

# Environment, Development and Transport committee

<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Adoption of the Norfolk Access Improvement Plan (NAIP)</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>8 March 2019</b>
<b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>	<b>Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services</b>
<b>Strategic impact</b> The Norfolk Access Improvement Plan 2019 – 2029 (NAIP) replaces the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007 – 2017 fulfilling the statutory duty for Norfolk County Council as county Highway Authority, to review and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan every 10 years under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	

## Executive summary

Norfolk's extensive countryside access network is an invaluable resource for residents and visitors and is free to all users. It offers a variety of attractive routes to explore for recreation and health benefits and for accessing local services. It provides access to unparalleled vistas and landscapes, to archaeology and built heritage and provides habitats for wildlife.

Norfolk County Council's Norfolk Access Improvement Plan and Statement of Actions 2019 – 2029 (NAIP) has been completed (see Appendix 1) with advice and assistance from members of the Norfolk Local Access Forum (NLAF), the statutory body that advises the Council on access to land in Norfolk. The NLAF fully recommend the document which was signed off at their meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

The NAIP sets out the priorities for increasing public use and enjoyment of Norfolk's Public Rights of Way network (PRoW) – footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. The NAIP also includes consideration of other routes and areas that allow people to access the countryside such as cycle tracks, quiet lanes, unclassified county roads and permissive routes which contribute to a dense network of access routes. Many of these are promoted as long-distance trails and attached circular walks and rides under the banner of the Norfolk Trails network. Norfolk also is fortunate in having two National Trails, the Peddar's Way and the Norfolk Coast Path.

The Plan will help deliver Norfolk Futures, the Council's strategy to 2028 which aspires to make the most of Norfolk's heritage, culture and environment; build communities to be proud of; make effective use of digital data; deliver services in places where most needed and help build a healthy and sustainable future for Norfolk.

### Recommendations:

- 1. That the NAIP is adopted by the Environment, Development and Transport Committee (EDT Committee) and officers instructed to work to reference it across (and integrate it with) other Council plans, publications and initiatives.**
- 2. That the EDT Committee members assist with promotion of the plan wherever possible.**

## 1. Proposal

- 1.1. The NAIP is presented to the EDT committee for approval.

## 2. Evidence

- 2.1. The Norfolk Access Improvement Plan 2019-2029 (NAIP) sets out the priorities for increasing public use and enjoyment of Norfolk's Public Rights of Way network (PRoW) – footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. The NAIP also includes consideration of other routes and areas that allow people to access the countryside such as cycle tracks, quiet lanes, unclassified county roads and permissive routes which contribute to a dense network of access routes. Many of these are promoted as long-distance trails and attached circular walks and rides as the Norfolk Trails network. Norfolk also has two National Trails, the Peddar's Way and the Norfolk Coast Path.
- 2.2. Norfolk's extensive countryside access network is an invaluable resource for residents and visitors and is free to all users. It offers a variety of attractive routes to explore for recreation and health benefits and for accessing local services. It provides access to unparalleled vistas and landscapes, to archaeological sites and built heritage and provides habitats for wildlife.
- 2.3. There are 2,400 miles (3,900km) of Public Rights of Way in Norfolk (footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic) as well as cycle tracks, quiet lanes, unclassified county roads and permissive routes.
- 2.4. The NAIP sets out priorities over the next 10 years for improving this rural and urban access network so that it is better able to meet the varying demands placed upon it:
  - by increasing public, economic and environmental benefit associated with / derived from the countryside access network;
  - through community involvement
  - through a collaborative and pragmatic approach to responsibilities and resources;
  - by increasing investment in the countryside access network.
- 2.5. The NAIP includes a review of the achievements of the previous plan, discussion of and recommendations to address the needs of future users and a detailed Statement of Actions which sets out our long-term plans to deliver our ambition to improve the countryside access network in partnership.
- 2.6. The Plan will help deliver Norfolk Futures, the Council's strategy to 2028 which aspires to make the most of Norfolk's heritage, culture and environment; build communities to be proud of; make effective use of digital data; deliver services in places where most needed and help build a healthy and sustainable future for Norfolk. Norfolk Futures and the Council's vision for Norfolk in 2021 align with "World Class Environment", the county's rural strategy.
- 2.7. The NAIP's 10-year Statement of Actions is organised under 8 umbrella themes (objectives) which are to achieve:
  - A well-managed access network

- A well-connected access network
- A well protected environment
- A well-promoted access network
- An access network underpinned by excellent information management
- A community –led access network
- An access network that supports / delivers health outcomes
- A valuable access network.

- 2.8. The NAIP was produced by Norfolk County Council following extensive consultation with user groups and with expert input and advice from the Norfolk Local Access Forum ([www.norfolk.gov.uk/nlaf](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/nlaf)). Forum members are local people and experts in their specialist area of countryside access (or related interest area) who volunteer their time to provide advice to Norfolk County Council (and other bodies such as Natural England) on how to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable for recreation and to benefit social, economic and environmental interests.
- 2.9. A Citizen Space online public consultation on an earlier draft of the NAIP took place between 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018 and 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018 [www.norfolk.gov.uk/naip](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/naip) generating 102 responses. A structured stakeholder event was held on 18<sup>th</sup> April to seek comments on the draft Statement of Actions (identify gaps and with capturing opportunities for collaboration, ownership and delivery of actions) which was attended by 41 people.
- 2.10. The NAIP is set against the backdrop of Norfolk’s projected growth agenda which envisages that by 2026 there will be 95,000 more jobs, 10,000 new businesses and 117,000 more homes in the county. A greater population and rise in visitor numbers will place increasing demands on the Public Rights of Way and access network which is composed of many historic routes and ways dating back centuries that do not always meet the needs and demands of users and land managers today. Other challenges are:
- (i) the loss of permissive access
- The countryside access network faces losses as permissive access agreements arranged through Countryside Stewardship are no longer funded by DEFRA. Permissive paths play an important role in making connections between existing rights of way and linking communities with green spaces. The Norfolk Local Access Forum has made good progress with a pilot scheme in west Norfolk which could deliver a template for other communities to follow
- (ii) the 2026 deadline to identify and submit applications to register unrecorded paths created before 1949 before they are lost forever (applications based solely on user evidence are not subject to the cut-off date). We are keen to encourage user groups and communities to submit applications to help get these unrecorded routes on the map.

### **3. Financial Implications**

- 3.1. The delivery of the plan is dependent on sourcing and securing external funding to make improvements. All recent improvements to the network have been funded from a range of external sources including, the Department for Transport, the Rural Development Programme England, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Interreg, and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

