

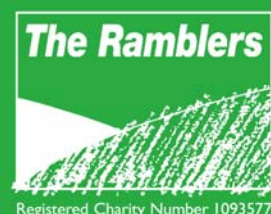
Ramblers' Association

Public Rights of Way Strategy for England and Wales

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Executive summary

This new strategy for the RA's rights of way work in England and Wales was produced after extensive consultation. It sets out the aims as being, in the long-term, to see 100% of the definitive public rights of way network open and easy to use and to see the historic network fully recorded. In setting out these aims the need to continue to press for substantially increased funding levels within local authorities is recognised. Work to protect urban rights of way and other means of linear access will be increased, and efforts will also be made to increase the engagement of the walking public with this work. Rights of way work will be key to the RA's approach to promoting walking, health, transport, climate change, and countryside protection, and considering the needs of those with disabilities will be integral to the approach. We will seek to raise the profile of rights of way work at local and national levels.

The methods employed to achieve these ends are set out. In particular, priorities for action will be specified, concentrating on routes which provide the greatest public benefit, taking as wide a view as possible, with Areas helped to develop local plans for rights of way work. Nationally, the approach will be based on a sustainable mix of casework, public campaigning and legal work. The likely demise of Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 178 will necessitate work with IPROW and other interested parties on new methods of monitoring local authority performance. In addition, means of reviewing our own effectiveness will be considered and means of internal communications improved. Greater support and encouragement will be given for practical work, and we will develop new initiatives to increase the awareness and activity of the walking public. Partnership working with like-minded organisations, with highway authorities, Local Access Forums, the Welsh Assembly Government, central government, CCW and Natural England will be fostered.

In respect of the RA's structure, the complex arrangements for footpath work at Area and Group level will be reviewed and recorded to facilitate improved recruitment, training and communication. Where necessary, Areas will be encouraged to conduct footpath work via joint committees aligned to highway authority areas, pending any major re-organisation of the RA's Area and Group structure.

A new training package in a modular format will be developed, which can be studied in a variety of media. 'Guidance for Footpath Workers' and 'Notes on Footpath Campaigning' will be completely re-written in a more user-friendly and attractive format.

Work areas not prioritised will be given only passive support and some specific areas of work will be reviewed, with a view to either ceasing or changing RA involvement, to allow proper development of the new strategy.

This strategy will be fed into the RA's wider strategic plan. A set of more detailed tactical documents to guide specific projects and approaches will be drawn up, and a central group, comprising volunteers, Trustees, and staff will be formed to oversee the development of the strategy.

Glossary of terms

CCW	Countryside Council for Wales – the statutory body charged with championing the environment and landscape of Wales “as a place for leisure and learning opportunities”.
Defra	Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs.
Footpath	Specific category of right of way. Sometimes used by the Ramblers' Association to refer to all rights of way (particularly when talking to the general public or referring to volunteer roles).
IPRoW	Institute of Public Rights of Way Management.
Natural England	The statutory body charged with helping people to “enjoy, understand and access the natural environment” in England.
RA	The Ramblers’ Association.
Right of way	Public right of way, defined by law.

This strategy belongs to the Ramblers’ Association at all levels. Words such as ‘our’, ‘we’, etc. refer to the whole organisation operating in England and Wales.

Introduction

1. This document, produced after extensive consultation, sets out a new strategy for taking the RA's rights of way work into the 21st century.
2. The original Countryside Commission target, endorsed by government, of having the entire network legally defined, properly maintained, kept free from obstruction, and well publicised by the year 2000 was both exciting and ambitious. Sadly, it proved too ambitious and we are still in the situation where more than 30% of paths in England and 50% in Wales are still reckoned to be difficult or impossible to use, and most definitive maps are decades away from completion. In the mean time, central government has introduced yet more means of closing and diverting rights of way, and budget pressures continue to mean cuts for rights of way services. While rights of way improvement plans and section 63 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (section 130A of the Highways Act 1980) offer opportunities for improving the network, these are not 'easy wins'. Without doubt, the job of volunteer footpath workers has become ever-more complex and demanding.
3. Against this background, a General Council motion in 2006 called for a new target for getting the network into good order:

This General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees working in partnership with major agencies and local highway authorities in England and Wales, to establish a commitment that by 2015 all rights of way will be fully available, legally defined and promoted for public use.

