

**Report to:** Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee  
**Date of meeting:** 14 June 2017  
**By:** Director of Communities, Economy & Transport  
**Title:** Countryside Access Strategy - Update  
**Purpose:** To provide an update on the Countryside Access Strategy

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**(1) Scrutiny is asked to note the contents of, the draft Countryside Access Strategy that was presented to Cabinet in April 2016 and was the subject of public consultation.**

**(2) Scrutiny is invited to comment to Cabinet on the proposals.**

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## **1 Background**

1.1 In March 2014, the Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee endorsed the development of a commissioning strategy for public rights of way (PRoW) and countryside site (CS) management. At the Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 March 2015, a Scrutiny Review Board was created to assist in the development of the draft commissioning strategy. Many of the Board's recommendations were incorporated in the formulation of the draft strategy.

1.2 In April 2016, the Cabinet was asked to note the draft strategy, now known as the 'Countryside Access Strategy', and to agree that it was publically consulted on for a 12 week period. That consultation took place between May-July 2016.

1.3 The results of the consultation, as well as the draft Strategy, will be presented to Cabinet for approval on the 27 June 2017.

1.4 The draft strategy sets out how the County Council proposes to secure the best outcomes for East Sussex residents, discharging its statutory responsibilities and maximising the contribution that PRoW and CS can make to Council priorities. This report gives a brief summary of the development of the draft strategy, and the start of the proposed implementation process.

## **2 Supporting information**

2.1 In developing the draft strategy (set out in Appendix 1) a commissioning approach has been adopted. Central to the 'needs assessment' (the first stage in the commissioning cycle) are the County Council's statutory obligations. As Highway Authority, the County Council has a statutory duty under the Highways Act to ensure that the 2,000 mile PRoW network is accessible and maintained. It also has a duty as landowner to conserve the wildlife value of 10 countryside sites (including Country Parks and Local Nature Reserves) totalling 1,160 hectares (see Appendix 2) and to ensure safe public access to these sites.

2.2 In addition to considering the County Council's statutory responsibilities, public engagement was carried out to establish what contribution PRoW and CS make to the Council's priorities. Survey responses, together with stakeholder events, have shown that PRoW and CS are places residents frequent to get out in the fresh air, for health benefits and to simply enjoy scenery and walking. National research has also documented the health benefits of exercise and in particular green exercise (i.e. outdoors in green areas). This information has also been used to develop the draft strategy.

2.3 The draft Countryside Access Strategy recommends a differentiated approach and considers PRoW separately to Countryside Sites concluding:

- PRoW are managed in-house, this covers areas such as maintenance, enforcement and legal record keeping. A number of areas of improvement are identified including how we prioritise Public Health objectives, work with those developing new paths and the contribution of our volunteer offer.

- The management of CS is recommended to change. It is proposed that, by changing how the sites are managed, there may be an improvement to both the visitor experience and conservation work. By seeking to pass the sites to other organisations more experienced in community involvement, conservation and better placed to provide visitor engagement, it is anticipated that there will be improvements in what the sites have to offer. The Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way are more akin to Public Rights of Way in their appearance and use, so they require different management arrangements to green open space. Consequently, it is proposed that the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way continue to be managed in-house, as public rights of way.

2.4 A copy of the Scrutiny Review Board's report on the draft Countryside Access Strategy, which accompanied the report to Cabinet in April 2016, is included in appendix 3. This sets out the work undertaken by the Review Board, its comments on the draft Strategy, and the recommendations that were made to Cabinet by the Review Board.

### 3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of the draft Countryside Access Strategy and is invited to comment to Cabinet.

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

ALL County Council Members will have PRow in their electoral divisions

The below table sets out the County Council Members that have countryside sites in their electoral divisions.

Site	Local councillor
<a href="#">Camber Sand Dunes/Johnson's Field</a>	Cllr Keith Glazier
<a href="#">Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve</a>	Cllr Jim Sheppard
<a href="#">Cuckoo Trail</a>	Cllr Gerard Fox
	Cllr Bill Bentley
	Cllr Colin Swansborough
	Cllr Rupert Simmons
	Cllr Daniel Shing
	Cllr Bob Bowdler
	Cllr Nick Bennett
<a href="#">Ditchling Common Country Park</a>	Cllr Jim Sheppard
<a href="#">Forest Way Country Park</a>	Cllr Francis Whetstone
<a href="#">Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve</a>	Cllr Darren Grover
<a href="#">Riverside Park</a>	Cllr Sarah Osborne
<a href="#">Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP)</a>	Cllr Stephen Shing
<a href="#">Shinewater Park</a>	Cllr Alan Shuttleworth
	Cllr Colin Swansborough
<a href="#">Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve</a>	Cllr Francis Whetstone

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None