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To Staffordshire Parish Councils

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Dear Colleague

**Developing a community based approach – the ‘Highways and Rights of Way – Your choices’ website is now live**

As you will be aware from recent communications, Staffordshire County Council, the Staffordshire Parish Council Association and representatives of local councils (parish and town) across Staffordshire have been working hard to establish a brand new resource for all local councils.

Following a joint workshop held in March, a need was identified for a dedicated website containing information and advice to help local councils to explore their options around getting more involved in local environmental tasks.

We are delighted therefore that the ‘Highways and Rights of Way – Your Choices’ website is now live at [www.highwaysyourway.info](http://www.highwaysyourway.info) and showcases a range of information about the relatively small and aesthetic tasks that help neighbourhoods to look good and work well.

As you know, the County Council continues to make tough choices as income reduces but demand for services such as adult social care continues to increase.

So whilst the County Council’s decision to reduce the amount it can spend on the environmental and amenity maintenance presents new challenges for many local councils, it also provides opportunities. Many local councils are already taking the initiative and carrying out some small highways amenities tasks and applying to the Community Paths Initiative Fund to help maintain local rights of way.

The website is built around the stories of these councils, and puts the accent on ‘self-help’, featuring all the information that local councils will need to explore in order to put their plans into action.

As well as explaining the change in the local government landscape, local councils can now easily find the following on the new website:

- the powers of local councils to manage tasks
- case studies of local councils both in Staffordshire and beyond who have liaised with the county council for help and advice and then gone on to successfully manage tasks such as stiles maintenance, hedge cutting, winter gritting on pathways and vegetation on pathways and verges
- advice on what to consider when carrying out specific tasks - with all the information you need on one page
- advice and support for local councils either to take responsibility or to recruit and maintain a volunteer network, including advice from local councils themselves
- options around funding
- links to independent help and advice from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC)
- contact details for the Rights of Way Team and Community Highway Liaison Officers - who are always on hand to discuss bespoke solutions.

### **The Rights of Way consultation**

As an important part of the local environment, the website also contains all the information that local councils need to consider before making an informed response to the county council's Rights of Way consultation which runs until 25 December 2017.

Our stunning rural county boasts 4,500km of public footpaths and bridleways, enjoyed by thousands of people every year.

But as the County Council's income reduces, there are new opportunities for those passionate about rights of way to help shape how we work together to look after the network into the future.

Through the consultation, the County Council is proposing new standards for how we maintain rights of way, including a category system which seeks to focus our limited resources on those routes and activities that provide most 'value' to Staffordshire.

As part of the consultation, the County Council needs local councils to:

- consider where it should focus its resources and where local people should get more involved
- contribute any local knowledge that may change how each right of way is provisionally categorised

- indicate what the priorities for council supported volunteer programmes should be ie what would make the most difference in your area?
- consider if they could help with liaison with local landowners about their responsibilities, ensuring the County Council's resources are focused on their statutory responsibilities. As the majority of reports being made to the County Council are about broken stiles and gates on privately-owned land, which are the responsibility of landowners, we need local councils to be our eyes and ears on the ground, and encourage landowners to replace them where necessary. The County Council will continue to contribute to their replacement cost.

Whilst the County Council will continue to meet its statutory responsibilities across the network, it is clear that more help from the community is needed to help keep the network working well. The County Council needs local councils to consider the range of options to them regarding local environmental amenity and rights of way tasks, and respond to the consultation with this in mind.

So, whilst there are many challenges ahead, and this is just the start of a new relationship of local councils delivering a wider range of services with the county council, we hope that the website is step in the right direction.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on the website and on the rights of way proposals so that together we can maintain and improve the local environment.

Yours faithfully



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**Helen Fisher**  
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