

2. Improving green access infrastructure

"A healthier population makes for a more robust and prosperous economy."¹¹

Introduction

The opportunities for developing green access involve the whole ROW&A team. Development projects will often include changes to the definitive map requiring legal orders to be drawn up; working closely with land owners requesting permissions and access to sites; liaising with the public on how the development will be delivered; working on funding bids and reporting on the delivery of projects; and celebrating the delivery of new projects through the media.

PRoW works are relatively low cost, providing excellent value for money. Past public rights of way projects have been funded through partnerships (Sustrans and parish councils), utilising local and national capital budgets (Local Transport Plan and Department for Transport Cycle Safety Fund), and through the European Regional Development Fund (InterReg Cross Border Cooperation Programme).

A key opportunity for funding improvements is the planning process. Suffolk County Council is a statutory consultee on all local planning applications that affect public rights of way and the team receives over 1,000 consultations a year.



Sustainable development is defined as “making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations.”



With aspirations to build 66,000 new homes in Suffolk between 2019 and 2039¹², there is a growing number of planning applications and consultations. Where developments are significant, it is possible to obtain funding or to agree works with the developer to improve the network. This approach can create new routes, improve existing routes, or change the status of a route, for example upgrading a footpath to a bridleway.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development is defined as “making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations.”

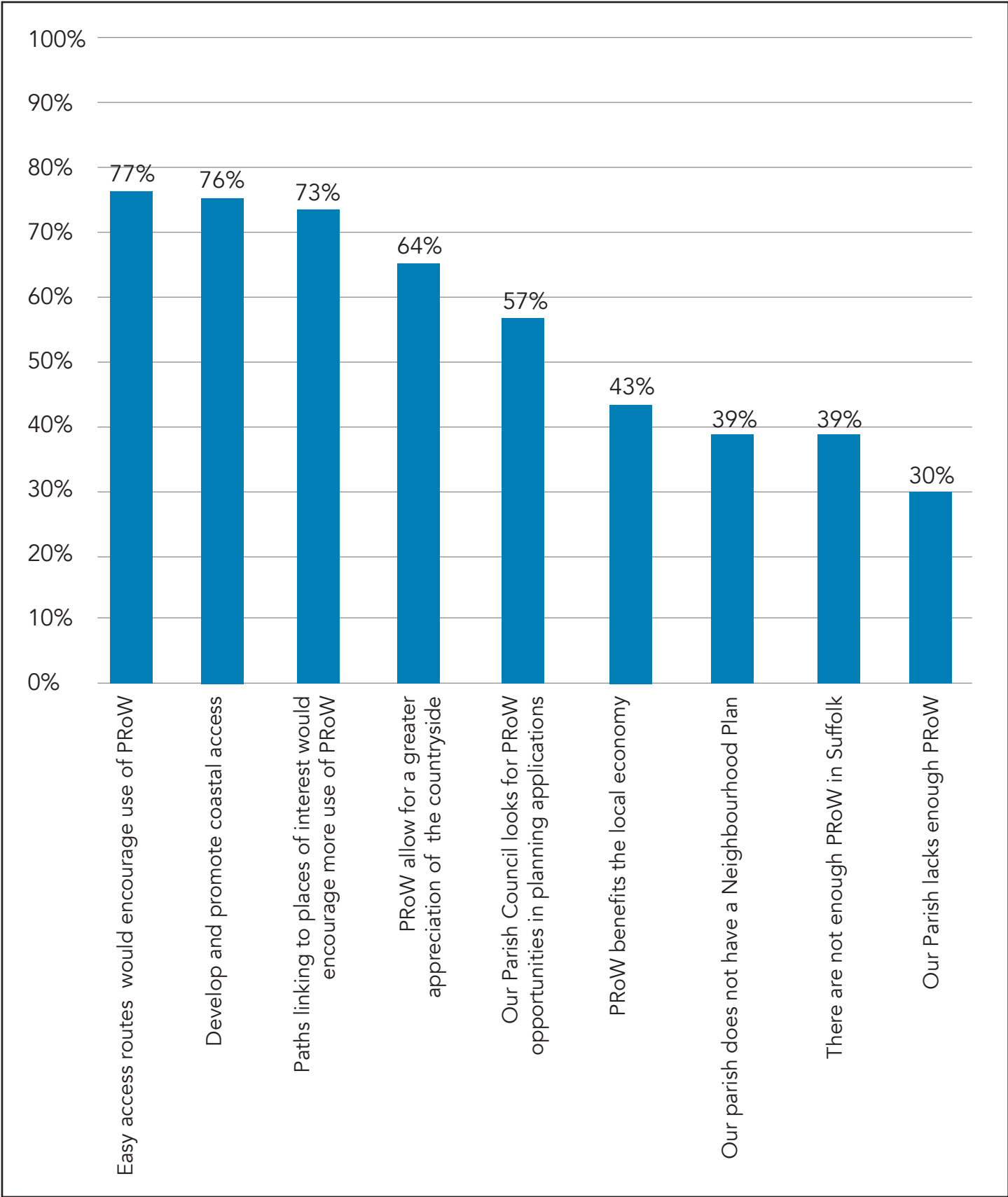
The NPPF also sets out aspirations to make the planning process more inclusive and creative. It provides a framework for local communities and their councils to produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans which will reflect the needs of their local communities.