4. The motion was remitted to the Board of Trustees and, as part of the process of addressing the issues raised within it, a conference was organised to allow for in-depth discussions of a new strategy for our work on rights of way.
5. The conference was held in March 2007, and participants from across the RA (footpath workers and other volunteers, Board of Trustee members and staff) took a fundamental look at what we want to achieve and how we should go about achieving it. Prior to the conference, John Trevelyan had been commissioned to carry out some research into how the better highway authorities manage to provide an open and useable rights of way network and this formed the background to some of the discussions.
6. Careful note was taken of all of the matters raised at the conference and footpaths staff from England and Wales subsequently held an away day to reconsider and consolidate those findings. A draft strategy document was then produced and circulated widely for comment. The comments received were carefully considered and have been used to amend the draft to produce the present document.

England and Wales

7. In terms of the strategic direction of the RA's work on rights of way, this strategy is relevant to England and Wales. There will, however, be differences in application of this strategy, which take into account the different priorities and RA resource situations in these two countries, and devolution to the Welsh Assembly Government.

Aims

Charitable object

8. The first charitable object of the RA is to promote, encourage or assist in “the provision and protection of footpaths and other ways over which the public have a right of way or access on foot, including the prevention of obstruction of public rights of way.”

Definitive rights of way open and recorded

9. Our long-term aim is to see 100% of definitive public rights of way open and easy to use. We recognise that for the life of this strategy document we will be working towards this target, and that a strategic approach will be needed at a local level to prioritise the RA’s work in order to deliver the greatest public benefit as we move towards this target.
10. It is also our aim to see the historic network of rights of way fully recorded. We will continue to work towards this goal and, given the lack of enthusiasm now evident in Natural England, CCW, the Welsh Assembly Government, and Defra for the recording of lost ways, we will seek the repeal of the 2026 cut-off date for historic claims. At the same time we will lobby for the structures and processes set up for the recording of lost ways to remain, and for far greater funding to be committed to this task. In the shorter-term we will lobby for greater use of creation orders and agreements to plug gaps in the network, with priority again given to those paths providing greatest public benefit.
11. It is an inescapable fact that increased public funding will be required to get the rights of way network into the state required by law. We will continue to press for substantially increased funding levels for rights of way within local authorities, with associated research into the national funding position.

Urban paths

12. While we are known primarily for our work on countryside paths, the RA also has an important role to play in urban areas. We will step up our work to protect urban rights of way and other linear access routes.

Permissive paths and other linear access routes

13. The RA maintains that the most secure legal status for linear public access is that afforded by public right of way status. We will therefore continue to pursue right of way status for any routes over which this can be claimed. However, we recognise that despite its faults, permissive access can sometimes deliver benefits to walkers where right of way status cannot be achieved. On this basis we will work with landowners, local authorities, and other bodies to secure the greatest extent of linear access possible.

Open access land

14. Traditionally the RA has viewed linear and open access issues separately, with a resulting separation of effort at both staff and volunteer levels. Increasingly, in local authorities in particular, this distinction is being broken down and a more holistic view of ‘public access’ is being taken. We will seek to manage this interaction carefully – stressing the differences between open and linear access where necessary, and emphasising their similarities likewise. At all times we will seek to maximise the advantages to the RA and minimise the

disadvantages. We will review our position during the life of this strategy.

Public involvement and education

15. The RA is a charity, delivering public benefits. It is therefore vitally important that we seek to involve the public in our work and take every opportunity to educate the walking public as to their rights and the legal remedies open to them. We will work to create a knowledgeable, active walking public, which is involved in our charitable work on rights of way and clearly associates the RA with the delivery of public benefits in this area.

