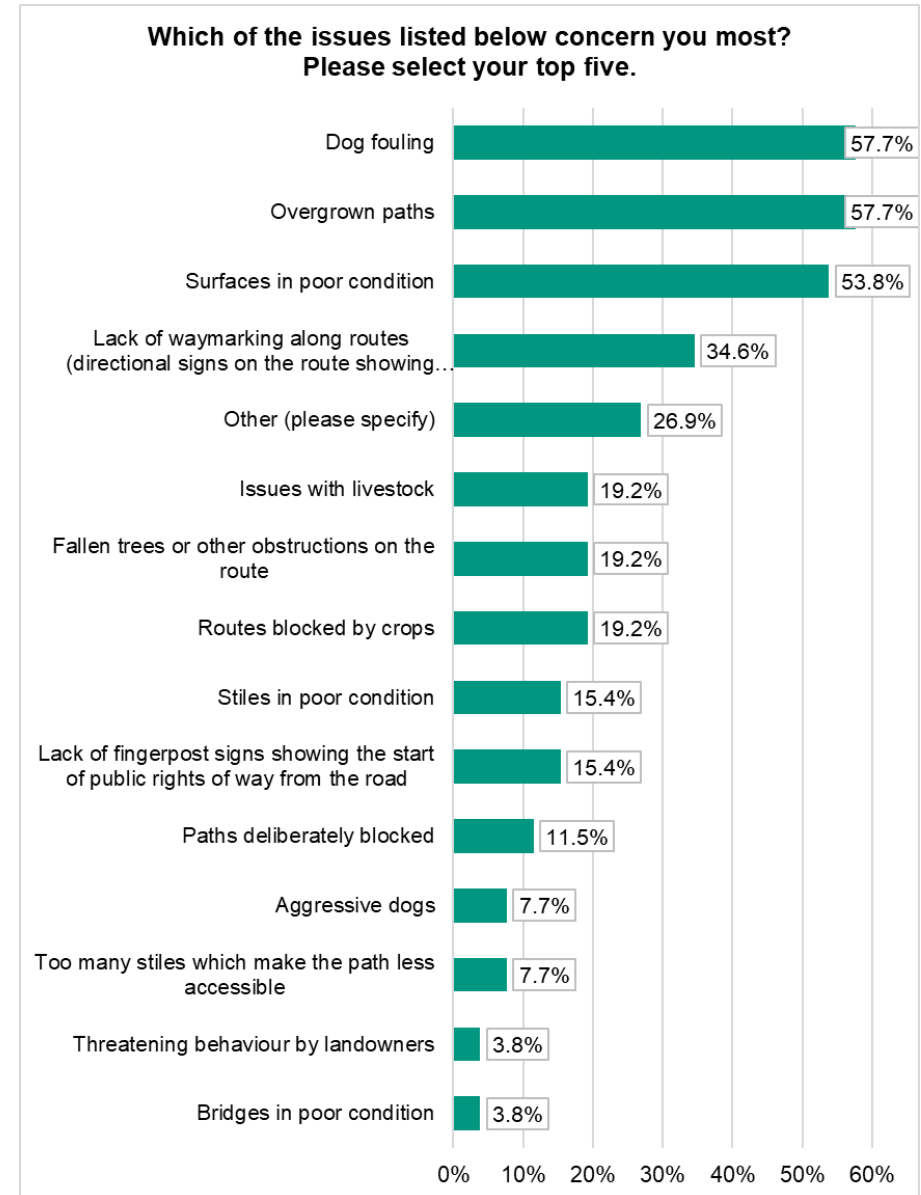
Issues of Concern

Local councils were asked to pick their top five issues which concerned them most, from a list presented to them, see Table 26 and Chart 20. Overgrown paths, dog fouling and surfaces in poor condition were the areas of greatest concern.

Table 26: Issues of Concern

Issue of Concern	Number	Percent	Percent of councils giving this as one of their answers
Overgrown paths	15	16.3%	57.7%
Dog fouling	15	16.3%	57.7%
Surfaces in poor condition	14	15.2%	53.8%
Lack of waymarking along routes (directional signs on the route showing you where to go)	9	9.8%	34.6%
Other (please specify)	7	7.6%	26.9%
Routes blocked by crops	5	5.4%	19.2%
Fallen trees or other obstructions on the route	5	5.4%	19.2%
Issues with livestock	5	5.4%	19.2%
Lack of fingerpost signs showing the start of public rights of way from the road	4	4.3%	15.4%
Stiles in poor condition	4	4.3%	15.4%
Paths deliberately blocked	3	3.3%	11.5%
Too many stiles which make the path less accessible	2	2.2%	7.7%
Aggressive dogs	2	2.2%	7.7%
Bridges in poor condition	1	1.1%	3.8%
Threatening behaviour by landowners	1	1.1%	3.8%

Chart 20: Issues of Concern



Some additional comments were made:

- Accessibility;
- Landowners repeatedly trying to block up a right of way;
- Cyclists/motor cyclists using footpaths and not giving way to walkers on byways;
- Appropriate maintenance. In some areas we could do less e.g. not spray pesticide on footpaths when not necessary;
- Overgrown brambles and stinging nettles;
- Ground often waterlogged and very difficult to get through.

Reporting Problems on Public Rights of Way

- 72% of councils said they had reported problems;
- 28% of councils had not reported problems.
- 83.3% of councils (15) had reported a maintenance issue, e.g. overgrown paths, surfacing issues;
- 27.8% (5 councils) had reported an enforcement issue;
- 22.2% (4 councils) had reported an emergency issue;

Comments under 'other' were:

- Lots of fly tipping reported;
- Cyclists using footpaths;
- Access issue;
- Lack of supply of waymark signs.

Most local councils either reported problems through WBC's 'Report a Problem' (55.6% of council's had used this service) or through contacting the Public Rights of Way Service by phone or email (61.1% of councils had used this method). Two councils had used West Berkshire Council's customer services. Two indicated they had

reported via a local councillor (not specified whether this was a parish or West Berkshire Council councillor).

Of those who used the 'Report a Problem' Service, 90% were satisfied with the service. One council was dissatisfied. There were two additional comments:

- It would be good to receive feedback when problem is solved or when it will be resolved. The Clerk does sometimes, but not always receive feedback [*were satisfied with service*];
- I have often been told that the issue has been passed to relevant person/company, but it seems to be up to me to check if it has been done. There is a major fault with the IT system. When you send a report you get an email with a reference number, but with no details of what you have sent to WBC (i.e. location, problem etc). Later you will get an email saying that the matter is now closed: again with just a reference number and no details. I send quite a few reports, and I have no idea which is which (unless I make a separate note). Surely the system could be amended so that the details as submitted are included in all future emails. [*were dissatisfied with service*].

Councils who had reported a problem were asked to rate the service of West Berkshire Council in dealing with their problem.

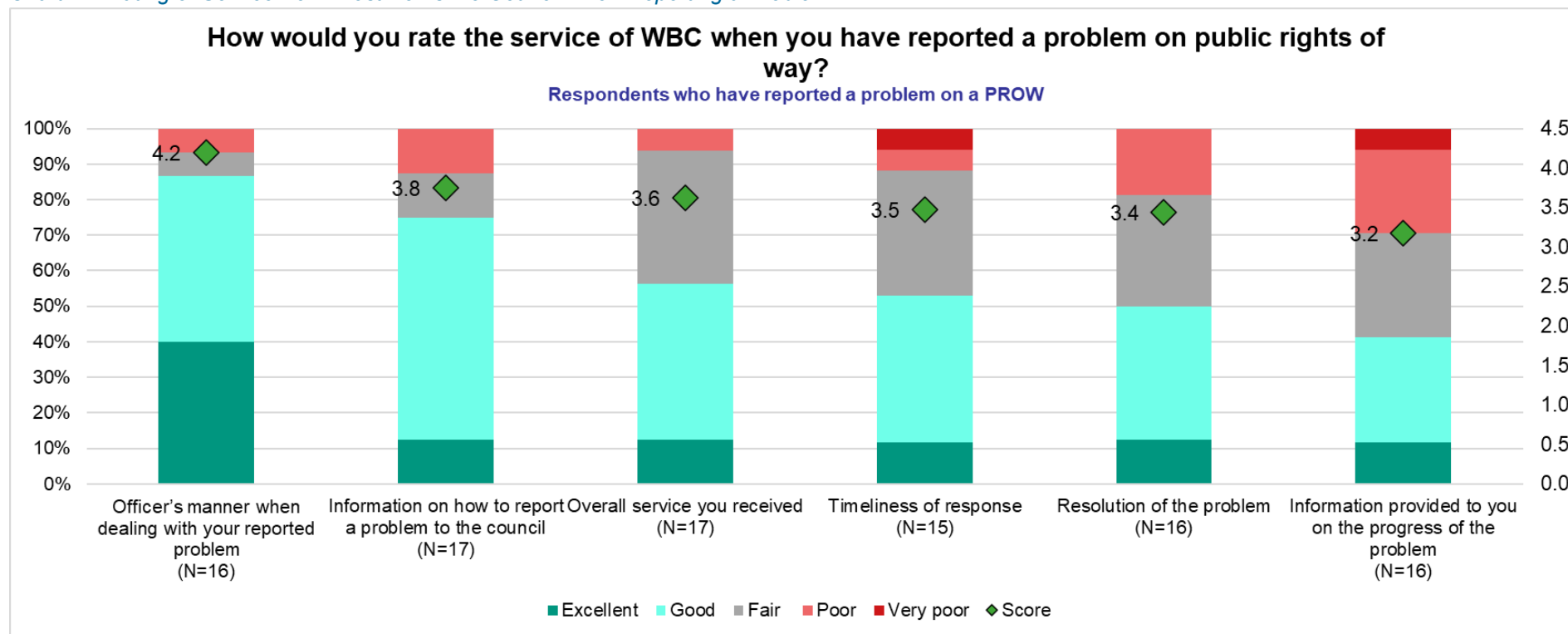
Respondents could choose from very poor, poor, fair, good or excellent. Answers were weighted to determine the level of agreement or disagreement (very poor – 1, poor – 2, fair – 3, good – 4, excellent – 5). A higher score indicates greater satisfaction.

Officer's manner dealing with the problem was rated the highest, between 'good' and 'excellent'. All other aspects were rated 'good'. No aspects were rated below good, see Table 27 and Chart 21.

