

## ***How developments can help us to improve the footpath network***

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It has never been a better time for us to fight for footpaths on new developments. There was a major update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in July 2018 which made walking and cycling top priority for transport. Paragraph 102 of the NPPF says that “*Transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals, so that..... opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued*”. Paragraph 110 states “*applications for development should give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport*”. Hertfordshire County Council’s new Local Transport Plan 2018-2031 (LTP4) supports these aims. London Boroughs are guided by the London Mayor’s Transport Strategy.

Hertfordshire is faced with massive Government imposed housing targets. There is a lack of brownfield land and a preference for large new sites with a single landowner who will fund new infrastructure within the development. In this environment, we need to safeguard existing access but there are opportunities for new path networks. Sustainable transport guidelines emphasise walking and cycling, and require direct traffic free routes where possible. Health and Wellbeing priorities recommend exercise – be it health walks, dog walks, family walks and cycle rides, or U3A group walks. These activities also help to support the rural economy, providing trade for village shops and pubs.

Ideally, we should inform developers of access needs at earliest stages, to ensure they know what is required before their plans are set in concrete. The application stage is really too late. Any planning applications submitted should conform to the Local Plan, so that is the time to get involved. There are many public consultation stages in the development of Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, and Transport Plans, when you have the opportunity to submit ideas.

A Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) is a statutory requirement of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and is particularly helpful for the development of the footpath network. If a route has already been identified in this plan as “desirable for the future”, a developer is more likely to consider it in initial plans. A ROWIP should aim to identify:

- Safe sustainable routes to schools and colleges, shops and places of employment
- Safe walking routes to public transport
- Short walks for families and dog walkers
- Safe cycle rides for families
- Safe routes for horse riders
- Longer strategic routes for walkers and riders
- Verge improvements linking PROWs and other paths and open spaces
- Safe crossings for major roads
- Alternatives for routes blighted by development

Hertfordshire updated their ROWIP policy document in 2017-18 to stand for 10 years, but the database of suggestions and its associated maps is a living document which is updated as new proposals are identified. Enfield and Haringey both have ROWIPs that are due to be updated and Barnet have never yet produced one, so there is room for our involvement.

In responding to development proposals, we need first of all to mitigate the effect on existing routes. For example, if a narrow lane will have increased traffic, we need off carriageway routes. We need alternative routes replacing those directly affected by development and safe crossing where

routes cross busy roads. Then, we must provide new routes for sustainable transport and leisure routes for health and wellbeing.

It is important to fight for **permanent** improvements to protect access for the future. Developers may be quick to offer **Permissive** paths, but these can be withdrawn at any time without consultation. If the development is permanent, routes should be permanent **Public Rights of Way**. Similarly, local green spaces should be dedicated as **Village Greens** to ensure that the public can have access in perpetuity.

The example below shows how a new development can be used to improve connections across a wider area. The current Definitive Map section shows the area to be developed, a newly created route across it, and planned linking routes for the future:



In summary, our aim should be to ensure that planning policies at all levels:

- Protect existing paths and access
- Require new paths and open spaces for sustainable transport and leisure use
- Support implementation of the ROWIP

And for **permanent** improvements, insist on Public Rights of Way and Village Greens. We need to ensure that planning authorities enforce these policies when developments come forward.

Keeping track of all the development going on across the Hertfordshire and our London Boroughs is far too big a job for one "Area Countryside Officer" to cover. We need people across our Area keeping an eye on local development plans and the major planning applications. If you are interested in such work, email [HNMsecretary@gmail.com](mailto:HNMsecretary@gmail.com). There are people within our Area and at Central Office who can help and advise. The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) provide a useful introduction to planning on their website at: [www.planninghelp.cpre.org.uk/planning-explained](http://www.planninghelp.cpre.org.uk/planning-explained)