Other agendas

16. We will integrate our work on rights of way with that on the other charitable aims of the RA. In particular, we will ensure that rights of way work is key to our approach to promoting walking, health, transport, climate change, and countryside protection. Linkages between our work and issues around tourism and the rural economy will be explored. We will take every opportunity to link our existing work with new projects.
17. We will explore ways to work on wider access issues, particularly access for people with disabilities, as an integral part of our approach.

Experts in the field of rights of way

18. We will build on our vast experience and widespread expertise to cement ourselves as the pre-eminent experts in the field of rights of way. We recognise the value of a strong and well-organised rights of way profession, and will work with IPRow to ensure that the profile of rights of way work is raised at local and national levels.

Methods

Priorities and local strategies

19. Through the consultation on this strategy we opened up a dialogue on the need for the RA to prioritise its work on rights of way. There is agreement that the RA should more clearly specify its priorities for action. As outlined above, we will concentrate on rights of way which provide the greatest public benefit, taking as wide a view as possible. We will carry out further work to create a useful definition of 'public benefit' and explore the other factors that should affect the prioritisation of rights of way cases by the RA.
20. Opportunities to gain positive publicity and achieve 'easy wins' on the path network will also be taken. This will necessitate a move away from a strictly legalistic approach to rights of way matters and Areas will be helped to develop local plans for rights of way work, which work towards the national strategy. These plans will be produced with staff support and guidance, and will be geared to local needs.

Casework and public campaigning

21. We will continue to take action on individual rights of way cases, in line with our priorities. Diversions and extinguishments will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with new easy-to-follow guidance. Creation orders and agreements will be pursued with greater urgency.
22. We will step up our public campaigning work and integrate this with our casework to maximise the RA's impact. We will take credit for our successes and use the media and democratic system to draw attention to weak authorities and specific cases. Wherever possible we will play our part in highlighting and spreading best practice. We will use the law where appropriate. Our campaigning approach will be based on a sustainable mix of casework, public campaigning, and legal work.
23. Our campaigning will focus on the aims outlined in this document, stressing the need for adequate funding and strong policies on rights of way issues, with particular emphasis on the public benefits of rights of way. We will seek to establish a productive combination of local and national campaigning, with strategic targets secured in the workplans of Defra, the Welsh Assembly Government, Natural England, CCW, and other public bodies.

Local authority performance monitoring

24. With the likely removal of Best Value Performance Indicator 178 it will be necessary to look again at the rights of way performance monitoring regime in local highway authorities. We will work with IPRoW and other interested parties to develop a set of monitoring tools which are meaningful to, and valued by, both users and rights of way professionals.
25. Independently of work outlined above, we will work on a set of indicators and methodology for use by the RA. These will assess the performance of local authorities according to criteria determined as important by the RA, on behalf of the walking public. Assessment of action on reported path problems will be key to this approach.

Legal action

26. Rights of way law is highly complex and often cumbersome. However, the RA has fought

for decades to improve the legal situation to the extent that there are now a number of legal ‘tools’ available to us in working towards our aims.

27. We will use the law where necessary to help us achieve our aims, making greater use of the tools available to us to secure quick results with clear public benefits. New guidelines will be issued to advise on the best course of action to address a particular problem. Our legal work will be combined with public campaigning to best meet our aims.
28. We will investigate the prospect of obtaining in-house legal support and will put in place succession arrangements, pending the retirement, in due course, of the present Honorary Solicitor, to ensure continuity in our legal representation.
29. We will work with the Magistrates Association to explore the best way to deliver training on rights of way law to magistrates.

Legislation

30. The RA has been successful in pressing for legislative change to improve the statutory framework for rights of way. We will review and continue to maintain the ‘legislation shopping list’ and will seek the RA’s desired changes in rights of way legislation whenever the opportunity arises, proactively where necessary, and taking special account of the changing political landscape in Wales.