Table 27: Rating of Service from West Berkshire Council when Reporting a Problem

Aspect of Service Provision	Excellent %	Good %	Fair %	Poor %	Very poor %	Score
Officer's manner when dealing with your reported problem	40.0	46.7	6.7	6.7	0.0	4.2
Information on how to report a problem to the council	12.5	62.5	12.5	12.5	0.0	3.8
Overall service you received	12.5	43.8	37.5	6.3	0.0	3.6
Timeliness of response	11.8	41.2	35.3	5.9	5.9	3.5
Resolution of the problem	12.5	37.5	31.3	18.8	0.0	3.4
Information provided to you on the progress of the problem	11.8	29.4	29.4	23.5	5.9	3.2

Chart 21: Rating of Service from West Berkshire Council when Reporting a Problem



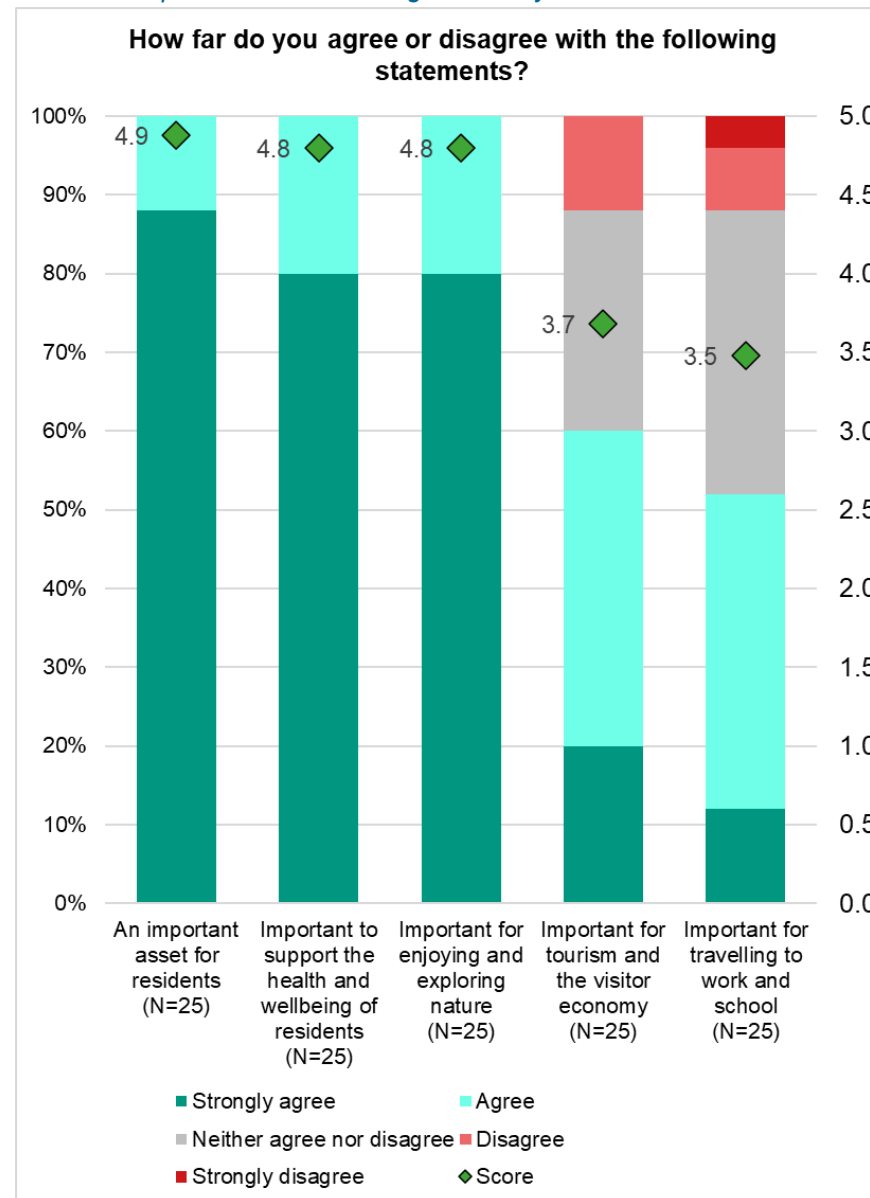
Views on the Importance of Public Rights of Way

Councils were asked a series of questions around how they viewed the importance of public rights of way. They found that all aspects of public rights of way which were listed were of importance. Importance for tourism and the visitor economy and importance for travelling to work or school were considered as slightly less important.

Table 28: Importance of Public Rights of Way

Aspect of Importance	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Agree %	Strongly agree %	Score
An important asset for residents	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.0	88.0	4.9
Important to support the health and wellbeing of residents	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	80.0	4.8
Important for enjoying and exploring nature	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	80.0	4.8
Important for tourism and the visitor economy	0.0	12.0	28.0	40.0	20.0	3.7
Important for travelling to work and school	4.0	8.0	36.0	40.0	12.0	3.5

Chart 22: Importance of Public Rights of Way



Promoted Routes

- 52% of councils indicated they had promoted routes in their area;
- 48% of councils indicated they did not have promoted routes.

Those councils which indicated they had promoted routes in their parish answered the following questions.

Most councils were satisfied with how the promoted routes were publicised and maintained, see Table 29.

Additional comments were made:

- The map needs to be updated - it still includes a shop and post office which we no longer have;
- It is disappointing that National Cycle Routes NC4 and NC422, both of which pass through Thatcham, are not promoted;
- The Sulham Valley route highlights a car park managed by the Forestry Commission which is not big enough for parishioners to use let alone those visiting from other areas;
- Only applies to Thames Path in our Parish. Signposting is an issue because the route diverges a long way from the Thames;
- The old railway line stretch of the Lambourn Valley way in Weston can often become quite overgrown and this results in a very narrow walking area.

Councils were asked whether promoted material could be improved and then chose from potential improvements (Table 30):

- 45.8% thought there were ways to improve the material
- 20.8% thought there were not;
- 33.3% did not know.

Table 29: Satisfaction with Promoted Routes

Level of Satisfaction	Satisfaction with how routes are publicised %	Satisfaction with how routes are maintained %
Very satisfied	0.0	0.0
Satisfied	61.5	91.7
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	15.4	0.0
Dissatisfied	23.1	8.3
Very dissatisfied	0.0	0.0

Table 30: Improvements to Promoted Routes

Responses	Number	Percent	Percentage of councils giving this as one of their answers
Other (please specify)	9	21.4%	81.8%
More promotional material for walking routes	7	16.7%	63.6%
More information to encourage responsible use of the countryside	6	14.3%	54.5%
More promotional material for cycling routes	6	14.3%	54.5%
Promotional material which links to local businesses, e.g. pubs	6	14.3%	54.5%
More promotional material for people living with disabilities	5	11.9%	45.5%
More promotional material for horse riding routes	3	7.1%	27.3%

Councils provided additional comments:

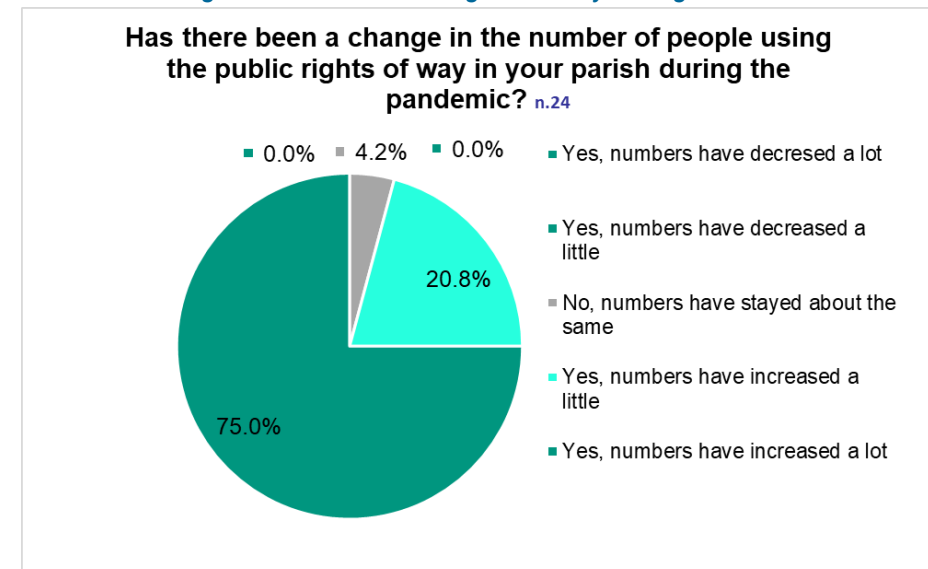
- Promotional material for walks starting and ending in Thatcham; Promotional material for walks suitable for mobility aids;
- Make material available online, not just as printed documents or PDF copies of the printed documents on websites (which are formatted for professional printing and folding);
- References to Buildings of Historical Interest;
- Keeping the material up to date especially with regard to safety concerns;
- Could our parish (Theale) have a walk maybe combined with Englefield parish referencing local business etc;
- There are three leaflets for Beenham, produced with West Berks Countryside Society in 2013. Why are they not listed? It would be good if printed leaflets were available;
- There is no specific promotional material for this Parish [*Purley on Thames*] apart from the Thames Path. This would provide walking routes linking us with adjacent Parishes to provide circular walks;
- Needs to be much more widely available;
- The routes with just maps are really unclear. The routes with words of what direction to go are better. These could also be enhanced with quizzes for children or wildlife to stop along the route;
- Cold Ash Parish is not on your list of publicised walks. However, we, the Parish Council, have a leaflet that is posted on our website. You could add a link from your website, as a short-term measure.

Public Rights of Way During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Councils were asked how important they thought public rights of way had to the health and wellbeing of residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. All councils thought public rights of way had been important (87.5% extremely important; 12.5% very important).

Most councils (95.8%) reported that the number of people using public rights of way had increased during the pandemic and associated lockdowns. No councils said that use had decreased. See Chart 23.

Chart 23: Changes in use of Public Rights of Way during the Pandemic



Additional comments were:

- Anecdotal evidence of very significant increase in use;
- We did see more walkers last year but less so now people have returned to work and school;
- A lot of non-local people have been using the footpaths as well as locals that would not normally be out and about;
- We have also relied very heavily on permitted rights of way in Englefield Estate lands without which we would have been seriously restricted in where we could go as a Parish, especially in the winter. With the considerable planned increase to our housing this will only get worse of course.
- Only thing that has kept people sane around here;
- Never before have the footpaths been more used;
- The increased use of PROWs during the pandemic has been a major contribution to increased physical and mental wellbeing. Getting people to undertake voluntary work on them could add to the benefits, for both parties;
- I have seen a great increase in walkers during the pandemic.

Councils were asked whether the increase in use had caused any problems.

- 73.9% said it had caused some problems;
- 17.4% said it had not caused problems;
- 8.7% did not know.

A range of problems were noted. Many of these related to increases in litter and dog fouling, and deterioration of surfaces. Some councils reported disputes between users and issues with social distancing not being adhered to.