The ROW&A team provides advice and guidance on the development of local and neighbourhood plans, presenting the case that the public rights of way network plays a key role in developing sustainable communities. Also, within this context sits Suffolk's Walking and Cycling Strategies. The walking strategy aims to make walking the default option for any journey under 20 minutes. This is where the rights of way network plays a pivotal role; providing safe off-road travel options for those wishing to walk or cycle as an alternative to driving.

The county council is committed to maintaining the green access network within the constraints of revenue and capital funding allocation.

Consultation key findings:
improving green access infrastructure

In the consultation two thirds of respondents recognised how PROW allow for a greater appreciation of the countryside and over half of parishes look for PROW improvements in planning applications. However, three quarters of respondents would like to see more easy access routes, more routes that link places of interest and the promotion of coastal access.



2. Delivery Plan: improving green access infrastructure

Timescale:

1 = on-going activity

2 = within 3 years

3 = within 5 years

4 = 5 years+

Resources:

£ = existing resources

££ = additional resources (up to £100k) and reallocation of staff resources

£££ = significant additional resources (over £100k) and additional staff

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
2.1 Improving the network					
2.1.1 Make the network better for all users.	Seek opportunities to enhance public rights of way, including new linkages and upgrading routes where there is a need, to improve access for all and support healthy and sustainable access between communities and services. Funding to be sought through development and transport funding, external grants, other councils and partnership working.	1	£	Improvements delivered.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.
2.2 Developments					
2.2.1 Make the network better for all users.	Where possible and appropriate, work with planners to enhance public rights of way as green corridors within new developments. Where this is not possible, seek the realignment of public rights of way within a green corridor that retains its integrity and links to the natural environment.	1	£	Number of sites with enhanced PRow.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.
2.2.2 Make the network better for all users.	Where relevant, seek the improvement and creation of new offsite public rights of way to link to other public rights of way or to features of interest.	1	£	Number of sites with enhanced off-site PRow.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
2.2 Developments					
2.2.3 Make the network better for all users.	Develop a range of improvement proposals that are fit for funding.	2	£	Number of improvements identified.	Easier access to green space and healthier communities.
2.2.4 Recognise green access as a strategic and valuable asset in achieving sustainable communities and economic growth.	Streamline the public rights of way response to local planning authorities and other consultations.	2	£	Launch new process.	Greater investment in green access.
2.2.5 Recognise green access as a strategic and valuable asset.	Influence the development of local plans, neighbourhood plans and design guides.	1	£	Number of plans reviewed.	Greater investment in green access.
2.2.6 Recognise green access as a strategic and valuable asset.	Raise awareness with local planning authorities to influence the design of new developments with a strong emphasis on delivering those parts of the National Planning Policy Framework which relate to improving green access and the County Council's policies.	2	£	Number of local planning authorities met and influenced.	Greater investment in green access.
2.2.7 Recognise green access as a strategic and valuable asset.	Contribute to the development of the Suffolk Design Guide to ensure green access is embedded in the guide.	1	£	Inclusion in the guide of green access principles.	Greater investment in green access.

Objective:	Action:	Timescale:	Resource:	Performance measure:	Outcome:
2.3 Connectivity					
2.3.1 Take a whole highway approach when considering the journeys of vulnerable users.	Work with colleagues and other agencies to consider the needs of non-motorised users on the road as well as the PRow network.	1	£	Number of agencies influenced.	Greater investment in green access.
2.3.2 Create a more connected network.	Obtain significant public rights of way improvements and legacies on nationally important development projects, such as Sizewell C and East Anglia Wind Farm developments.	1	££	Number of schemes influenced.	Greater investment in green access.
2.3.3 Create a more connected network.	Work with Network Rail to improve safety at public rights of way level crossings. Where closures are sought, ensure new public rights of way are created which work well for all users, are well maintained, safe and funded. Oppose proposals which do not meet the needs of local communities in accessing public rights of way.	3	££	Number of schemes influenced.	Greater investment in green access.
2.3.4 Create a more connected network.	Work with Highways England to address public rights of way severed by trunk roads through diversions to existing infrastructure or provision of new grade-separated crossings.	1	£	Number of crossings where the council has sought changes.	Greater investment in green access.
2.3.5 Create a more connected network.	Carry out legal order-making to facilitate improvements to the network as opportunities arise.	1	£	Orders made.	Greater investment in green access.