Joint review and support

31. The RA has always worked at both local and national levels on rights of way matters. In general it has made sense to set strategic goals at a national level and support local RA officers working towards those goals in line with locally agreed priorities. However, this approach has not always delivered the outcomes desired by the RA, and required under our charitable objects.
32. We will pilot a method of reviewing the rights of way work being undertaken across England and Wales, jointly with Areas and Groups. This will enable staff to offer more focussed assistance. This is not intended to standardise the activities of local officers, nor to reduce the flexibility with which they operate. It is, however, intended to ensure that the RA is in a position to work towards its aims in all parts of England and Wales, and that volunteers feel both empowered and supported.

Communication

33. We will improve our internal communication channels to ensure that everyone working on rights of way issues is in touch with the latest news and developments. Greater use will be made of existing channels, such as www.ramblers.org.uk, ‘Footpath Worker’, ‘Walk’, ‘Hike’, ‘Walking Wales’, and ‘Welsh Rambler’. A new campaigns newsletter is already in development which will combine reports on all the RA’s campaign activities, replacing ‘Footpath Matters’.
34. We will investigate the options for establishing an email (or other online) network for footpath workers to seek advice and share experiences.
35. Externally, we will be more proactive in seeking publicity for our work on rights of way. We will seek to ensure as much as possible a balanced output of news releases (i.e. between negative and positive stories). Wherever practical, we will tie in our work on other agendas

to illustrate the enormous public benefit of our work on rights of way.

36. There has always been discussion within the RA about the terminology used in our work on footpaths/rights of way. Indeed, the fact that both terms are used in this document reflects the sometimes muddled situation. ‘Footpaths’ is a more easily understood term among the general public, and is generally understood within the RA to mean ‘all rights of way’. However, there may be confusion externally, where the use of the term ‘footpaths’ can give the impression that we are only interested in the particular class of right of way used by pedestrians. The reality, of course, is that we are concerned with all rights of way. We will tighten up our use of these terms, while recognising that different terms may be needed for different audiences. We will carry out some research on this point.

Practical path work

37. Practical path work is an integral part of the RA’s approach. It is through this voluntary work that the RA can illustrate its desire to ‘put something back’ into the network, countering claims (however unfounded) of selfishness and negativity. In addition, many people want to do this work, and it makes perfect sense for the RA to enable them to do so.
38. Despite these facts little support has been given to practical work teams in the past with the result that activity has declined in recent years and coverage across England and Wales is now patchy. We will encourage more practical path work by providing support and guidance on issues such as health and safety, and particularly by resolving the problems around insurance.
39. We will work to improve our liaison with local authorities and landowners, and will aim to secure greater publicity for our work in this area.

Public engagement projects

40. We will continue to develop and roll out new initiatives aimed at increasing the awareness and activity of the walking public. The ‘Footpath Guardian’ and ‘Forgotten Paths’ projects will be thoroughly evaluated and further developed to build on the valuable benefits already seen.

Partnerships

41. Key to our work on rights of way is the building of alliances and entering into partnerships with like-minded organisations, or those seeking the same outcomes as us. We will seek to establish these working relationships at both local and national levels.
42. At a local level we will work closely with other groups to achieve our aims. Some examples are other user groups, parish and community councils, primary care trusts, education authorities and schools.
43. In seeking partnerships we will sometimes be faced with difficult requests to change our position in order to reach a consensus or compromise. This may mean adapting our campaign demands to secure the support of others. These decisions will need to be made on a case by case basis.

Working with highway authorities

44. The RA works with 171 highway authorities (plus other councils acting as agents) in

England and Wales. It is therefore impossible to set down in detail the working relationship we expect with each and every one. However, we will continue to conduct our relationships with highway authorities on the basis that the professional staff working in rights of way have the same aims as us – that is, to see the network fully recorded and open for public use. We accept that rights of way staff are often put in difficult positions, and constantly battle for recognition and funding for their work.