The problems noted (in full) were:

- People not clearing up after their dogs and at the same time overflowing dog bins;
- There is only a small car park in the village and this has quite often been full and as a result people have struggled to find somewhere to park. Also as a result of more people visiting the village with dogs there have been several occasions where the dog bins have been overflowing;
- Deterioration of muddy surfaces over winter. Significant issues between pedestrians and cyclists on towpath;
- Caused arguments between landowners and users. Increase complaints on dog fouling. Complaints on how farmers manage footpaths;
- Dog fouling complaints;
- Surface wear - we would like to see the laying of woodchip on paths that are frequently muddy as the surrounding vegetation gets damaged when this happens;
- Disputes between walkers and other users;
- Increase in dog waste being bagged and the bags left behind. It would be better to promote the message of either bag it and take it OR flick it off the paths;
- Serious safety issues with dangerous parking at the entrance to Sulham Woods. WBDC Officers did act quickly to get enforcements in place but the Forestry Commission who manage the car park need to be pressured to expand the car park;
- Increased dog fouling, overflowing dog waste bins. More litter, overflowing litter bins with an increase of fly tipping. Increased motorised vehicles damaging byways;

- During the first lockdown people would picnic or sit close to the footpaths. People congregate around gates and stiles. Not allowing social distancing on narrow paths especially children;
- Increase in dog fouling and litter;
- Litter, dog fouling, maintaining social distancing;
- Litter near footpaths Increased wear to surface and gates etc.; cycling along footpaths Trespassing over adjacent fields
- More damage to surfaces and to stiles etc.;
- Huge increase in waste, which has led to an increase in costs due to the purchase of additional bins;
- Wet weather. Muddy patches make the footpaths wider as walkers try to avoid them. Inevitable;
- Increased litter and dog foul and more complaints about inconsiderate usage of the footpaths;
- As a Parish Councillor, we receive complaints from users which are mainly based around landowner action and/or the surface of the PROW. The actions can take the form of:
 - Blocking the PROW
 - Obscuring the PROW (i.e. planting over a path)
 - Use of barbed wire/electric fences adjacent to the PROW
 - Aggressive unofficial signage
 - Verbal abuse from landowners. Surface issues can be a result of owner action or user behaviour.

The councils were then asked what actions the public rights of way service could take to support the new audience which had been introduced to public rights of way during the pandemic.

The most frequently comments could be summarised as better signposting or provision of waymarked routes, providing information on responsible use of the countryside and good maintenance.

The comments received are shown below in full:

- Ensure that footpaths are clearly signed and well maintained. At the end of last year we installed 4 maps throughout the parish showing the public footpaths highlighting what is available in the parish;
- Ensure there is clear signage and that footpaths are well maintained;
- Well maintained paths and stiles with easy access. Good signage so paths can be followed;
- Well-marked circular routes. Identify and promote walking and cycling routes north of Thatcham;
- Better education to respect other users, landowners and the routes that are offered. Not sure how to communicate this;
- Keep the paths clear;
- Education - not sure how;
- Promotion of the countryside code and considerate use;
- To clear signage of vegetation, so people can read the signs and know not to trespass on private property;
- Update the code/guidelines of what is and is not acceptable;
- Increased litter picking and collection. Increased promotional material encouraging people to pick their poo up/take it home. Increased maintenance to ensure people stick to the paths;
- More dog bin, litter bins, signs to promote the countryside code, more information on local walks some enforcement on dog fouling etc- some prosecutions perhaps? Some interpretation boards to promote the area and its wildlife maybe too;
- Get rid of mud. Prepare a long term schedule of planned improvements to ROW. Have Open Evenings for councillors and other interested people;

- Education on proper use of footpaths, open farmland and livestock. Ensure that walkers keep to footpath and not walk all over fields;
- Keep them in good condition;
- Increased waste collections and provision of receptacles. More support from the dog warden to prevent dog fouling;
- As more people work from home, I hope paths will continue to be used. The choice is an individual one. Self-motivation is the prime factor;
- Ensure they understand the rules of the countryside;
- More sign posting, more promotion of maps available - through social media etc. More circular routes so people less tempted to walk across areas/fields that they shouldn't;
- Publish a countryside guide that recognises that users and landowners need to work in harmony and respect the environment.

Accommodating Future Needs

The councils were asked “*What improvements do you think need to be made to the public rights of way network to accommodate future needs, e.g. increased population in West Berkshire?*”. The following suggestions were made:

- Need to be well sign posted, well maintained, so that everyone can enjoy them - consider adding a few more;
- Any development should maintain the character of Rights of Way, either through or adjacent to the development. Resurfacing of popular paths. Measures to improve road safety where paths meet, or cross, roads, i.e. warning signs for drivers etc. Footpaths where pedestrians walk along short

- sections of road to improve connectivity of offset paths. Pedestrian refuges. Provide a safer alternative for footpath THAT/15/2 at rail-track crossing;
- We have a wide range of paths in Ashampstead and the surrounding area. Whilst it would be good to have all paths cleared regularly it would be difficult to justify the cost. Volunteers do keep some paths clear. We would not need more paths in our area;
- More joining of paths to create routes;
- Restrictions on vehicle usage on byways during wet periods;
- Promoted routes need more infrastructure to accommodate people arriving in vehicles. The service needs more funding to support Officers to carry out existing projects and to ensure the network is maintained;
- Increase in parking at popular spots to prevent cars blocking roads Maintenance of flat routes for disabled;
- A continued maintenance programme that ensures easy and open access to the footpaths and bridleways;
- Greater access to the countryside if possible and continue to look for opportunities to improve cycling, walking and horse riding. Can we look to grow the network with landowner support?;
- I took over footpaths for Beenham PC several years ago. I tried to meet with WBC to find out what I could do to improve things (i.e. who owns what, what funds are available etc). But I never managed to get a meeting. Maybe an occasional zoom meeting to discuss ROW issues would be a good idea;
- Complete the Thames Path route from the end of Skerritt Way under the Railway and through the Marina along the River Thames. Footpath connecting Sulham Woods and Goosecroft Parish Council Site. Footpath connecting Westbury Lane to the

Thames Path Convert the permitted path along the north side of the railway into a Bridleway to link Purley and Pangbourne;

- Several permitted paths need to be converted to proper rights of way;
- Improve accessibility;
- Continue good maintenance and ensure that the way marking is clear;
- Better access for all users would be ideal and good links to business and town centres to encourage more sustainable travel. People also need to be encouraged to be more considerate of each other. We have a lot of complaints from walkers regarding runners and from runners regarding cyclists;
- More connections between villages to connect communities;
- More circular routes that mean you don't have to end up on busy roads;
- Change your model to a public/voluntary arrangement, where WBC works in harmony with local organisations (Parish Councils and any other organisations that are happy to get involved). There are devolved powers, under which Parish Councils can operate, but these are not widely taken up. This needs to be encouraged through support and guidance. Setting up local Footpath Marshall's with local organisations (we're looking to set one up in our parish and, I'm aware, that the South Oxford Ramblers have set up a similar scheme in their area). This could cover monitoring and light maintenance, to ensure continued access. Support local voluntary groups with funding for materials, to improve PROW (i.e. a delivery option that would significantly reduce costs, by leveraging free labour). Invest appropriately in the WBC team;
- Accessibility for the very young and the disabled.

Priorities of the Public Rights of Way Service

Councils were asked for their level of agreement with a list of priorities. Councils could choose from strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree or strongly agree. Answers were weighted to determine the level of agreement or disagreement (strongly disagree – 1, disagree – 2, neither agree nor disagree – 3, agree – 4, strongly agree – 5). A score over 3 indicates that on average respondents agreed with the statement and the closer the value to 5, the higher the level of agreement with the statement. The results are shown in Table 31 and Chart 24.

The highest priorities for councils (equal by overall score) were to protect and create sites through development and other projects and to maintain and invest in the current network. Lowest was supporting parish councils and community organisations in taking a more active role in public rights of way, although the overall score indicated that the councils were in agreement with the statement.

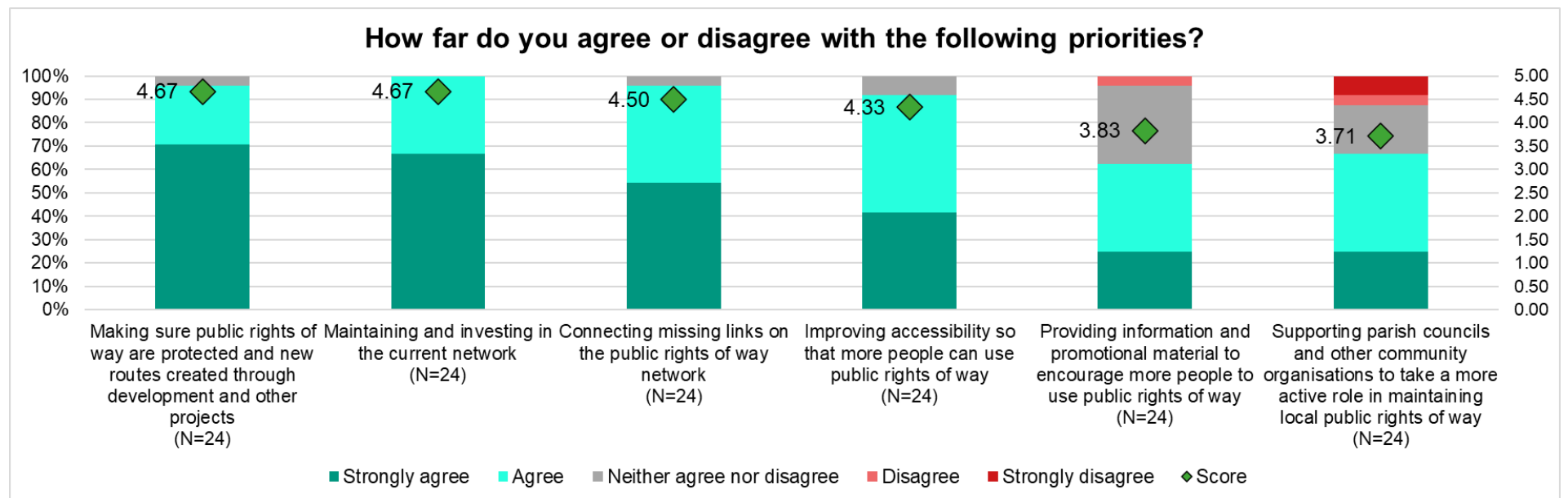
Some councils provide additional comments:

- We would like to work with WBC to look at creation of a new route;
- The majority of Parish Councils in West Berkshire do not have the staff and financial resources to become more active;
- Parish councils could perhaps help advise on local improvement areas or issues etc but could not take over responsibility for maintenance- they are volunteers and also have financial restrictions etc.;
- Every parish should have at least one walk that is accessible to everyone - even in winter;
- Pretty obvious questions, who is going to disagree with those.

