



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Government guidance on diversion or extinguishment of public rights of way that pass through private dwellings, their curtilages and gardens, farmyards and industrial or commercial premises

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## Please note

1. Sections 118ZA and 119ZA of the Highways Act 1980 and section 54B of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 have not yet been commenced and are not in force.
2. Therefore, this guidance currently applies only where local authorities choose to consider diverting or extinguishing a right of way under s119 and s118 respectively of the Highways Act 1980.
3. Defra will inform local authorities in good time prior to commencing 118ZA and 119ZA of the Highways Act 1980 and section 54B of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

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# Extracts from Hansard 23 March 2016

*As a Government Minister, Baroness Williams of Trafford made the following statements:*

*“The right to apply will be supplemented by guidance that will effectively act as a presumption to divert or extinguish public rights of way that pass through the gardens of family homes, working farmyards or commercial premises where privacy, safety or security are a problem.*

*The guidance will give authorities more scope to confirm orders made in the interests of the landowner in circumstances where a right of way may cause hardship because it goes through the garden of a family home, a working farmyard or other commercial premises.*

*I am happy to reaffirm the commitment made by the previous Government that we will review, within two years of implementation of the reforms package, how effective the right-to-apply provisions and the accompanying guidance have proved to be. The review will send a message to authorities that the Government are determined that the new policy should work and that if guidance does not bring about sufficient changes, we will consider the introduction of further measures.”*

## Introduction

1. This guidance sets out Government policy on changes to public rights of way through gardens and curtilages of private dwellings, working farmyards and other commercial premises. It sets out how local authorities should respond when considering diverting or extinguishing public rights of way under s119ZA and s118ZA of the Highways Act 1980, or when considering making a ‘modification consent order’ under section 54B of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It also applies where local authorities choose to consider diverting or extinguishing a right of way under s119 and s118 respectively of the Highways Act 1980. It should be read in conjunction with all other relevant guidance, including rights of way Circular 1/09 (or as revised) and sections 118, 119, 118ZA and 119ZA of the Highways Act 1980 and Section 54B of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; the relevant web links are appended to this guidance.

## Context

2. The majority of public rights of way cross privately owned land. In general, members of the public and farmers/landowners are used to the concept and see no inherent inconsistency between the fact that land may be privately owned and the presence of public routes across it for both passage from A to B, and enjoyment of the countryside and the natural environment.

3. However, the general view of both groups can change markedly in situations where public rights of way pass through contained spaces such as private gardens, farmyards or commercial premises.
4. Members of the public may not be comfortable following a path through a contained space of this type because doing so feels like infringing on the privacy of a house owner, or potentially disrupting, or being endangered by, activities within a farmyard or commercial premises. Such path alignments can deter people from exercising the public's right to use the path.
5. The less contained such a space is, the fewer the public's concerns tend to be. People are used to walking past a house along an adjacent road or pavement, and this feels acceptable because they are clearly outside its visible domain. The degree of proximity can also make a big difference. Few people are troubled by using public paths across privately owned land around a house or farm, so long as they feel they can keep a reasonable distance from it. But the more that a route over privately owned land brings people into close proximity with the associated house or operational farm buildings, the less likely they are to feel comfortable using it.
6. Even where a public path through a private garden or farmyard has existed for centuries, and perhaps even pre-dates the use of the land for these purposes, there may be one or more reasons why its presence could be problematic for the landowner:
  - a. A reasonable expectation of being able to relax in the garden or spend time with family and friends without strangers appearing in the same contained space;
  - b. Greater concerns today than in previous eras about the security of children or property in such situations;
  - c. An increased use of public rights of way for general leisure and recreational use rather than local people using them to get around the locality, particularly where rights of way are promoted by local authorities.
  - d. A concern that having a public path close to the house has a negative impact on the value of the property;
  - e. Farmyards or commercial operations putting the public potentially at risk, or being regularly disturbed, because of the limited space within which a route passes.

# Guiding principles

7. This guidance applies where a public right of way passes through:
  - a. A garden or curtilage of a residential dwelling
  - b. a farmyard or
  - c. other commercial or industrial premises
8. It does not apply to gardens, dwellings or commercial premises which do not have the necessary permission for the current use of the land (most land and property will have an authorised use, either by way of existence of that use prior to the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 or, post 1947, either by way of an implemented planning permission or an authorised use as a consequence of a relevant period of use).
9. In all cases where the guidance applies, the order-making and confirming authority should weigh the interests of the owner and/or occupier against the overall impact of the proposal on the public as a whole. They should note that reducing or eliminating the impact of the current route of the right of way on the owner and/or occupier, in terms of privacy, security and safety, are important considerations to which due weight should be given. In relevant circumstances, the duty on authorities to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 may be a consideration.
10. The order-making authority should therefore be predisposed to make, and the confirming authority will be similarly predisposed to confirm, an order if it satisfies the respective relevant legislative tests. There are different tests for extinguishment and diversion; these are set out in s.118 and s.119 (respectively) of the Highways Act 1980. The relevant web links are appended to this guidance.
11. In such circumstances, it is in the public interest that any change to remove or reduce the impacts on the property owner or occupier of the existing public right of way should, wherever possible, involve diversion or replacement of the way rather than extinguishment alone. Before making an order, authorities should consider all the options available to them and/or to the landowner, and should be open to using the combination of powers, agreements and management arrangements that best suit the circumstances, whether mentioned below or not.
12. These options include:
  - a. Diversion of the right of way onto land already owned/occupied by the owner/occupier.
  - b. Diversion of the right of way onto other land –
    - i. either by agreement with that landowner, or

- ii. where agreement is not forthcoming, using powers under s119 (5) to require the owner or occupier to underwrite compensation payable to a third party.
- c. Concurrent extinguishment of the right of way and creation of an alternative route under s118 and s25 and/or s26 Highways Act 1980 –
  - i. on land already owned/occupied by the owner/occupier, or
  - ii. on other land by agreement with that owner/occupier, or
  - iii. using the power under s26 to create a route across other land, bearing in mind the provisions of s28 of the Act.
- d. Extinguishment of the right of way where other existing rights of way (including carriageways) would meet the need of the public for access
- e. Extinguishment of the right of way where an existing path is not needed for public use. (For the purposes of section 118, in order to be not needed for public use, a public right of way does not necessarily have to be unused. In assessing non-use, authorities should disregard any temporary circumstances that prevent or diminish the use of the way, such as obstructions).

13. Authorities should also consider:

- a. The potential for improving a path so diverted or replaced (for example, by replacing stiles with gates).
- b. Where a route is to be extinguished, the scope for the owner/occupier to defray the cost of improving an existing alternative route or of creating an alternative route

## Conclusion

14. In determining an application to which this guidance applies, it is for the authority to consider the case on all its merits taking into account all the statutory requirements and available guidance. In making its decision as to whether the existing path should be diverted or extinguished, an authority should consider in particular the impact of the existing path on the property owner and/or occupier against the benefit that having the right of way through the land brings to the public, taking account of this guidance.

# Appendix

Links to legislation referred to in the guidance

## Highways Act 1980

Section 25: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/25>

Section 26: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/26>

Section28: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/28>

Section118: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/118>

Section 118ZA: [not yet commenced]

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/118ZA>

Section 119: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/119>

Section 119ZA: [not yet commenced]

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/119ZA>

## Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Section 54B: [not yet commenced, see Schedule 7 of the Deregulation Act 2015]

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/20/schedule/7/enacted>

## Town and Country Planning Act 1947

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1947/51/enacted>

## Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Section 17: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/section/17>