45. Wherever possible we will seek a collaborative and supportive approach in our work with rights of way officers, while at the same time defending our aims and pressing for improvements that benefit walkers. We will work with highway authorities, and others, to disseminate best practice on rights of way.
46. We will play an active part in Local Access Forums. Support will be offered to any RA member sitting on a forum.
47. We will engage in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan process and continue to stress the need for rights of way resource requests to be included in Local Transport Plans, and for other funding sources to be targeted.
48. In dealings with local authority members and senior officers, we will be forthright in making our case for rights of way. While mindful of the wider pressures on local authorities, we will ensure that our case is made clearly and without apology. We will seek to tie in our messages with others that have relevance in local authorities (e.g. health and sustainable transport).
49. We will continue our national work to build direct relationships with local councillors and rights of way officers, through publications such as the councillors' newsletter and guidance leaflet, and 'Working for Walkers'.

Working with the Welsh Assembly Government, Central Government, CCW, and Natural England

50. Rights of way work is relatively low down the list of Welsh Assembly Government and Central Government priorities. Recognising this, we will seek to tie in our key campaign messages with other important Government initiatives, as well as emphasising the intrinsic value of the rights of way network.
51. We will continue to press the case nationally for increased public funding for rights of way, while recognising that the local authority funding regime is designed to give local decision makers the discretion to divert funds according to local priorities.
52. We will work with CCW and Natural England to develop a robust research base for investment in the rights of way network and other linear access. We will support CCW and Natural England in their aim to be champions for public access. We will continue to encourage these bodies to take a tougher line with failing local authorities, and to use all powers available to them to seek a more open and useable rights of way network.

Promotion and path problem reporting

53. The 'Use Your Paths Challenge' has shown that promotion of the rights of way network can effectively be combined with a system for reporting path problems. These two elements, while capable of standing alone, combine to produce a better-educated and active walking public. We will thoroughly evaluate this project, taking account of all feedback received.

54. We will explore how systems could build on this success, including the prospect of an online problems database along similar lines to the Use Your Paths website and ‘Group Walksfinder’ on www.ramblers.org.uk.

Style (as well as substance)

55. At times the RA has suffered by being labelled variously as selfish, unreasonable, out of touch, pedantic, etc. Often these terms are used by detractors to express their disagreement with our firmly-held legitimate beliefs. However, these views are sometimes expressed by otherwise supportive people who have failed to understand our motives, or who having understood our motives question our methods. We will seek to address this by constantly assessing the effectiveness of our approach. We will not be combative without good reason, and will seek to adopt a collaborative approach wherever possible.
56. Our charitable status requires us to always give due consideration to the public benefit of our work. It is often harmful to our cause when we are painted as representative of a minority, or interested only in the furtherance of our members’ wishes. We will ensure that all staff and volunteers working on rights of way issues have an understanding of the need to demonstrate public benefit in all that we do.

Structure

Footpath roles

57. In rights of way work the RA's structural complexity reaches its pinnacle with a myriad of office holders whose roles vary from Area to Area. The job titles of 'Footpath Secretary', 'Path Order Recipient', 'Footpath Warden' etc, are used across England and Wales but have little common currency. The role of Footpath Committees is not standard, and in some places there is no committee. Some Groups do little or no rights of way work, with rights of way work in that locality being carried out by a district footpath worker appointed by Area. This is not a criticism of the huge amount of work undertaken, but recruitment, training and communication within such a disparate framework is unlikely to be as efficient as it could be.
58. We will carry out a detailed survey of exactly who is carrying out rights of way work for the Association, their job titles, functions, responsibilities, the support they receive locally, their place in the Area/Group arrangements, reporting lines, etc. The aim of this exercise will be to give staff and Board members a better understanding of how our rights of way work is organised so that support of all kinds can be better targeted. It is envisaged that the information obtained will actually be a register of our rights of way work, possibly made available on the members section of the website. There is little appetite amongst volunteers for the imposition of any uniform structure from above, the general view being that present systems have evolved to meet the personnel available, the geography of existing Areas and local government structures, but the register emerging from this exercise should provide examples of good practice which will be of use to others e.g. splitting the traditional Area Footpath Secretary post into several jobs to facilitate recruitment, using district footpath secretaries not necessarily attached to Groups and so on.