Table 31: Potential Priorities for the Public Rights of Way Service

Potential Priorities	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Agree %	Strongly agree %	Score
Making sure public rights of way are protected and new routes created through development and other projects	0.0	0.0	4.2	25.0	70.8	4.67
Maintaining and investing in the current network	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	66.7	4.67
Connecting missing links on the public rights of way network	0.0	0.0	4.2	41.7	54.2	4.50
Improving accessibility so that more people can use public rights of way	0.0	0.0	8.3	50.0	41.7	4.33
Providing information and promotional material to encourage more people to use public rights of way	0.0	4.2	33.3	37.5	25.0	3.83
Supporting parish councils and other community organisations to take a more active role in maintaining local public rights of way	8.3	4.2	20.8	41.7	25.0	3.71

Chart 24: Potential Priorities for the Public Rights of Way Service



Some councils suggested additional priorities:

- We receive complaints about stiles not being accessible - either for users and for walkers with large dogs! Difficult one to solve as fields often contain livestock;
- There is an increase in motorised vehicles that are using byways. (4 x 4's, motorbikes). They are damaging the paths and making some routes unpassable. CPC ask that Byway 49 and 36 is changed to a restricted byway. The safety of small children and animals are also at risk from the speed of these vehicles;
- Dog and litter bins at prominent points to help keep the countryside clean;
- Litter;
- The environment. Do we do too much hedge flailing, and mowing or spraying and at the wrong times and wrong frequency? There must be some cost savings to be had there that would also benefit the environment;
- To differentiate between field environmental headlands and legal footpaths . Footpaths that cross arable fields could be rerouted around the edges and headlands.

Any Other Comments

Councils could provide any other final comments:

- Provide each Parish Council with an easy to read document of where the footpaths and rights of way are within their parish;
- A community panel of volunteers across WB who could meet regularly throughout the year to communicate any issues on PROW;
- It would be helpful to prepare a schedule of ROW for each parish, with details of who owns it and/or who is responsible for maintenance;
- A few strategically placed nature related information signs would help inform the walking population.

Landowner Survey

A survey was distributed to landowners through the Country Land and Business Association and the National Farmers Union. Unfortunately, uptake was low with only 10 landowners responding. Nonetheless, this gave useful insight.

Positive Contribution of Public Rights of Way

Landowners were asked if they thought the public rights of way on their land made a positive contribution to their local community. All landowners (100% n.10) thought they did.

Landowners were then asked in what was they thought public rights of way made a positive contribution from a list supplied, see Table 32.

- 90% of landowners recognised the positive contribution to health and wellbeing;
- 60% thought they had a positive contribution to increasing knowledge of the countryside;
- Only one landowner thought they directly benefitted their business.

One other response was given:

- We have seen a large increase in footfall due to COVID-19, what we lack is the education of the general public regarding the countryside code, picking up dog mess, leaving litter along with throwing it out of cars as they are driving, and disposable barbecues.

Table 32: Potential Benefits of Public Rights of Way - Landowner Responses

Potential Benefits	Number	Percent	Percent of landowners giving this as one of their answers
They support health and wellbeing	9	40.9%	90.0%
They increase users awareness and knowledge of the countryside	6	27.3%	60.0%
They benefit the local economy, e.g. through supporting pubs or tourism	5	22.7%	50.0%
They benefit my business, e.g. campsite, farm shop, B&B	1	4.5%	10.0%
Other (please specify)	1	4.5%	10.0%
People report problems on my land, e.g. in regard to animals	0	0.0%	0.0%

Issues with Public Rights of Way

Landowners were asked if they had experienced any problems related to the presence of public rights of way on their land. 90% of landowners had experienced problems, see Table 33.

- All of the landowners had experienced an issue with dogs off of leads bothering stock;
- 88.9% of landowners had experienced issues with trespassing, littering, disturbance or damage to the nature conservation interest of their land and illegal use, e.g. by motorbikes.

There were two additional comments:

- Cyclist riding on CROW land along with the use of drones as well as irresponsible drivers driving over the common and chasing cattle. Purposefully breaking drink bottles to cause harm to livestock;

- We always have a number of walkers and horse riders who refuse to stick to the footpaths/bridleways as they feel they should be allowed to make their own routes. However, in lockdown this has become a more significant problem. We find it very difficult to know how best to deal with those off the paths without causing offense / upset in the local villages. If people aren't on public rights of way it makes it much more difficult for us to keep them safe, should we be shooting, spraying or carrying out forestry operations.

Table 33: Problems Encountered by Landowners

Problem	Number	Percent	Percent of landowners choosing this answer
Dogs not on the lead and bothering stock	9	13.4%	100.0%
Trespassing	8	11.9%	88.9%
Littering	8	11.9%	88.9%
Disturbance or damage to the nature conservation interest of your land	8	11.9%	88.9%
Illegal use, e.g. by motorbikes	8	11.9%	88.9%
People not closing gates behind them	7	10.4%	77.8%
People getting lost	6	9.0%	66.7%
Damage to path surfaces from overuse/misuse	6	9.0%	66.7%
Crime and security issues	5	7.5%	55.6%
Other (please specify)	2	3.0%	22.2%

Information and Support for Landowners

Landowners were asked if West Berkshire Council should provide more information on landowner responsibilities for public rights of way:

- 66.7% did not want further information;
- 33.3% did want further information.

One comment was made on the type of information which would be useful:

- Info on permissive paths, the right of closure (temporary). What represents a normal path condition.

Landowners were also asked how West Berkshire Council could help them to manage public rights of way on their land:

- See answers in 7 above [*repairing surfaces and motor vehicle damage*];
- To have a discussion with the relevant person on site to ascertain and to explain the layout of our land to improve communications and understanding;
- I don't know. It feels like a lost cause educating sections of the public about responsible behaviour in the countryside. Start with the schools? More notices?;
- Assist in policing illegal activity;
- Signposting to include distinguishing footpaths from bridleways and byways would be good;
- More awareness to public about wildlife and livestock. Spraying pesticides in fields;
- Give us more notice on intended works i.e. Gigaclear;
- There needs to be more of a debate about how they are used and maintained.

Public Rights of Way During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Landowners were asked if there had been a change in the number of people using public rights of way during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 80% of landowners reported that numbers had increased a little or a lot;
- 20% of landowners reported that numbers had decreased a lot.

Those landowners who had reported an increase were then asked if this had caused any problems.

- 87.5% reported that it had caused a problem (n.8)

Landowners were asked to provide more details. Many of these comments related to increases in littering, dog mess and visitors not keeping to public rights of way:

- Increased littering. Uncontrolled dogs. Large quantities of dog poo bags left in my front garden deliberately;
- Littering, damage to PRoW, Trespass;
- More people off the public rights of way. Considerable trespassing from those up to no good at night in 4 x 4's etc.;
- People finding there is too many walkers on paths. They then decide to make their own route across private property (fields) and across our environmental margins. More people have purchased dogs which they cannot control. This has led to several dog attacks on livestock. Several walkers having picnics near dry fields and not taking rubbish with them. Poo bags hung on fences and hedges and not taken away;

- People wandering all over the land and not sticking to PROW's;
- People wandering everywhere, not sticking to footpaths, which not only can be hazardous in woodland but causes to wildlife especially at springtime.

Landowners were asked for suggestions around how the public rights of way service could help to ensure any continued increase in users was not detrimental to the countryside and rural businesses:

- Ensure that unsurfaced footpaths and bridleways are not used and abused by recreational motor vehicles;
- Countryside Code notices on paths and byways. Heavier fines and prosecution for fly tipping;
- Signage and education;
- We love to have people in the countryside and are currently preparing some boards with QR codes so that people walking on the Estate can access information about what they are seeing as they walk - the wildlife, woodlands, animals, crops etc. We would love to be able to make a difference to people's experience so that they understand what we are trying to do;
- Increased signage encouraging public to keep to paths. Official parking Areas which don't block field and farm entrances. Keep dogs on leads signage to reduce farms financial loss from attacks. Would be nice for dogs to be kept on leads during bird nesting season. (March-June);
- Remind people that all PROW's are privately owned with the public's right to pass over. Also the combination of council and landowner responsibilities generally are taken very seriously for the benefit of walkers;
- Use more signage. Add fines for littering and countryside code.

Priorities for the Public Rights of Way Service

Landowners were asked what areas of public rights of way work they thought were the most important from a list, see Chart 25 and Table 34.

- All landowners thought that education the public around the Countryside Code and responsibilities in the countryside was important;
- 66.7% thought providing and maintaining waymarking and signage were important (second highest).

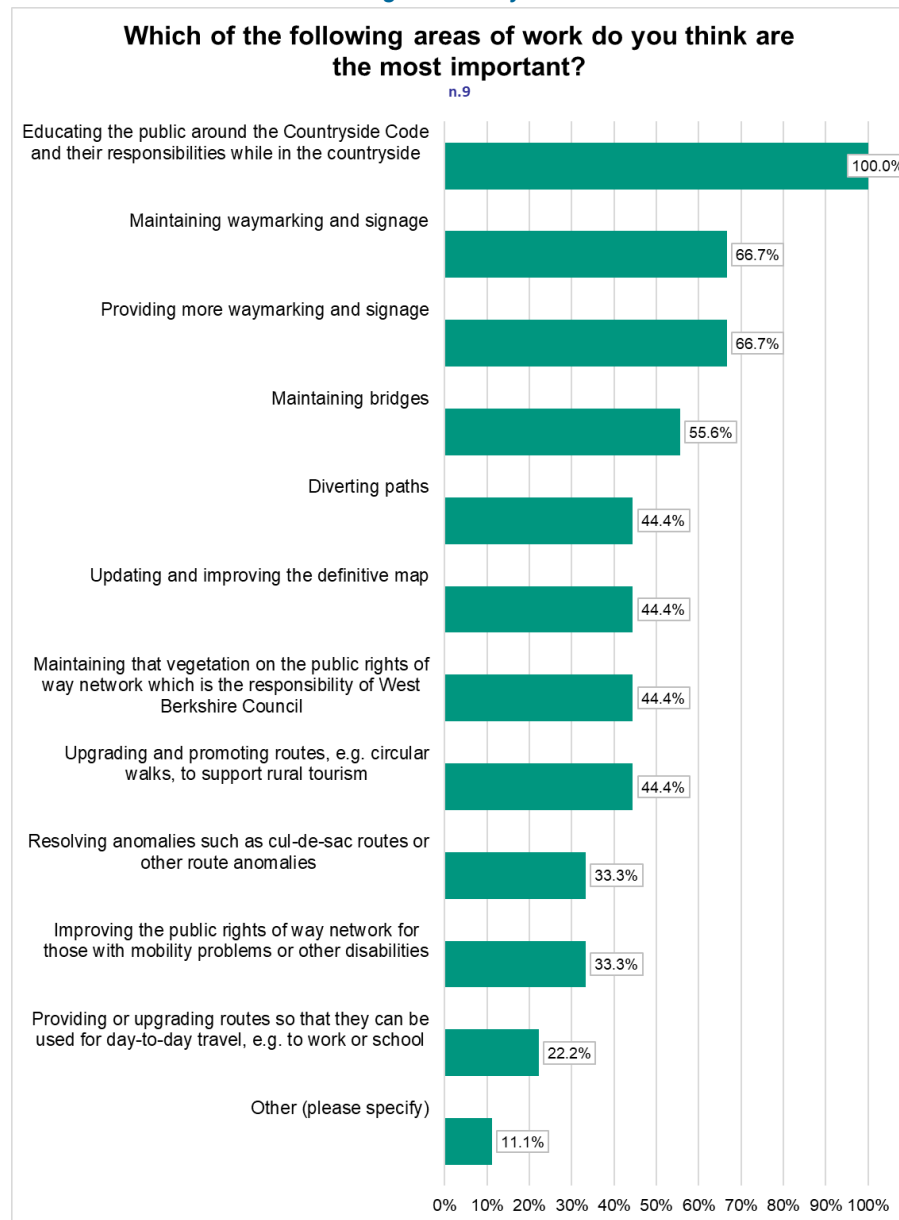
One additional comment was made:

- Repairing damage done by motor vehicles, and stop it being repeated. Improve drainage of rights of way. Prevent and remove fly tipping on rights of way.

