

Rural news



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Rural Travel Plans Update

Village Travel Plans: the selection process

Hertfordshire Highways has developed a rural database to give all parishes a fair chance to be involved in the Village Travel Plan process.

The criteria to identify those parishes with the greatest need have been categorised under two main headings:

- (1) Awareness and enthusiasm.
- (2) Accidents and severity.

Awareness and Enthusiasm

Participation in the programmes listed below shows the parish awareness and willingness to change things in their parish.

- School Travel Plans
- Parish Paths Partnership (P3)
- Parish Environmental Action Plan (PEAPS)
- Parish Plan
- Village Travel Plan Information.

Accident and Severity

The higher the accident rate and greater the severity of accidents within a parish, the more there is a need for safety improvements.

All the factors are scored and then added together. The total figure gives the position that the parish then holds in the ranking list. Successful parishes will receive an invitation to join the scheme.

Work has been continuing with the three parishes of St Pauls Walden, Weston and Aston. Working groups have been set up, consisting of interested residents from within their respective parishes, business and school representatives, district and parish councillors and officers from Hertfordshire Highways.

A parish travel plan questionnaire, pertinent to each parish, was agreed and produced. The questionnaires were sent out to households throughout the three parishes.

Subjects included, the use of the existing facilities within the community, bus and train use for both leisure and work purposes, use of the rights of way network and modes of transport available to householders. Additionally there were opportunities for residents to express their concerns on subjects as diverse as street lighting, maintenance, speed, rat running, congestion and parking.

A good response rate to the questionnaires of between 30% and 50% was received. The questionnaires have now been analysed, giving a very good picture of issues relating to village travel in the three communities.

Major items of concern in Whitwell identified included:-

- Parking and congestion in the High Street.
- The lack of a continuous footway and safe crossing points.



The residents of Weston identified their major concerns to be:-

- The lack of a footway in Hitchin Road and Damask Green Road.
- The lack of crossing points.

The major concerns to Aston's householders were :-

- The volume of traffic travelling through the village.
- The number of large unsuitable vehicles using Aston as a short cut to Benington.

Common to all three villages are a perception of speeding vehicles, rat running and poor maintenance of the highways.

A newsletter, informing residents, has been produced for each of the three parishes giving a general overview of concerns and problems highlighted in the questionnaires. A shortened version has also been displayed on notice boards in the parishes.

The design team of Hertfordshire Highways will now be drawing up proposals for solutions to the problems identified. These proposals are scheduled to be exhibited in the parishes during Spring 2004.

Rights of Way Improvement Planning

The County Council is currently preparing Hertfordshire's first Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWImp). The plan is a requirement of the recent Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) and will be the primary means by which local highway authorities identify actions to meet the Government's aim of better provision for walkers, cyclists, pedestrians and people with disabilities. The plan will have a ten year life-span.

The process for preparing the RoWImp is well documented in statutory guidance published by the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The guidance sets out clear steps to undertake:

- An assessment of the **present and future demand** on the

network by a range of users including those with limited mobility and motorised users.

- An assessment of the network. This work not only considers the **state of the network** but also the issues surrounding the legal record that is known as the Definitive Map.
- An assessment of a wide range of **existing policy documents** including Structure and Local Plans, Community Strategies, the Local Transport Plan, Community Forests as well as taking into consideration open space planning and the identification of open access land.



The assessment is currently underway and has engaged a wide range of organisations to identify key issues and demands through focus groups and questionnaires. Once the process is completed then it will go out to consultation early in 2004 that will involve a wide range of organisations including local authorities, user organisations and regional organisations such as the Countryside and Environment Agencies.

If you wish to contribute to or discuss the improvement plan further please email trevor.mose@hertsc.gov.uk or phone 01992 555291.

Countryside walks for people with disabilities

To help mark European Year of People with Disabilities 2003, a partnership of local organisations has produced a new pack of countryside walks in the Chilterns suitable for people with disabilities.

Walkers can enjoy the fresh air and fantastic views and explore woodlands, meadows, rivers, canals and lakes and might see deer, wild flowers and even red kites. Local resident Sandra Hastrick said: "These walks are wonderful for people like me who love to be outdoors in the countryside. Its great that thought has been given so that people confined to wheelchairs now know where they can go to enjoy the Chilterns."

The walks are all in the Chilterns area, including Ashridge Estate, Tring Reservoirs and College Lake in Herts. Most of the walks are on

level hard surfaced paths but some are more challenging.

Each leaflet provides information about the conditions people can expect to find on the walk, such as slopes or the type of path surface. This information will help disabled



people decide if the walk is right for them. At two of the sites it is possible to borrow mobility scooters to help explore.

The attractive pack describing 11 walks is free for people with impaired mobility and users of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs. Call the Chilterns Conservation Board on 01844 271316 to order a pack or you can download them from the internet

www.chilternsaonb.org/accesswalks/

A programme of guided walks in the countryside accessible for wheelchairs, pushchairs and mobility scooters is planned for next spring and summer. Contact James Littlewood 01844 271316 for details.