12. Encouraging Walking and Cycling

Objective 9 - Develop and increase cycling and walking for local journeys, recreation and health

Walking and cycling provide travel options that have the lowest carbon footprint, few adverse environmental impacts and contribute to improving people's health. While not suitable for all journeys, our core objective is to create the conditions where a greater proportion of trips, especially in urban areas, are made on foot or by bicycle.

Policies

Policy CW1 **Oxfordshire County Council will seek to improve facilities to encourage greater levels of walking and cycling.**

Policy CW2 **Oxfordshire County Council will work with interested groups and local communities to promote greater levels of responsible cycling.**

Policy CW3 **Oxfordshire County Council will take into account the needs of all users, including people with disabilities, in the design of cycling or pedestrian facilities.**

Policy CW4 **Oxfordshire County Council will protect and maintain public rights of way and natural areas so that all users are able to understand and enjoy their rights in a responsible way.**

Policy CW5 **Oxfordshire County Council will seek opportunities for network improvements and initiatives to better meet the needs of walkers, cyclists and horse riders, including for people with disabilities, for local journeys, recreation and health.**

12.1 Our strategy for promoting more walking and cycling includes:

* Auditing of current facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to develop programmes for improvement of important routes

and other facilities;

* Developing pedestrian and cycle route networks by providing new or improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.
* Improved signage of pedestrian and cycle routes;
* Promotion of the health and environmental benefits of increased walking and cycling, including use of rights of way and publicly accessible green areas.

Walking

12.2 Walking is the most popular mode of transport for short journeys and is an essential component of almost all other journeys. Encouraging the transfer of appropriate trips from car to foot would reduce local congestion and contribute to reducing air quality problems. Such a transfer would be good for people's health, would not damage the environment, and could contribute to the building of social cohesion and the deterrence of crime.

Current Situation

12.3 It is impossible to measure all walking trips in the county, as walking forms at least a component of most journeys and takes place almost everywhere. In the ten years to 2003, the number of walking trips nationally fell by 20%. This decline in walking journeys is largely accounted for by trips that have transferred to the car.

Providing for pedestrians

12.4 To encourage more walking it is necessary to consider all aspects of the pedestrian environment, including the pavement surface, amount and location of street furniture, pedestrian signing, and crossings of main and side roads. Oxfordshire County Council has begun a process of "de-cluttering" – where accumulated signs, roadside equipment and street furniture is rationalised and where possible reduced – as part of any maintenance work undertaken in town centres and shopping streets. We will continue this work as resources allow.

12.5 The quality of the pavement surface is particularly important for people with mobility problems. A key element of improving the

quality of the walking environment is not just improving but also regularly inspecting and maintaining footways.

12.6 Connectivity of walking routes is also crucial. This includes not just the footways but also includes being able to cross roads safely and without having to make a significant detour. It is also necessary to look at pedestrian routes and consider carefully locations of facilities such as bus stops and taxi ranks to ensure that these complement the pedestrian network.

12.7 The presence of traffic is a factor that affects how people act in public space. Congestion, with its associated outcomes including fumes and noise, can discourage people from making short journeys on foot. Traffic volumes and speeds directly affect the quality and range of pedestrian activity.

12.8 In new developments, facilities for pedestrians should be arranged and designed to minimise walking distances and should link known destinations in an effective and attractive manner. It should also add to and improve current facilities as well as providing new routes where possible.

12.9 Walking is a key element in increasing public transport use. Improving access to public transport access points – rail stations, bus stations and particularly bus stops - is essential to promoting walking and also promoting and increasing use of public transport.

12.10 Promoting and enabling walking requires the provision of sufficient information to enable people new to or unfamiliar with the area to get where they want to go. Signing for pedestrians in our towns has historically been a haphazard process and has been usually associated with promoting tourism rather than helping people on foot fully use the facilities available. In recent years there have been some examples of areas where comprehensive signing schemes for pedestrians have been introduced, for example in Bristol and the City of London, and the introduction of similar systems in Oxfordshire is a long-term aspiration.

12.11 Consultation and involvement are important components of planning for walking. Local users should be consulted and involved in an audit of locations that have been identified for footway or other walking facility improvement, and that

consequent improvements are used to promote behaviour change. Living Streets has developed *Community Street Audits*, a method of evaluating the quality of the street environment from the perspective of those who use it. Oxfordshire County Council has already used this method with parents in Oxfordshire to improve walking routes to schools, with staff at our new Banbury local office and at staff at children's centres across the county. It will also be of use to audit three walking routes being proposed as part of the *Eco-Bicester* project. Proposals to improve the walking environment can often be brought forward as part of wider public realm improvements, and opportunities for this should be taken whenever possible.

12.12 There is an opportunity to develop partnerships with local health authorities to promote the environmental and health benefits from encouraging more trips to be made on foot. As part of schools and workplace travel planning the wider benefits of walking should also be promoted.

12.13 Oxfordshire County Council will also consider the following when developing schemes to encourage more walking:

* Promoting improvements to walking facilities, including better maintenance and improved lighting;
* Traffic calming measures to reduce speeds, particularly near to schools, in urban residential areas and in villages;
* Pedestrianisation schemes, where vehicle access is restricted or prohibited, or clear zones, where vehicle access is restricted to low or non-polluting vehicles, to boost the attractiveness of town and local centres for shopping, employment and leisure uses; and
* Encouraging pedestrian routes, for instance, along riverbanks, canal towpaths or disused railways to be highly visible and integrated with other activities, in order to maximise pedestrian safety and security.

