

PLACE, SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22nd APRIL 2024

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY ASSET ASSESSMENTS

1. BACKGROUND

Carmarthenshire's PROW network consists of 3176 individual routes and extends to over 2500km in length (see appendix 1). The whole network and the legal status of each PROW can be viewed in detail on the Council Website [Public rights of way \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

The PROW network exists over land of all types from agricultural to urban and contains numerous pieces of infrastructure such as stiles, gates and bridges, to enable unrestricted public access.

Depending on the type of infrastructure, responsibility mainly sits either with the Local Authority or the landowner. The division of legal responsibility for network infrastructure is clearly defined in the Highways Act (1980).

As part of the Authority's responsibility for keeping the surface of public rights of way in a fit state for public use we have a duty towards the bridge structures on the network which are maintainable at public expense.

With an extensive network and a challenging economic environment, we need to prioritise where and when we deliver our various duties.

In 2021 we adopted a PROW Network Hierarchy that has been used to group the whole PROW network into 5 priority categories from High to Low. The hierarchy provides a consistent means of prioritising the network, considering criteria such as usage, levels of access and promotion.

Categorisation of routes has assisted in ensuring that we deliver consistently against our statutory duties, using our limited resources to resolve the most urgent issues.

2. EXISTING ASSET INFORMATION

The last performance indicator survey results for the network (5% random network sample), completed in 2018, showed 52.3% of the routes on the PROW network are open.

Within this extensive network there are many assets which the County Council has a responsibility for. Presently the total number of these assets is unknown; to date, it has been established that the Council's assets across the PROW network amounts to 701 bridge structures, it is likely there are many more.

There is a need to manage the potential risk posed by the assets present on the network both to the public and to the authority. The introduction of the Network hierarchy in 2021 (see appendix 2) has allowed a more strategic approach to managing and maintaining our known structures.

By targeting higher priority routes and their associated structures, we have been able to develop a complete record of assets along those routes and their condition. How and where we allocate resources to the assets on our higher priority routes has also been formalised using a risk-based scoring system based on the Network Hierarchy.

This risk-based approach centred on route priority has improved the Authority's position in respect of PROW asset management. The remaining network, however, still contains an unknown number of assets and this is a risk to the Authority.

We now have an opportunity to complete an asset assessment on our remaining PROWs so we can apply our risk-based methodology for asset management across the *whole* network.

We want to use the opportunity to also obtain a complete set of baseline data for overall network condition and operational status, a set of data that has never been achievable before.

The outcome of this assessment will undoubtedly provide an unprecedented data source for PROW management. It is however worth noting that the data will likely highlight a significant shortfall in resources for asset management.

Presently resources for our known assets is nowhere near adequate to bring all substandard/missing structures into serviceable condition. Asset improvement has to be scored and prioritised each year taking account of existing and new asset information.

3. ASSET ASSESSMENT DELIVERY (NETWORK SURVEY)

The Countryside Access team made a successful application to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund back in August 2023. With the grant funding awarded, the Authority have been able to fund a part time Ramblers project officer.

The appointed officer has been tasked with leading a new project, developing a volunteer resource that will survey the PROW network on behalf of the Authority. The survey will gather data in respect of CCC assets, alongside route condition and operational status.

Details of this partnership and the project outlined above can be viewed online <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/pathways-partnership-carmarthenshire>

The Network Hierarchy assisted in determining where volunteers will be asked to survey. Our category A routes and the County Walks that sit in category B are regularly inspected by Countryside Access Rangers and therefore we have a complete record in respect of these routes. Volunteers are therefore being asked to survey the category B bridleway network and our C, D and E category PROWs.

Recent investment in the CAMSWeb mapping system has created a digital means to deliver this survey project. The system has the capacity to manage volunteer details, allocate surveys, record survey data and embed the data into the main CAMS (Countryside Access Management System) database.

The Project Officer has so far recruited over 80 volunteers. She has engaged directly with stakeholders and used social media and the press to drive the recruitment exercise.

To provide appropriate training to the volunteers and manage the surveys through CAMSWeb the Project Officer has been working closely with the Countryside Access team to develop her knowledge and has been provided with appropriate software training.

Volunteers will receive training to ensure the asset and condition data collected is accurate and substantiated. Training is scheduled to commence during the last week of March and will run across 4 weeks to ensure all volunteers can attend a session, support will be provided by members of the Countryside Access team.

Volunteers will be allocated surveys according to where they live, how far they are able to walk and how far they are willing to travel. With over 80 surveyors the asset assessment should progress quickly but how long it will take to complete the whole project is unknown at this time. We should be able to determine a estimated timescale once the project is underway and we start receiving data.

4. CONCLUSION.

Our high and med-high priority PROWs have complete asset data because of their priority status. They have high footfall, are used by all ages and abilities and are widely promoted but with a complete record of assets we are able to properly manage risks and safeguard the public along these routes.

There is visible need in the PROW asset record to complete an assessment of the remaining network to ensure resources are directed towards the most urgent asset issues through the adoption of a risk-based approach.

Additionally, the condition data that will be collected alongside the asset data will provide a valuable snapshot of the accessibility of the whole network. Previously, performance indicators have been our only means to determine the condition of the network and these were based on a 5% random sample of the network.

The condition information will assist the Countryside Access team in developing well informed and strategic maintenance, enforcement, and improvement plans as well as creating efficiencies in project planning.

3. OTHER OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND THEIR PROS AND CONS

Not complete the asset assessment.

Should the authority not complete this assessment we would continue to work with incomplete asset and condition data across the PROW network. This would leave the authority more vulnerable to injury claims caused by unrecorded, substandard assets.