Table 34: Priorities for Public Rights of Way Service

Priorities	Number	Percent	Percent of landowners giving this as one of their answers
Educating the public around the Countryside Code and their responsibilities while in the countryside	9	17.6%	100.0%
Providing more waymarking and signage	6	11.8%	66.7%
Maintaining waymarking and signage	6	11.8%	66.7%
Maintaining bridges	5	9.8%	55.6%
Upgrading and promoting routes, e.g. circular walks, to support rural tourism	4	7.8%	44.4%
Maintaining that vegetation on the public rights of way network which is the responsibility of West Berkshire Council	4	7.8%	44.4%
Updating and improving the definitive map	4	7.8%	44.4%
Diverting paths	4	7.8%	44.4%
Improving the public rights of way network for those with mobility problems or other disabilities	3	5.9%	33.3%
Resolving anomalies such as cul-de-sac routes or other route anomalies	3	5.9%	33.3%
Providing or upgrading routes so that they can be used for day-to-day travel, e.g. to work or school	2	3.9%	22.2%
Other (please specify)	1	2.0%	11.1%

Chart 25: Priorities for Public Rights of Way Service



Reporting Problems on Public Rights of Way

Landowners were asked if they had reported a public rights of way issue to West Berkshire Council in the previous two years and the method they had used:

- 62.5% had reported a problem;
- 37.5% had not reported a problem.
- 80% had reported the problem directly to the public rights of way team by email or telephone;
- 40% had reported using West Berkshire Council's 'Report a Problem' service;
- No other methods had been used.

Landowners who had reported a problem were asked to rate the service of West Berkshire Council in dealing with their problem. Only 5 landowners answered this section and therefore the sample size is very low.

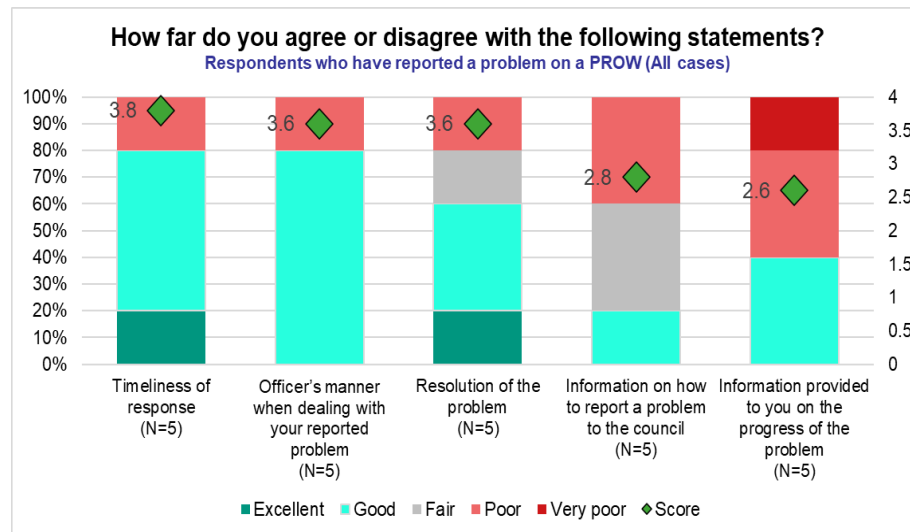
Landowners could choose from very poor, poor, fair, good or excellent. Answers were weighted to determine the level of agreement or disagreement (very poor – 1, poor – 2, fair – 3, good – 4, excellent – 5). A higher score indicates greater satisfaction, see Table 35 and Chart 26.

- Landowners thought timeliness of response, officer's manner in dealing with the problem and resolution of the problem were 'good';
- Information on how to report a problem to the council and information provided on the progress of the problem were rated as 'poor'.

Table 35: Rating of Service from West Berkshire Council when Reporting a Problem

Aspects of Service Provision	Excellent %	Good %	Fair %	Poor %	Very poor %	Score %
Timeliness of response	20.0	60.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	3.8
Officer's manner when dealing with your reported problem	0.0	80.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	3.6
Resolution of the problem	20.0	40.0	20.0	20.0	0.0	3.6
Information on how to report a problem to the council	0.0	20.0	40.0	40.0	0.0	2.8
Information provided to you on the progress of the problem	0.0	40.0	0.0	40.0	20.0	2.6

Chart 26: Rating of Service from West Berkshire Council when Reporting a Problem



Any Other Comments

Landowners could provide any further comments:

- Keep motor vehicles off unsurfaced rights of way;
- Can't think of anything obvious. Just keep stressing that with "Rights" come "Responsibilities";
- Make sure everybody knows the difference between public rights of way, private land and open access land (Crow Act);
- A new cycle/walking/riding way has been proposed alongside the B4494 past Rose Cottage and Pillar Box cottage. This is one of the most dangerous roads in West Berks and is madness! If this scheme is still going to go ahead, the local community will oppose it in every way possible.

Stakeholder Interviews and Written Responses

Supporting Health and Wellbeing and COVID-19 Pandemic

This section includes comments from:

- *Age UK*
 - *Canal and River Trust*
 - *Cold Ash Parish Council*
 - *Mid Berks Ramblers*
 - *Mobility Issues Group for Goring and Streatley (MIGGS)*
 - *Pang Valley Rambler Group*
 - *Trail Riders Fellowship*
 - *West Berkshire Countryside Society*
 - *West Berkshire Walking for Health*
 - *West Berkshire Ramblers*
 - *Wokingham Greenways*
- There are 10-12 regular health walks in West Berkshire, all of which are run by trained volunteer leaders. Most of them are weekly; some operate a couple of times each month. None of them have stiles and all are very accessible. The scheme is hoping to expand to more rural areas and to increase use of public rights of way. There are options to develop social prescribing;
 - Lack of seating across locations for older people. Lockdown has led to deconditioning in many older people due to lack of exercise so they are unable to walk the distances that they previously could. A lack of seating is therefore prohibitive to them getting out and about;
 - The [Canal and River] Trust has experienced a significant level of towpath usage during the last 12 months. Many routes were closed on a temporary basis following Government Guidance, but when allowed to open they have been extensively used for exercise, wellbeing and relaxation, as well as a commuter route for cycling, walking to work away from road traffic. We anticipate this trend may continue as the lockdown comes to an end across England and Wales;
 - The increased use of PROWs during the pandemic has been a major contribution to increased physical and mental wellbeing. Getting people to undertake voluntary work on them could add to the benefits, for both parties;
 - Since the start of the COVID pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in the number of people using the PROWs around the parish. This has led to much more impact on the walking surfaces, turning some of them into a quagmire, during wet periods. This, in turn, has led to people walking on a wider area than the PROW, which can have adverse impact on the landowners fields and local wildlife. Some landowners have responded, putting up additional fencing and restrictions. All of this has led to a number of complaints being made by PROW users. Whilst we haven't received any complaints from landowners directly, it's clear that many are unhappy with the impact the new and increased number of users are having on their land;

- The current COVID pandemic has highlighted the importance of exercise and encouraged wider use of footpaths and cycleways. It has also shown that access to the countryside is beneficial to public health, and that easy access is also important. So availability and ease of use become more important.
- Cycling and running have increased during the pandemic and is likely to continue at a high level. Cyclists have the advantage over Ramblers because they can travel longer distances without recourse to public or private transport;
- The pandemic has encouraged people to exercise more by walking, cycling and other activities. I have explained above the problems of limited public transport, the resultant increase of private transport and the car parking problems. Added to this is the need for accessibility for those with restrictive medical conditions. So the Local Authority will have to cater for these deficiencies;
- Arrange litter clearance from paths, parks and car parks. Possibly a volunteer scheme like Reading Borough Council's RAYS;
- The increased use of PROWs during the pandemic has been a major contribution to increased physical and mental wellbeing. Getting people to undertake voluntary work on them could add to the benefits, for both parties;
- Circular trails should be devised and marked for example a 1-mile trail, a 3-mile trail and 6-mile trail, with good car parking / public transport links at the start of each trail, to encourage people to walk for health before branching out to design their own walks;
- Create well signed and well-furnished short circular trails with good car parking / public transport links and advertise the walks through Doctor's surgeries and hospitals. Provide areas for dog owners to 'exercise' their dogs in their locality avoiding the need to drive to places others walk. Many parishes in West Berkshire have leaflets showing footpaths in the parish. WBC could work with each parish to provide leaflets downloadable from both parish and WBC website;
- It is clear from feedback and experience on the ground that there are competing needs of users already on Rights of Way in this area, and that the pandemic has increased the pressure on these resources. This is evident particularly on the Kennet and Avon Canal walkway where there are complaints of speedy cyclists endangering vulnerable users, and of course cyclists risk dangers from speeding cars where routes cross roadways, which will deter use of the routes unless these issues are addressed;
- Trail riding is a recognised form of exercise and reducing the available network restricts those who to choose to exercise through trail riding. Trail riding delivers a significant mental health benefit. Reducing the network increases stress on trail riders damaging their mental health. Many trail riders are over 65 and trail riding enables them to access the countryside in a way not possible through other methods such as walking or cycling as they have reduced physical mobility themselves. Removing access therefore damages the wellbeing of this section of society;
- There is an organised scheme of heath walks covering Goring and Streatley.³

³ <https://www.goringgapwalks.co.uk/>

People Living with Visual Impairment

This section includes comments from:

