

## Item 8 – Countryside Access Plan Review

### Local Access Forum Consultation:



### *Review of the Hampshire Countryside Access Plans*

#### 1.0 Background

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a requirement for Highway Authorities to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Although, as an 'Excellent Authority' Hampshire County Council could have opted out, instead we welcomed the opportunity to work with others to carry out a comprehensive review of issues relating to our rights of way network. We also chose to broaden our approach to ensure we covered issues relating to Countryside Access in general, rather than simply focusing on the rights of way network.

The Countryside Access Plans (CAPs) were produced in 2008 and, although the statutory requirement is that the plans be reviewed every 10 years, Hampshire published its first set of access plans for a period of five years. They therefore run from 2008 to 2013.

We would now like to hear the views of the LAFs in Hampshire on what has worked well, what hasn't and what our key considerations should be for the review of the plans. To inform the workshop, this paper describes the development, content and implementation of the current plans as a basis for discussion.

The full plans can be found on the website: [www.hants.gov.uk/countryside-access-plans](http://www.hants.gov.uk/countryside-access-plans)

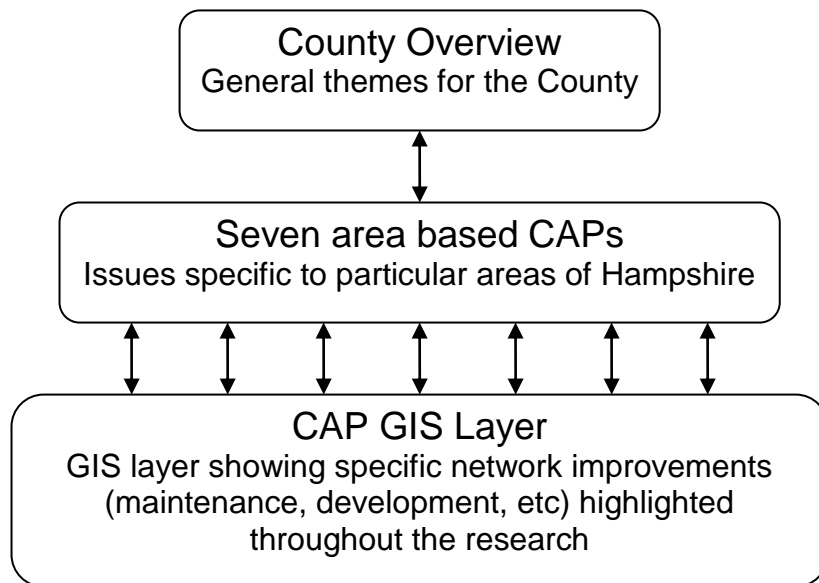
#### 2.0 The Hampshire Countryside Access Plans

##### Research / Development

Two approaches to the collection of data for the CAPs were piloted to evaluate the benefits of different methodologies. In the Forest of Eversley, after qualitative research with key contacts to establish expert opinion on the current issues facing users, consultants carried out a quantitative, large scale household survey and mapped existing access sites and routes in detail. In the Forest of Bere, County Council officers used a more qualitative approach, based on smaller-scale surveys, interviews with key access providers (including local authority representatives and other public landowners) and 'broad-brush' mapping of access using existing data. Although both approaches had benefits, the bottom-up Forest of Bere approach provided not only a clear understanding of local issues, but also established a range of contacts within the community.

The County Council therefore went on to produce five further plans using the qualitative methodology piloted in the Forest of Bere, as endorsed by HCAF. It was further agreed with HCAF that the work for each plan would be overseen by a local Working Group made up of local residents, user group representatives, local authority representatives, public land managers and private landowners. The initial purpose of these groups was to guide and advise on the production of the plans, and to provide local contacts and assist with further research and consultation.

## Content/Structure



The plans comprise three key elements:

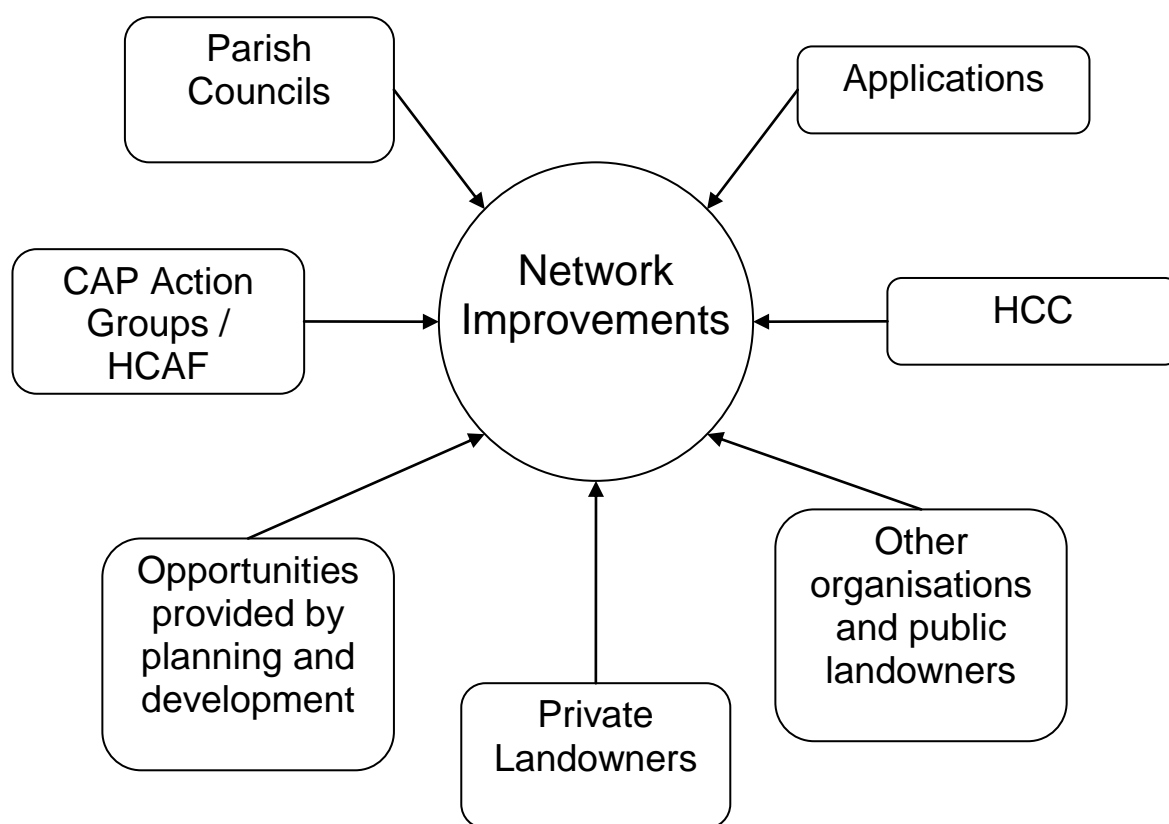
**The Hampshire Overview** is the overarching document which draws the CAPs together and describes the key issues affecting access to the Countryside across Hampshire.

