

Rights of Way Review
Staffordshire County Council
1 Staffordshire Place
Stafford
ST16 2DH

Dear Sir/Madam,

It is a privilege to be able to respond to this consultation regarding the 4,500km of public footpaths and bridleways which cross our beautiful County and which are enjoyed by thousands of people every year. Thank you for the opportunity to take part.

Staffordshire County Council is responsible for working with landowners and others to keep these public rights of way open, safe and appealing for people to use and enjoy. It is vital that this important work continues and is enhanced where possible. Many of the public rights of way across our County are integral parts of our communities, allowing access to some of the most beautiful parts of our countryside, and in many cases, providing vital access to land and animals.

I acknowledge and fully understand the pressures on the County Council's resources. Demand for services such as adult social care continue to increase and this leaves the Council needing to find savings and new ways of working and concentrating resources where they are needed most.

I accept that proposing new standards for how rights of way are maintained, focusing money and activity on those footpaths and bridleways which are important to our communities and for promoting tourism, is one approach. However, I would make the case that other footpaths and bridleways must not be abandoned. Therefore, I would suggest that Parish Councils be engaged at an early stage to see how they could assist or even take on the responsibility for rights of way in their areas. Perhaps also Community Groups could be engaged in the same way.

I will take your main points in turn

- **Help guide where the county council focuses its resources.**

Clearly, County Council resources should be focused on the main routes and those best for tourism, however, it is vital that some resources are kept aside for the other routes.

- **Help shape county council programmes to support volunteering across the rights of way network.**

Again, the Parish Councils and local Community Groups could be engaged in these ventures. Clear guidance will however be needed if volunteers are to be used. After all, in many cases, volunteers will be going over private land to maintain rights of way. Any engagement with the community could also help in terms of education.

- **Help shape new ways to keep people better informed of progress if they have made a request for help or information.**

Communication will always be key when dealing with these types of situation, especially as we know how important various Rights of Way are to their communities. Perhaps new technologies could be explored to help with communications, or again, Parish Councils and Community Groups used to help spread the message.

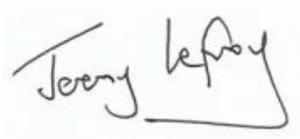
- **Help guide where the community and users could play a bigger role.**

Again, I refer to my points above regarding the use of Parish Councils and Community Groups to take on some of the roles. I would suggest that they are encouraged to set up Local Landowners' Liaison Groups to bring everyone locally around the table to sort out the management of local footpaths and bridleways. Often, disputes and misunderstandings over Rights of Way are often caused by poor communication rather than anything more sinister. I therefore think that establishing local forums to ensure everyone is 'in the loop' will not just avert some problems before they materialise, but also, by reducing possible conflicts and enforcement, may produce part of the cost saving that the County Council is looking for.

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this consultation.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeremy Lefroy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line at the end.

Jeremy Lefroy MP
Member of Parliament for the Stafford Constituency