- *Berkshire Vision (two individuals – one blind and one with limited vision; both lost sight later in life)*
 - *West Berkshire Council Sensory Needs Service*
- Getting to public rights of way can be difficult, it is not just following the path itself which presents challenges. Issues such as crossing roads, parked cars and other obstacles can make actually reaching the public right of way hard for visually impaired people;
 - There is a lot of bureaucracy and poor communication which isn't actually responding to making things more accessible, particularly for visually impaired people;
 - Handrails are important on steps and bridges;
 - To accommodate a lack of peripheral vision, [my son] would avoid any area where he is likely to bump into people at the side or walking across his path. The second problem is to do with the uneven surface of the path; this has caused few trips on stones or potholes in the past;
 - Vegetation can be an issue especially overhanging branches;
 - It is important to know where the edges are on paths – this is easier with kerb stones in an urban environment than in the countryside;
 - Maintenance is important. Stiles and steps can often be negotiated with care but wobbly or damaged structures are hazardous and difficult to use;
 - Kissing gates are preferable to stiles;
 - Improving the standard to British Standard is needed across the network, over time;
 - In general, changes are difficult to deal with. If you know a route well it is difficult when conditions change (furniture, surface, trip hazards, obstacles blocking the path etc.) and takes a while to work it out;
 - Worry more about sudden drops, canal edges, slopes or mud than trying to get through a gate or stile – as the other hazards are unknown and unexpected;
 - Steps should have long treads and be regular, not different heights and widths;
 - Bikes are difficult as quiet and can be travelling fast;
 - Railway crossings and water are hazardous;
 - When lose sight you lose confidence and it is difficult to go out and explore. Need people to help you. Either friends and family or support from groups such as Berkshire Vision. Most partially sighted and blind people walk with a sighted guide;
 - The sighted guide will most often walk alongside, which means that a wider path is better. It is more difficult to use a narrow path where the route is only wide enough for one person;
 - Tend to go to the same places which you know and where you know what you will find, and where paths are in a good condition;
 - Would be good to link up with Health Walks to meet people and explore more areas;
 - Berkshire Vision run a walking group. There are 20 people on a walk with 4 volunteers.

People Living with Mobility Impairments and Dementia

This section includes comments from:

- *Age UK*
 - *Canal and River Trust*
 - *Local Access Forum Disabled Access Group*
 - *Mid Berks Ramblers*
 - *Mobility Issues Group for Goring and Streatley*
 - *Pang Valley Rambler Group*
 - *West Berkshire Ramblers*
 - *Wokingham Greenways*
- Local Access Forum Disabled Access Group tabled 10 points which should be included in the new Rights of Way Improvement Plan. These covered (in summary):
 - Providing information online on parts of the network which are already accessible;
 - Improving path surfaces, widths and removing inaccessible infrastructure;
 - Develop accessible circular routes;
 - Maintain surfaces and keep clear of overhanging vegetation;
 - Parking spaces which are sufficiently large to accommodate and unload vehicles with mobility scooters;
 - Ensure any diverted routes are suitable for disabled access where physically possible;
 - Set up a user group to work with the Public Rights of Way team on issues of important to people living with disabilities;
 - Involve the Local Access Forum in discussion around paths affected by development;
 - Provide updates on progress of Rights of Way Improvement Plan actions relating to access for people living with disabilities, including the number of paths which have been improved, routes waymarked as suitable for disabled people and number of disabled-friendly gates installed.
 - Information needed on West Berkshire Council's website on suitable routes on the public rights of way network for people living with disabilities. Highlight routes which have been improved for disabled people;
 - Annual report needed on works that have been done to improve the network and information for people with disabilities;
 - Install and promote one circular route each year;
 - Documenting the routes used by Walking for Health could be a good way to begin getting a suite of accessible routes together;
 - There are lots of promoted routes already on West Berkshire Council's website – can any of these be adapted to provide information for people with disabilities?;
 - Develop 'Miles without Stiles' – Wokefield (e.g. the common), Snelsmore, Thatcham and Padworth could be good places;
 - Impossible for those with a mobility scooter to get past stiles and kissing gates. This also applies to pushchairs;
 - One of the main issues is the provision of information as don't know which paths are suitable for wheelchairs and disabled scooter;
 - Want 3 or 4 walks with good information, so that have confidence that they can do a circular route, with a leaflet detailing, showing

exits and infrastructure. Have not come across anything like this in West Berkshire to date;

- Boards could be installed at points along the route so know where you are and where to go giving clear information;
- Some infrastructure, such as large mobility gates, are expensive, but grants are available and it may be possible to work with partners (e.g. BBOWT) to progress projects;
- Bring together representatives from a range of organisations representing people with disabilities to meet with Public Rights of Way team annually;
- Many disabled people were once abled-bodied – and many people will become disabled later in life. The issue affects most people or their families;
- There is a lack of seating for older people and those with mobility impairments;
- With specific reference to people living with dementia the guidance around seating is - Does any seating look like seating? People with dementia will find this easier - so for example a wooden bench would be preferable to an abstract metal Z-shaped bench;
- Shorter walks are needed, which show detail on how accessible the route is. Even better if the route includes refreshments, toilets and seating;
- Toilets are very important for older and disabled people (this was raised by all stakeholders). It is important to show toilets on the

⁴ Although the water was raised as a hazard by visual impaired users, made more difficult due to use of path by cyclists.

promotional material, although there are fewer public toilets now, which creates a barrier for these groups of people;

- Maps should be clear and easy to read and understandable. Not everyone understands Ordnance Survey maps so think carefully about design and wording (for example say 'Parking' rather than 'P'). Include lots of relevant information so that people have enough to decide whether they can attempt the walk;
- People with dementia don't want to get lost and need good signposting. Signposting can be very difficult to understand if lots of arrows in different directions – make it clear. It also needs to be very well maintained and no waymarkers or signs missing as a person with dementia will easily become confused. Lettering needs to be legible;
- Just have a few but really well promoted and maintained, high quality accessible routes;
- Promotional material produced at present isn't inclusive;
- Add key landmarks to maps as most people with dementia way find using points of interest.
- Age UK organises dementia walks with a leader;
- Greenham Common, Snelsmore, Wokefield Common, Kennet and Avon Canal⁴ mentioned as accessible places which would benefit from promotion to this audience;
- Age UK forwarded an Age Friendly Community Guide for review;⁵.
- Most towpaths are over 200 years old, designed for a horse to pull a boat and mostly never intended to be publicly accessible. This

⁵ https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/age_friendly_places_guide.pdf

means that sometimes they are not very easy to use if you are using a wheelchair, a pram or have any other mobility issues. We'd like to change that and, wherever we can, make it easier for everyone to enjoy our waterway network where practicable. The Trust aims to provide safe multi-user access where practicable, although given the historic nature of our canals many of which are over 200 years old it is not always possible to be fully compliant with ODA especially around statutory designated structures like Listed Buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments i.e., some historic lock flights, bridges and weirs. [Canal and River Trust];

- Barriers (stiles, even gates) are significant problems for this group, which can be extended to include the elderly (we have walkers in the 90+ age group!) Path surface, particularly mud, also becomes a serious issue here;
- There has been a big move over recent years away from stiles and towards gates. That is an improvement for Ramblers but still creates barriers for the people with mobility problems. The surface of paths is an issue for all in this group. Barbed wire adjacent to paths is extremely dangerous to all who use the countryside and should be replaced along all PROW;
- Some of the trails could be designed to cater for the disabled and visually impaired, as parts of the Speen Moor path have been;
- The Newbury area benefits from the existence of many excellent areas of Common Land, and the obvious conflict here seems to

come between dog walkers and vulnerable elderly users, wheelchair or push chair users and toddlers;

- The online map is difficult to find and requires a high degree of competence to then use the layers to find stiles and gates and even then can't have a high degree of confidence in it – not enough to then venture out;
- Surfaces could be easily improved through the application of self-binding aggregate.

Tourism and Visitor Economy

This section includes comments from:

- *Mid Berks Ramblers*
- *Newbury Business Investment District (BID)*⁶
- *North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)*
- *West Berkshire Council Senior Archaeologist and Assistant Archaeologist*
- *West Berkshire Museum*⁷
- *West Berkshire Ramblers*

- The countryside of West Berkshire is an important asset for the visitor economy and there are beautiful walks;

⁶ Newbury BID (Business Improvement District) is a not-for-profit organisation formed in 2012 by local businesses, for local businesses. It is a fully independent, business-led and business-funded Community Interest Company, which exists to allow the 600+ businesses of Newbury Town Centre to work together collaboratively towards a shared vision and purpose. *“Our long-term vision is to establish Newbury as a go-to destination for businesses and visitors from all around the world, with the BID leading*

the way on place-shaping and town centre transformation.”

<https://visitnewbury.org.uk/about/>

⁷ <https://www.westberkshireheritage.org/west-berkshire-museum>

- No one is promoting West Berkshire as a whole for its visitor economy potential – using the countryside, itineraries of taking in several attractions in countryside areas and promoted routes could help support business and is currently a missed opportunity;
- Routes could also incorporate urban areas, for example heritage walks, and public art trails, or interests, such as vegan food;
- West Berkshire Museum stocks 8 local heritage guides which are sold in the shop, covering a wide range of heritage topics. There are some walks on the website which include heritage features in villages and towns (Kintbury, Hungerford, Pangbourne, and Inkpen) plus a themed on World War II guide.⁸ These don't include public rights of way but a guide could be developed using public rights of way;
- Utilise the heritage assets of the area more fully in promoted material. Work in partnership with Heritage Team to ensure accuracy of information;
- North Wessex Downs AONB ran a Walking Festival in 2019 and will running it again in 2022 (paused due to pandemic);
- North Wessex Downs AONB posts information on walking and cycling in the AONB on its website;⁹
- I'm not sure West Berkshire is a hot tourist destination. I can't think of anything immediately;
- [How to support tourism] Through increased advertising of the network of rights of way, including defined circular and linear routes for people of all abilities. This could include a new set of leaflets for walks, and online availability of the same information,

⁸ <https://www.westberkshireheritage.org/local-heritage/heritage-walks>

including downloadable gpx data. There is a large number of organisations and individuals already publishing such information, so much of the work may already have been done. Access and path maintenance may be the best areas to concentrate on;

- The economy and tourism are particularly important for the livelihood of people in the countryside. Up to date leaflets including the Lambourn valley way, need to be readily available showing routes clearly with cafe and pub stops included.

Development and Growth

This section includes comments from:

- *Mid Berks Ramblers*
- *Newbury Business Investment District (BID)*
- *Pang Valley Rambler Group*
- *West Berkshire Ramblers*
- Development should be looked at strategically to ensure that there are sustainable / active travel routes (walking and cycling) from the developments on the outskirts of Newbury into the town centre;
- The urban interface in the North Wessex Downs AONB is important for people to get out to enjoy the countryside;
- Due consideration should always be given to sustainable travel and exercise facilities in any proposed development;
- Increased population and growth could mean increased usage of PROW leading to increased erosion of path surfaces, maintenance

⁹ <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/cycling-riding/> and <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/walking/>

of gates and stiles. Therefore increased budget provision will be necessary;

- Whilst we have a good network of Row in West Berkshire there is scope to improve. New housing developments should include a requirement to extend the existing public rights of way as part of planning and the provision of local dog ‘exercising’ areas to help keep footpaths free of dog mess. Footpaths and cycle ways both need to be increased but must be kept separate whenever possible;
- While looking at planning applications we are always looking for ways to improve the ROW network, however this is rarely successful;
- A mechanism to review the performance of recent developments, say in the last 10 years, in providing new footpaths and cycle ways to the development. Has the CIL money been wisely spent, have the developments led to increase in traffic?
- Development in areas will increase the population and will increase demand for access to the countryside and accessible routes.