**The area based CAPs** reflect the fact that Hampshire is a large and diverse county and that, whilst there are some access issues which are common across Hampshire, there are others which reflect factors such as soil types, land use, underlying geology, topography and demography. The area-based plans represent, therefore, the key local issues that have emerged in different areas of Hampshire.

**The Geographic Information System (GIS) layer** is a map of specific network issues which those people who have contributed to the access planning process have identified. These issues include desired additions to the network, improvements required to the existing network and obstacles/barriers affecting people's access to the Countryside. This layer originally included all suggestions which were made but, over time, has been refined and prioritised.

## Implementation

This diagram indicates the key mechanisms by which the issues or improvements identified in the CAPs have been delivered.



Most of the work of the Countryside Access Team has been shaped around CAP delivery. The following are examples of the work that has taken place; it is not a comprehensive list of actions or projects.

### *Shaping our business:*

The County Council has a number of statutory duties and powers relating to access to the Countryside but has always been clear that, in carrying out these duties, our focus should be driven by public benefit. CAP priorities have therefore been built into key areas of work – for example, **applications to modify the Definitive Map** of Rights of Way can now be prioritised if they meet a need identified in a CAP, and **applications to divert** public rights of way are now scored according to how they deliver against CAPs. **Guidance to landowners** has also been developed to ensure that where routes are diverted or dedicated, the new route addresses, where possible, issues identified in CAP research. Issues reported on the existing network are now also **prioritised**. Projects which address CAP related access improvements have been instigated; these might include **specific infrastructure improvements** to the network or those aimed at improving the information we provide relating to Countryside Access, such as **Storytrails**.

### *Working together:*

A key area of delivery has focused on working with others to deliver against CAP issues. The **Small Grants Scheme** has been developed to enable Parish Councils and landowners to take action to address specific issues. The **Parish Reference Guide** has been produced, also as a mechanism for helping parishes to understand their powers and options.

Volunteer groups have become increasingly important in the delivery of CAP aims. We have been working with the Ramblers on projects such as **Waymarking** and with the Ramblers, landowners and others on **Stiles to Gates**. Obviously, the LAFs within Hampshire have also played a leading role in driving projects, the **PATHH** project which has involved members of the New Forest, South Downs and Hampshire LAFs is one example of this. The **CAP Working Groups** have, to varying degrees, played an important role in prioritising routes on the GIS layer and, in certain cases, considered particular projects arising from this.

#### *Influencing delivery:*

The CAPs have provided a significant opportunity to influence development and delivery across Hampshire. Significant work has taken place to embed the contents of the Countryside Access Plans into other plans and delivery programmes such as **Local Plans**, **Local Transport Plans**, Hampshire's **Strategic Infrastructure Statement** and other such documents. The nature of the documents and the way in which they were researched means that they have proved useful and credible documents for partners to share. Alongside working to embed the core issues identified by the CAPs in relevant plans, strategies and delivery programmes and using the GIS layer to identify specific routes for delivery as opportunities have arisen, the **Countryside Recreation Network** project is an attempt to shape the development and delivery of Hampshire's green infrastructure in a way that responds to the key issues described in the CAPs.

### **3.0 Revising the Countryside Access Plans**

The LAF is asked to provide its views based on the questions provided below. The County Council will then consider the views put forward and report back to the LAF with its proposals for consideration.

- 1. What are the key changes which have taken place (internal and external) since the first CAPs were researched (and what changes can be predicted over the next 5-10 years)?**

*This question is about factors which may influence CAP production/delivery – not changes which have been brought about through the delivery of the CAPs.*

It may help to consider the question in terms of Pestle analysis: **Political**, **Economic**, **Social**, **Technical**, **Legal**, **Environmental**

- 2. What elements of the existing CAPs have worked well/been a success? What elements haven't worked so well, or are missing altogether?**

*Consider the following themes:*

- Production - how the CAPs were researched (e.g. were the right mechanisms used to gather input, does it reflect a good cross section of views etc)
- Structure/content - how the CAPs are structured as plans (e.g. the breakdown between Hampshire wide and area based, the choice of areas, the GIS layer etc)
- Delivery/ implementation - how the delivery mechanisms have worked (e.g. shaping priorities, CAP working groups, external partners etc)

*NB: The intention of this consultation is to provide insight into how the County Council should go about the CAP review and hear the LAF's views on this. It is not intended to be an actual 'review' of the content of the CAPs.*