Area boundaries and regional government

59. RA Area boundaries often do not match highway authority boundaries. There are a number of highway authorities in which three separate RA Areas have a stake. As a consequence of this, extra work is required to ensure that the RA presents a united front to the highway authority. This can range from a formal committee bringing together all of the RA Areas concerned, to extra internal consultations on matters such as rights of way improvement plans.
60. The restructuring of the RA – whether in terms of a radical change to the future and function of Areas and Groups, or a simpler re-alignment of Area and Group boundaries – will be a massive task.
61. The present RA structure is also unhelpful now that central government in England is beginning to devolve to regions. When there is a consultation on a regional matter it is very difficult to find a volunteer who is willing to speak or act on behalf of many RA Areas. This issue will need to be addressed but in the absence of any support amongst volunteers for the RA to consider any regional structure to mirror the Government regions, it is probably a need which will have to be met by staff, coordinating responses from relevant RA Areas (see paragraph 64 below).
62. In contributing to the development of the RA's new strategic plan we will emphasise the desirability (in terms of delivery of an improved rights of way network) of the RA's functioning units (presently known as Areas) matching highway authority boundaries.

63. As an interim measure, we will encourage the setting up of an RA Footpath Committee for each highway authority area. In some places (e.g. the old metropolitan counties, or where unitary authorities have been established within old counties) that committee might cover more than one highway authority, but in no circumstances should it cover part of a highway authority area. Area Footpath Committees dealing with parts of highway authorities should, if possible, be disbanded. The posts of individual Area Footpath Secretaries could be retained: they would have seats on the joint committee and would report back to their Area Councils or Executive Committees. However, any such joint committee should have a chair or secretary who will be the key contact point with the highway authority.

64. In terms of support from central office, we will retain the system (which has been in operation for some years now) of policy officers (and latterly campaign officers) having responsibility for specific parts of the country, and developing working relationships with the footpath workers in their Areas. We will seek to undertake more site visits and to make sure that all footpath workers in those territories know who their officers are. We will seek to make the territories with which staff deal match, as far as possible, those of the Government Offices for the Regions so that we are able to offer more assistance when dealing with regional matters.

Training

The present situation

65. There is clear demand for more and better training. Since 1997 we have offered to Areas a range of training days 'on demand' (although even before that time central office did run *ad hoc* events either on request or because of a perceived need). These are a recruitment day (to recruit new footpath workers), an induction day (for newly recruited footpath workers), a day on changes to the network (Highways Act orders), a day on changes to the network (rights of way and development) and a public inquiry training day. We have also been able to provide training days covering specific topics requested by Areas and there have been other events such as the Campaign Road Shows and training days for LAF members.
66. In addition to this there is a vast amount of written material: 'Rights of way: a guide to law and practice' (the 'blue book'), 'Guidance for Footpath Workers' (also available on members section of website), 'Notes on Footpath Campaigning' (also available on members section of website), a series of Advice Notes on various rights of way topics (on paper and on website), the Rights of Way Review Committee Good Practice Guides. Other information is also available on the website. In addition, 'Footpath Matters' goes out to all RA footpath workers once a month and 'Footpath Worker' is published 3 times a year. The 4th edition of the blue book is being launched alongside the 'blue book extra' website which will contain both regular updates to the content of the book and much extra information. The consensus view seems to be that this huge volume of useful but unstructured information is not serving footpath workers well, particularly anyone newly recruited to the job.