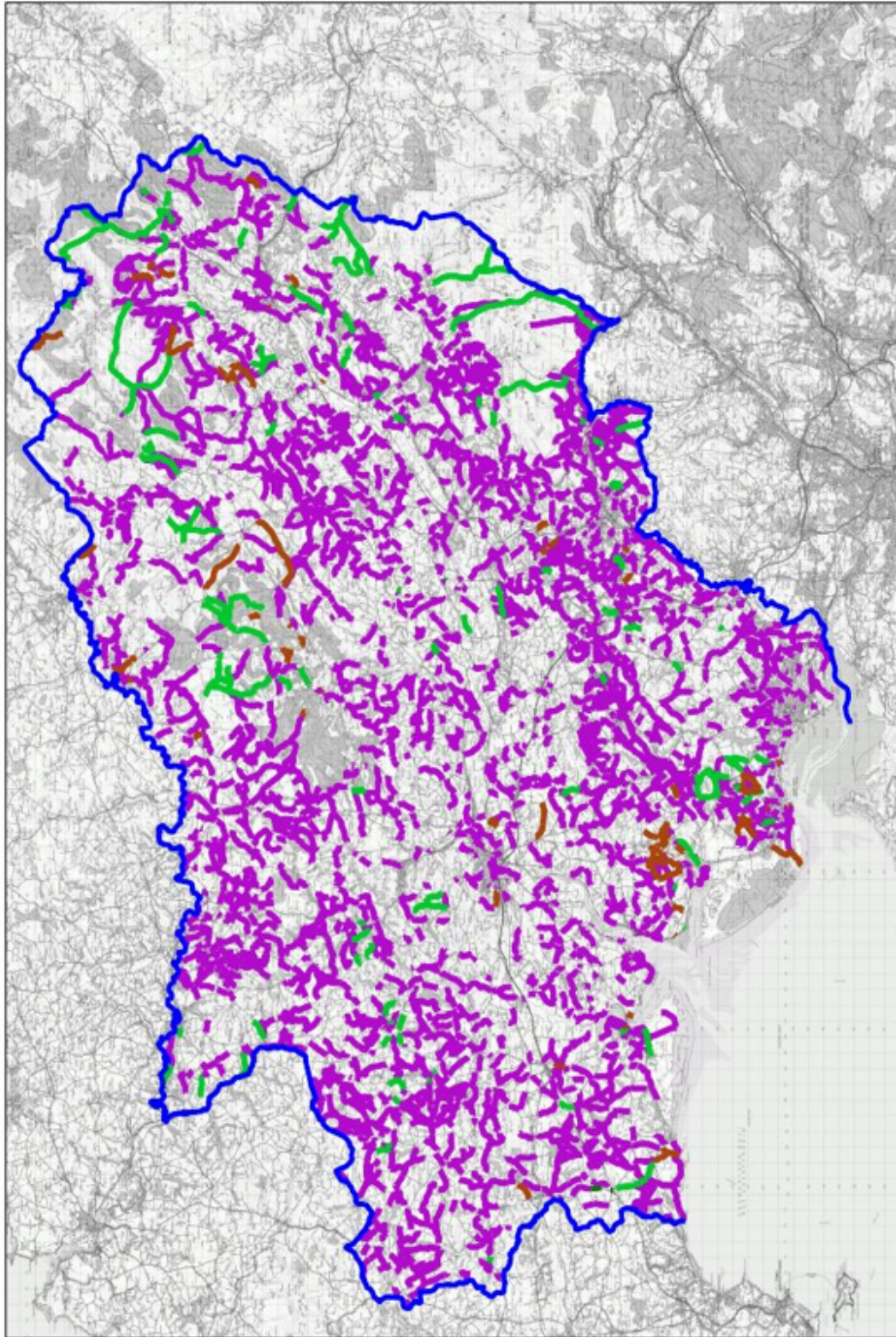
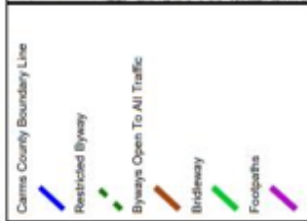
This would prevent the effective prioritisation of assets and the development of effective asset management protocols in a well-informed, defensible way, leaving the Authority more vulnerable to claims and less able to justify/defend asset management decisions.

With increasing demand for the network and limited resources, defensible decisions in respect of CCC assets across the PROW network are essential.

Appendix 1



Llybwrau Cyhoeddus Sir Gâr/Carmarthenshire's Public Rights of Way



Graddfa Scale
1:250000

Canol y Map Map Centre
[253266.2, 222405.2]

Dyddiad Date
14/10/2021

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Appendix 2



Priority				
A - High	B – Med/High	C - Medium	D – Med/Low	E - Low
<p>Long Distance Walks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wales Coast Path St Illtyd's Walk Heart of Wales Line Trail Landsker Borderlands Trail <p>All Ability Routes: -Routes particularly suited for less able users.</p> <p>High Utility / High Use: Paths (normally tarmacked) which provide alternative to short car trips – such as home to school, commuting, retail, key community facilities.</p>	<p>Promoted Routes / County Walks Routes that are promoted on the Discover Carmarthenshire website.</p> <p>Multi-user PRowS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bridleways Restricted Byways Byways Open to All Traffic 	<p>Linking Paths Paths forming a valuable link to an A or B classified route.</p> <p>T&CC Priority Paths Town / Community Council maintained or prioritised paths.</p> <p>Community Value Paths Routes to key attractions / significant amenity benefit.</p>	<p>Otherwise Uncategorised Paths Paths not classified A, B, C or E.</p> <p>Open Access Link Routes linking to Open Access Land.</p>	<p>Cul-de-sac Paths (unless amenity use can be identified)</p> <p>Purposeless Paths Paths with no obvious purpose.</p>