¹⁰ Cold Ash Parish Council also submitted a full audit of public rights of way in their parish and two PowerPoint presentations.

Active Travel

This section includes comments from:

- *Canal and River Trust*
 - *Cold Ash Parish Council¹⁰*
 - *Mid Berks Ramblers*
- There is a real opportunity to ensure high usage off-road routes like canal towpaths can be more flexibly used in the future, especially with the desire from the Government to move Cycle routes away from the road network and high volumes of traffic (LTN 1/20 - Cycle Infrastructure Design DfT 2020). The Trust are well positioned to have conversations with Local Authorities on how to promote our off-road routes, although as a Trust suitable funding must be secured to upgrade some sections of our network. Funding through S106, CIL and other sources is crucial to securing such improvements for the benefits of all users and supportive planning policies are needed, not just in the ROWIP, but in other transport, Infrastructure deliver plans and local plan documents to achieve this and maximise the benefits that the Kennet and Avon canal can bring to the West Berkshire area;
 - [Use of the public rights of way network for travelling to work or school] It depends on the location of the PROW. In our parish, some PROWs lend themselves as a route to a local school, but these are few (less than 10%);

- More and safer cycleways and greater separation of pedestrians and cyclists;
- It depends on the location of the PROW. In some parishes, some PROWs lend themselves as a route to a local school, but these are few;
- To achieve this, it would be important to make sure the Row are safe for school children to walk e.g., paths need to be regularly maintained (perhaps adopted by the Schools for litter picking) perhaps street lighting could be provided.

A Better Network

This section includes comments from:

- Canal and River Trust
 - Councillor Hilary Cole (Chieveley and Cold Ash)
 - Mid Berks Ramblers
 - Pang Valley Rambler Group
 - Trail Riders Fellowship
 - West Berkshire Countryside Society
- The entire Kennet and Avon Canal towpath running through West Berks is shown on the West Berks online map. Most sections are owned by the Canal and River Trust, however, along some short river sections the Trust are only the navigation authority. The Trust is currently working with West Berks Council on several partnership towpath projects where the intention is to improve the towpath for cycling and multi-user usage. These include GREE/7/1 Hambridge Road to Bulls Lock (950m), a section of high usage towpath which will follow on from the recently completed Newbury

S106 section between the A339 and Hambridge Road (improvement works delivered in 2020). The Trust and West Berks are also looking at further improvements to the east of Thatcham Station where improvements were undertaken by West Berks in 2020. GREE/7 /2 Sustrans are currently working on developing a Paths for Everyone Activation project along the eastern end of the Kennet and Avon Canal, one of six activation projects in the south of England (see the National Cycleway Network (NCN) 'Paths for Everyone' review 2018). PADW/20/1 Section between Aldermaston Wharf and Theale (Sustrans Activation Project South) BURG/24/2;

- The [Canal and River] Trust has a national policy for towpaths - Better Towpaths for Everyone, with the aim to ensure our waterways and towpaths remain a treasured national resource for everyone. In particular the policy states: *“The Trust gives pedestrians priority but recognises the incorporation of towpaths as part of walking and cycling routes and, where designated as a bridleway, or as a permissive route, towpaths are also available for horse riding. The Trust are committed to encouraging better considerate behaviour by everyone on our towpaths, so that people can feel safe and secure when they use them. The Trust use clear and simple signage to encourage safer sharing. The Trust has its own branded signage, but we can incorporate partners logos in some circumstances. Where there are concerns over towpath capacity or condition, the Trust will seek opportunities to secure further external investment to undertake improvement work.”* Towpaths are, by their very nature, narrow spaces but many are suitable to accommodate multi- use. Where appropriate, we have already "widened" the path (i.e., the surfaced path area within the towpath corridor) as this is often the best way to ensure that they are used safely and that conflict between visitors is minimised. We will continue to look for opportunities to

optimise space where we can, but we will not do this at the expense of the character of the canal.

- The canal towpath is a free to use resource for walking and cycling throughout the district as well as providing access to the water space for other recreational users such as anglers and paddlers;
- Consider the use of public footpaths for horse and cyclist use to extend the network and regularise what is already happening;
- As a Parish Councillor, we receive complaints from users which are mainly based around landowner action and/or the surface of the PROW. The actions can take the form of:
 - Blocking the PROW;
 - Obscuring the PROW (i.e. planting over a path);
 - Use of barbed wire/electric fences adjacent to the PROW;
 - Aggressive unofficial signage;
 - Verbal abuse from landowners;
 - Surface issues can be a result of owner action or user behaviour.
- Opportunity is only limited by access. Most rural rights of way are only accessible by car for walkers – public transport is patchy at best. When organising group walks, finding a suitable, safe place to park a number of cars is frequently an issue. The opportunities for cyclists are limited by poor maintenance of tracks and conflict of use with walkers;
- The COVID pandemic has highlighted an issue that has been bubbling away in the background for many years. A number of rights of way in West Berks (and throughout the country, probably) pass through or very near to domestic properties. Some of the landowners have already put in place unofficial diversions or permitted paths to avoid contact with residents. A survey of such properties would be appropriate, and plans put in place to implement permanent diversions away from properties;
- We must not lose sight of the “Lost Paths” exercise with a deadline of 2026. This could be a source of some additional paths;
- Parking availability is a problem that has been highlighted by the pandemic. Car sharing has not been possible and consequently there is a requirement for parking above the pre-pandemic level. Even with restrictions placed on the numbers taking part in walks, it has been difficult to find locations where there is adequate parking. This has been a particular problem at weekends when activity is greater. Many rural locations do not have an adequate level of bus service and this will continue to mean that personal transport is the only realistic means of access to the countryside;
- Paths that requiring road walking to get from the end of one to the start of the next. Stiles in extremely poor condition. More resources to be put into removing stiles and installing gates. Paths inaccessible due to mud/flooding, whilst nothing can be done about the weather some measures could be taken to improve paths in problem areas e.g. boardwalks;
- Arterial routes such as the Kennet and Avon Canal could be used to divert cyclists onto more challenging uphill circular tracks, which would be popular with serious cyclists, and would create more space on the Canal route for slower moving traffic. One example already in existence is the Berkshire Circular Route leaving the canal at Enbourne Bridge. This route makes use of existing roads in parts, and perhaps a study could be undertaken to see whether traffic calming on these highway sections might encourage greater cycle use of the circular route? This principle could then be used elsewhere, to relieve pressure on the canal route. Another arterial route in the area where such diversions could be created is the

Wayfarers Walk/Mid Wilts Way, where a circular route off is almost already existing via the Test Way. Church Lane, Combe is the only section which appears to use the Highway, and traffic calming of some sort here might be needed for users and welcomed by residents to increase recreational use of the route. The B4000 Roman Road could appeal to serious cyclists if suitable circular routes were promoted for leisure use. Stoney Lane Track and White Shute Track from Lambourn almost link to the Roman Road but should an improvement (upgrade?) to a short length of track create a suitable link in the area north of Woodland St Mary, the Lambourn Downs would become accessible and appeal to a huge number of Newbury cyclists. To the north the Lambourn Way and the Downland Village Riding Route already exist to cater for horse riders, so it would not seem unfair, and would divert cycle use away from those routes, if other circular routes were offered as recreational routes for cyclists. Perhaps improvements to the existing riding routes could be considered too where needed;

- There are clearly different classes of motor vehicle and ask that these are recognised and it is important to distinguish between 4x4's and motorcycles when matters of access are being considered. Where it is not possible for a 4x4 to co-exist it is highly likely that it would be possible for a motorcycle to exist as at a dynamic width of one metre they are no wider than a horse or cyclist. Recreational motor vehicle traffic only represents 5% of the traffic on PROW and that heavy farming machinery and landowner vehicles contribute significantly to the surface impact on them.

Partnerships, Public Rights of Way Service and Delivery of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

This section includes comments from:

- *Age UK*
 - *British Horse Society*
 - *Mid Berks Ramblers*
 - *Newbury Business Investment District (BID)*
 - *Pang Valley Rambler Group*
 - *Trail Riders Fellowship*
 - *Walking for Health West Berkshire*
 - *West Berkshire Council Senior Archaeologist and Assistant Archaeologist*
 - *West Berkshire Countryside Society*
 - *West Berkshire Museum*
 - *West Berkshire Ramblers*
- Some public rights of way are heritage features in themselves and are listed on the Historic Environment Record and there are also high levels of access to some heritage features which could cause damage – would be beneficial for Public Rights of Way and Heritage Teams to co-ordinate knowledge and skills;
 - Develop a heritage walk using public rights of way in partnership with West Berkshire Museum and West Berkshire Council Heritage Team;
 - Utilise the heritage assets of the area more fully in promoted material. Work in partnership with Heritage Team to ensure accuracy of information;

- Produce good quality walks around the countryside to support the visitor economy, in partnership with Newbury BID and heritage;
- Want to extend Walking for Health to other parts of the district using public rights of way. It would be good to work more closely with West Berkshire Walking for Health to target areas to increase accessibility, for example through removing stiles and for the Public Rights of Way Team to advise on possible suitable routes. Would be very beneficial to build a good working relationship with one point of contact;
- Would be beneficial to work with Age UK to capture, map and promote the routes of the dementia walks;
- Age UK and other organisations can offer advice on the design of benches and other infrastructure;
- North Wessex Downs AONB can engage with public rights of way through projects, for which funding would need to be sought (could develop partnership projects with Public Rights of Way Team) where this meets the objectives in the AONB Management Plan;
- Could be more options for increasing access (possibly permissive) through new agri-environmental scheme Farming in Protected Landscapes;
- The British Horse Society submitted a paper on 'cross roads';
- The PROW team is too small and underinvested in, and, so, has to prioritise issues. This means that, in the main, only high priority issues get addressed and most of these are not dealt with in a timely manner. There seems to be no or limited proactive monitoring. Change its model to a public/voluntary arrangement, where WBC works in harmony with local organisations (Parish Councils and any other organisations that are happy to get involved). There are devolved powers, under which Parish Councils can operate, but these are not widely taken up. This needs to be encouraged through support and guidance;
- Setting up local Footpath Marshall's with local organisations (we're looking to set one up in our parish and, I'm aware, that the South Oxford Ramblers have set up a similar scheme in their area). This could cover monitoring and light maintenance, to ensure continued access;
- Support local voluntary groups with funding for materials, to improve PROW (i.e. a delivery option that would significantly reduce costs, by leveraging free labour);
- Overall we are pleased with the service. Responses to issues raised are normally quick and positive. We understand and regret the pressures on local authority budgets;
- The ROWIP as largely a strategy document has not concerned us. What we would be interested in seeing is any implementation plans resulting from the ROWIP, and probably annual reports on progress in implementing these plans. Such reports may already be produced, and may go to the Local Access Forum, but this is rather an obscure body which doesn't report very widely;
- *[How does the public rights of way service perform]* Very well; I receive rapid and courteous replies to problems raised with staff;
- There is an absence on the existing plan of a separate ROWIP which could cover a right of way which has been approved but on which implementation has not taken place after a long period of time;
- Many paths are fine but it is not clear how one should report problems;
- A key plus would be adequately resourcing the PROW team;