The future

67. We will develop a completely new training package in a modular format. We will assess how other similar charities and NGOs provide such training, and then develop our own package with the assistance of professional training providers. There will be an introductory module, which all newly recruited footpath workers will be invited to attend. These will be held regionally to encourage maximum participation. Other modules might include 'Changes to the network: Highways Act Orders', 'Rights of Way and Development', 'Definitive Map Work', 'Funding and Budgets', 'Public Inquiries', 'Maintenance', 'Obstructions', 'Practical Work and Related Matters', 'Local Government Structures and Funding', 'Map Reading and Related Matters', 'Team work/motivation/communication', 'Urban paths/gating order/special orders', 'Sections 130A and 56', 'Dealing with paper work/records/computers' and 'Path Improvements'.
68. In all modules we will provide training that incorporates both the RA's policy/legal work and campaigning, thus giving attendees the widest possible range of tools with which to work. The modules will be developed in such a way that they can be studied on-line, or on DVD, possibly by small groups of people working together with a local mentor.
69. The existence of such a structured training framework may operate as an incentive in the recruitment of footpath workers and can be advertised widely ('walk', 'hike', RA website). Indeed, perhaps it would not be necessary for a participant to be an RA footpath worker or potential footpath worker to attend (although a charge might have to be made in those circumstances). The BHS already operates such a system.
70. 'Guidance for Footpath Workers' and 'Notes on Footpath Campaigning' will be amalgamated and completely re-written in a more user-friendly and attractive format. We

have received a number of suggestions as to how this could be done, (e.g. through the use of flow charts and incorporation of standard letters and forms) and how the content could be extended (e.g. ploughing and cropping, urban paths and their closure, how to achieve safe road crossings on trunk roads, agri-environment schemes). We will recruit a 'sounding board' of volunteers to guide that process. As of now, this guidance will also be available on-line.

Goodbye to all that ...

71. In taking a long-hard look at what we presently do, the inescapable conclusion is that staff and volunteers try to spread themselves too thinly. Our impact in whatever we are trying to do (be it training volunteers or influencing politicians) is thus diluted. If we are going to deliver the changes outlined above then some things are going to have to be dropped.
72. Work areas that are not prioritised in this strategy will most likely be supported passively; i.e. by way of a briefing note on the policy line, or an 'off the shelf' campaign strategy. It is impossible for the RA to pursue all rights of way issues actively, and having agreed our priorities we will concentrate on those. Clearly however, there will be times when new issues arise or existing issues become more important, requiring a reassessment of our priorities.
73. Specifically, we propose the following actions as part of a review of our work:
 - Since March 1983, when the RA became an organisation prescribed to receive notice of public path and definitive map modification orders, we have kept, on a computer database, a detailed record of every change made to the rights of way network in England and Wales. For the first few years this was done under contract to the then Countryside Commission who wished to monitor the working of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. When the Countryside Commission withdrew its support the RA continued with the monitoring itself. Over the years a number of reports have been produced using the data, Areas and local authorities ask for information on the numbers of orders made, etc. as do Government departments and agencies. However, little use has been made of the available data as a campaigning tool and it is estimated that it takes approximately 40% of one member of staff's time to record the details from each order received. Transition to a new operating system over the last year has not been straightforward and problems remain. Investment in the system is needed if we are to continue to record the detail of every path order received. A staff working party has already been established to assess the future of this work (including the use made of the data, and the requirements of any new database system).
 - Instead of a member of staff attending meetings of the British Waterways User Group and associated British Waterways Meetings, we will consider recruiting a volunteer to undertake the job (in the same way that a volunteer is our appointee on the National Trust's Council). There is a strong feeling that whilst many tow paths are not rights of way so much use of them is made by walkers that the RA must continue to have a voice in their protection and development.
 - A member of staff attends meetings of the Highways Agency Road Users Group. The need for, and nature of, our representation on this Committee will be reviewed. Whilst the significance of the fact that the Highways Agency now invites non-motorised users to these meetings should not be underestimated, our influence there appears negligible.

Next steps

74. This strategy will feed into the wider strategic plan of the RA, which is currently being developed.
75. In order to take the strategy forward, a number of detailed 'tactical documents' will be developed. These will be used to inform guidance to RA Areas and Groups, the workplans of the Footpath Teams at the RA, and the content of training material and publications.
76. A central group, comprising volunteers, Trustees and staff will be established to oversee the development of this strategy and subsequent policies, training programmes, etc.

Agreed by the Ramblers' Association Board of Trustees
14 October 2007