

KIRKLEES METROPOLITAN COUNCIL (Annex 1)
AMENDMENTS (MODIFICATIONS) TO THE DEFINITIVE MAP
GUIDANCE NOTES FOR MEMBERS

Introduction

The Council is responsible for maintaining the Definitive Map and Statement of public rights of way. These are legal documents.

From time to time applications are made to amend the Definitive Map and Statement by adding previously unrecorded rights of way or deleting or altering the status of the public rights of way shown on the Definitive Map. Such applications must be accompanied by evidence. The process is often referred to as the “modification order procedure”. These notes outline the key principles which apply to this procedure.

The Legal Tests

Any decision must be based on evidence. The process is about giving official recognition to what actually already exists. It is not a question of convenience (i.e. is the application a good idea?)

If the applicant is claiming that a right of way should be added then the Council has to be satisfied that the claimed right of way subsists or is reasonably alleged to subsist.

If the applicant is claiming that a right of way should be upgraded then the Council has to be satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the right of way subsists in its upgraded form.

The test in respect of a claim for a deletion or downgrade is more onerous. The applicant has to produce clear and cogent evidence to satisfy the Council that a mistake was made when the right of way was recorded in the Definitive Map and Statement

A right of way can come into existence by being expressly dedicated by the landowner. If this is the case, then (unless there is a dispute over the dedication or its terms) there is no need for claims or evidence to be considered.

The starting point is the test set out in the Highways Act 1980 (Section 31) that the way has been used in its claimed form without let or hindrance, for a period in excess of 20 years.

In effect this means that the public has used the path or way without the landowners express permission and without having to overcome barriers. The use must also be open and not in secret. Therefore it is presumed that the landowner does not object and has accepted public use. The erection of a notice by the owner in terms that the way is private can defeat the creation of a right of way by these means, as can certain other actions by the owner (see below).

A public right of way might arise at Common Law as a result of public user for a period of less than 20 years, but the tests for the establishment of a way by this means are more onerous than those stipulated by the Highways Act 1980.

The use must also be by the general public. Use of a route to visit the landowner is not public use. Thus people cannot claim a public right over the private drive where the use was for visiting the owner, delivering post or buying produce etc.

If, however the landowner has erected notices, gates or can produce evidence that it has never been their intention that a public right be created, then this is a hindrance or evidence of contrary intention. For instance, they may have turned back all the people seen using the way or locked a gate across the way on a certain date every year. There is also a procedure for registering with the local Highways Authority, documentation stating that there is no intention to create a new way.

Making the Order

If the Council does not make an order, then the Applicant has the right of appeal to the Secretary of State. This is usually done on written representations. The Secretary of State decides whether a basic case exists. If he/she agrees with the Applicant then the Council will be directed to make an Order.

If an Order is made by the Council (whether by direction or not) then any person aggrieved by that Order can appeal. This usually leads to a Hearing or a Public Inquiry.