- Good cooperation exists between WBC, BBOWT and the Ramblers. However, WBC appear reluctant to use their enforcement powers in some protracted cases regarding infringement of Public Rights of Way;
- Support the Ramblers in the establishment of Parish Footpath Wardens to help improve the footpath network;
- WBC could be more forceful with Landowners helpful in developing the new who block footpaths and generally do not public rights of way comply with Rights of Way law. There are improvement plan several long-standing issues within the area which should have been resolved by now. WBC prefer to negotiate which can be successful however WBC have the legal powers to use and need to be willing to use them when negotiation fails;
- 2010-20 RoWIP Plan - In the overview of the plan it clearly states that the RoWIP is there to improve access for all user groups. The plan then systematically and deliberately fails to recognise motor vehicles as a legitimate user group. The plan includes the statement. "Research and implement mechanisms to realign the road user hierarchy in favour of non-motorised transport – especially walking." We would remind WBC of the statutory guidance issued by DEFRA in respect of Rights of Way Improvement Plans (para 2.2.21) "Wherever possible proposals for improving rights of way should not unduly benefit one class of user at the expense of another. Improvements that are intended to benefit cyclists, harness-horse drivers, horse riders or walkers should not unduly restrict lawful MPV use of public vehicular rights of way." The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 it clearly states a RoWIP requires that an assessment should be undertaken in order to improve the network for all users. We see no evidence that an assessment for motorised vehicles was undertaken;
- Could get volunteers more involved to make some of the changes needed on the network, removing stiles etc. as the Chiltern Society do in the Chilterns;
- Could West Berkshire provide public liability insurance to cover volunteers which could help local communities to take more action.

Local Access Forum

An extraordinary meeting of the LAF took place in September 2022, specifically to discuss the ROWIP. The role of the LAF in this regard is to provide advice to the council. Those LAF members present discussed some of areas which had been raised through the stakeholder and public consultation.

Area 1 – Maintenance, effective working and reporting problems

- Some authorities use an online system, e.g. Oxfordshire County Council (CAMS system);
- Report a problem is adequate but not much guidance on how to use it;
- Limited on what you can report;
- People want to know the progress of their issue but this requires time commitment. LAF suggested that the reported problem is given a priority and that this should be conveyed to the person reporting the problem to manage expectations. Use standardised responses to streamline the process;
- When problem is resolved the LAF acknowledged that officers report back effectively but sometimes only with the number of the complaint. This makes it difficult to relate to the original issue unless the person reporting the problem has remembered to record this;
- Ward councillors should automatically be informed of problems being reported in their area. It should be possible to achieve this through GIS systems;
- Discussion around whether landowners could help to maintain PROW, being used as contractors to undertake work, for example vegetation cutting (only maintenance which is the responsibility of the council and not the landowner);
- Could be efficiency and costs savings as equipment on site;
- Question around administration of many small contracts and transactions;
- Need to ensure insurances are in place;
- More could be done with volunteers and these groups do more in other counties, e.g. Wiltshire and Hampshire;
- Parish councils may also be able to do more and be encouraged to help maintain some PROW, and the Public Rights of Way Service are extending working with them;
- There is a wide range of PROW – rural natural surface, surface, farm access tracks, urban rights of way. This needs to be recognised in the ROWIP;
- Some areas have a higher population density and lower density of public rights of way. May need to prioritise problem resolution and projects, perhaps to respond to areas of most need. It need to be clearer in the ROWIP how actions and work is prioritised;
- It is difficult to prioritise all issues in a geographic area, as some paths are more highly used than others; some paths better linked to the network etc.;
- Currently all paths are equal priority, except those on promoted routes or those which are routes to schools;
- Work and problems are prioritised on a path by path basis;
- It may be possible to rank every path on a priority basis but this would need careful consideration;
- This might mean that some paths receive less attention;

- Paths where people live may not be the only priority, also paths where people take their exercise. Horses for example are not kept where people live (urban areas);
- Cornwall County Council operates a system of prioritising paths into 'Gold', 'Silver' and 'Bronze';
- To date, WBC has focused on keeping the whole network in good condition and this has been very successful. There is a high degree of confidence that a route on a map will be in a useable condition and WBC should be credited for that;
- A prioritisation system may release resources to deliver improvements where they are needed and to meet the actions of the ROWIP but this may involve a trade-off whereby some areas do not receive as much attention;
- More resources are needed to make progress to implement the ROWIP;
- Central government is making large investment into walking and cycling. This route to funding should be explored;
- There is potential for PROW to be used as utility routes;
- Also WBC Public Health can access money and have been interested in utilising routes around villages;
- Consensus that an element of identifying strategic priorities and concentrating on priorities is important;
- Need to communicate the priorities to the public.

Area 2 – Accessibility and Improving Communication and Promotion

- WBC produces promotional material for circular routes but these can only be found on the WBC website if you know the title. The search facility needs to be improved;
- There is a GIS layer on the online map (recreational routes) but not easy to find;
- For active walkers there are about ten website promoting walks;
- Quality assurance of the routes publicised on other websites varies – some routes are checked and moderated and some are not;
- The Ramblers' Association (only available to members) and Visorando are moderated;
- WBC could link to other sources of information, but would need to caveat that the council does not have control over the quality of the information;
- WBC could provide information which fills gaps which others do not, for example for entry-level, shorter routes, rather than information for experienced walkers;
- Potential to link promotion to projects and improvements and produce promotional material and suggestions for walks and rides, highlighting different areas of the district;
- Council could priorities promotions from country parks and settlements;
- People who are less confident accessing public rights of way may not find maps very accessible. Paths could be named. Fingerposts with destinations;
- In terms of promotion, WBC should fill a gap of what is not being done or what is not being done well;

- Concerned that promotion of the Three Downs Link will disappear. It is currently on the Wessex Downs AONB and BHS websites;
- Promotion could also help to spread the load by directing people to exploring areas;
- Need to improve provision in terms of accessible routes for those living with disabilities;
- Need to have some accessible routes;
- Potentially option to hire mobility scooters the country parks;
- These needs also apply to those who are older, who need information on the route, seating places and facilities;
- If a route is publicised as accessible it needs more frequent checking to make sure it remains accessible and is as described;
- The public rights of way condition survey will assist in identifying routes which are accessible and will provide information on where improvements could be made;
- WBC needs to promote and take advantage of the assets of the area and link into the rural economy, heritage and tourism.

Area 3 - Specific User Groups

- Suggest contact Cycling UK for information on cyclists;
- Probably highest number of cycling users are mountain bikers but they may not have an over-arching body in West Berkshire to co-ordinate responses;
- BHS and Cycling UK work together as both users of higher rights public rights of way;
- A lot of cyclists use the towpath (National Cycle Network);
- Touring cyclists don't use off road paths very much;
- It is difficult to reach motorised vehicle users which do not belong to a group or organisation;
- The public rights of way service has overall taken account of the needs of equestrians;
- It is difficult to create new routes and limited in what can be achieved;
- Behind the hedge routes could be pursued;
- More account of equestrians needs to be taken by WBC Highways in the implementation of schemes and should be properly considered in the assessment, design and implementation of schemes (e.g. Walking, Cycling and Horse Riding Assessment and Review – WCHAR). There needs to be a clear methodology for including equestrians;
- Some schemes have been implemented by WBC Highways where opportunities to improve the equestrian network have been missed;
- A more strategic approach needs to be taken looking at all projects together and how they can connect;
- Equestrians need to use the highway network as the network is not well-connected. Each equestrian has to assess the level of risk. WBC Highways need to recognise more fully the needs of these more vulnerable users.

Appendix

List of Stakeholders Contacted

4x4 Without a Club
 Age UK Berkshire
 All Wheel Drive Club
 Alzheimer's Society
 Arthritis Matters
 Autism Matters
 Berkshire Vision
 Berkshire Walkers
 Berkshire Weekend Walkers
 BOB Mountain Bike Club
 British Horse Society
 Canal and Rivers Trust
 Carriage Driving representative
 Connecting Communities Berkshire
 Community United
 Country Land and Business Association
 CPRE Berkshire
 Dementia Walks with Age UK

Down's Syndrome - West Berkshire Support Group
 Eight Bells for Community Strength
 Eight Bells for Mental Health
 Environment Agency
 Fibromyalgia Support Group - West Berkshire
 GLASS
 Hants and Berks Rover Owners Club
 Historic England
 Hungerford U3A
 LARA
 Loddon Valley Ramblers Association
 Mencap - Newbury Gateway Club
 Mencap - Reading
 Mid Berks Ramblers
 Mobility Issues Group for Goring and Streatley (MIGGS)
 Motor Neurone Disease - Reading and West Berkshire Branch
 Multiple Sclerosis Society Newbury and District Group
 National Autistic Society (NAS) - West Berks Branch

National Farmers Union
 National Trust
 Natural England
 Neighbouring Highway Authorities:

- Oxfordshire
- Hampshire County Council
- Reading
- Wokingham
- Wiltshire
- Swindon

 Newbury BID (Visit Newbury)
 Newbury Road Club
 Newbury U3A
 Newbury Velo
 North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 Open for Hope
 Pang Valley Ramblers
 Parkinson's UK - Newbury Branch
 Planning - Strategic Planning / Local Plan
 Ramblers' Association (national)
 Reading Cycle Campaign
 Reading Cycle Club
 Reading Outdoor Group

Recovery in Mind
 Ridgeway National Trail
 Swings and Smiles
 Thames Path National Trail
 Thames Valley LEP
 Thatcham U3A
 The Advocacy People
 Trail Riders Fellowship
 Tu Vida
 West Berks Ramblers
 West Berkshire Council:

- Heritage Team
- Sensory Needs Service
- Adult Social Care
- Healthy Communities

 West Berkshire Countryside Society
 West Berkshire Spokes
 West Berkshire Museum
 West Berkshire Walking for Health
 Wokingham Greenways