Cycling

12.14 Cycling is a flexible, enjoyable, healthy and relatively inexpensive mode of travel and has a pivotal role in creating a sustainable economy. It can facilitate economic development as it cuts congestion and can enhance the experience and create vitality in an area. Economic benefits can be derived from reduced

healthcare costs, reduced absenteeism and improved productivity.

Current Situation

12.15 Evidence nationally paints the picture of a decline in cycling - the distance travelled by bicycle fell by 2% between 1995/97 and 2008. However, cycling in Oxfordshire has consistently bucked this trend. Oxford has one of the highest cycling rates in the country (Oxfordshire has a 5% modal share for cycling to work against the national average of 2%); cycling to school in Oxfordshire is more than four times the national average (at over 8%) and is steadily increasing. Automatic bicycle counts in Oxfordshire indicate that overall cycling levels may have increased slightly since 2005.

12.16 The perception is that cycling is a slow form of transport and the car is quicker. In fact, in many urban areas cycling can be much quicker and an excellent congestion beater. The benefits of speed management (such as the recently introduced 20mph speed limits in Oxford) should have a positive impact on cycling, although enforcement or supporting measures may be required.

Cycling training

12.17 Cycling in built-up areas with high traffic volumes and speeds can be daunting to novice or 'lapsed' cyclists. Oxfordshire has a comprehensive cycle training education programme for primary school pupils (aged 9 years +) but access to cycle training for younger pupils, teenagers and adults is limited. This lack of training has an impact on cyclists' ability to assert themselves on the road - many cyclists believe themselves to be 'second class' road users, cycling close to the kerb or in the gutter. However, asserting a good road position at junctions, roundabouts and when passing parked cars can dramatically enhance cycling safety, build confidence and can influence other road users' behaviour, creating a safer environment. As resources allow, we will look to develop programmes for teaching better cycling techniques to all age groups.

Image and marketing

12.18 In order to encourage cycling it is important to understand why people do not currently cycle. Cycle attitude surveys can reveal

trends and explanations tailored to particular areas. Solutions can then be tailored instead of applying a "one-size-fits-all" approach. An awareness of different types of cyclist – novice/experienced, commuter/leisure cyclist, confident/nervous - and their individual needs will be encouraged.

12.19 Over-emphasizing the dangers and risks over the benefits can deter some people from cycling. Marketing and promotion should look to target and increase cycling levels among low participation groups, for example, women, teenage girls, over 45s, school children, the disabled and disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities, for instance through "try-out" sessions or by encouraging novice cyclists to use quiet and/or traffic-free routes to gain confidence. Cycling promotion should aim at reflecting cycling as an everyday activity which does not require specialist equipment or clothing.

12.20 The negative image of cycling needs to be addressed if relationships between different road users are to be improved. Awareness should be targeted at car drivers, bus operators and pedestrians as well as cyclists to ensure that people generally know what is allowed and what is not and the consequences of actions. A *'Bike Polite'* or similar initiative could be progressed to alleviate the conflicts and foster a general acceptance and courtesy between different road users. This would also help to change pedestrians' perception of safety and the impact of sharing routes with cyclists.

Cycle infrastructure

12.21 Some areas of the county have good cycle infrastructure (traffic-free routes, on road cycle lanes, toucan crossings, cycle parking etc.), although in some places this can be intermittent, sub-standard, or indirect. Where infrastructure is provided it can be obstructed by parked vehicles, causing increased conflict and affecting safety, especially where road width is restricted. Sometimes the most convenient routes for cyclists are prohibited by one-way streets, pedestrian only areas or cycle barriers. There is also a lack of direct cycle routes parallel to some main roads. This can be a decisive factor in mode choice.

12.22 Since 2001, Oxfordshire County Council's long term aspiration has been the development of *"two-tier"* cycle networks in its main

towns. These consist of making conditions on main roads attractive for confident cyclists to use *(the upper tier)* while providing routes made up of off road or less busy roads for younger or less confident cyclists *(the lower tier)*. The implementation of this policy has been difficult. With some notable exceptions the off road routes are usually indirect and not attractive for everyday use while conflicts with other users makes some main roads unpleasant even for the most experienced of riders.

12.23 Compromise solutions also have drawbacks: where cycle paths share footways this can cause conflicts with pedestrians and also are often unattractive for cyclists where they cross driveways and side roads – they are also often unattractive and potentially dangerous to experienced cyclists but their presence can increase drivers' intolerance of them cycling on road; on-road cycle lanes are often of limited width and can re-enforce the view that cyclists should remain at the kerbside, even when this is unsafe.

12.24 The provision of cycling facilities can be controversial, especially where this involves the conversion of existing footways for shared use. An evidence-based approach, where it can be demonstrated that new or altered facilities for cycles will improve the overall transport system and contribute to the Council's wider objectives, is considered the best way to ensure that the facilities that are put in will be effective.

12.25 Existing cycle infrastructure, as with the rest of the highway network, suffers from wear and tear. Pressure on maintenance budgets means that cycleways can suffer. Yet it is important to maintain safe and user-friendly cycleways as poorly maintained or badly designed infrastructure can discourage cycling.

12.26 Theft of cycles can discourage cycling. Secure cycle parking is required to deter theft but the facilities must be located in a convenient position at major destinations. Not having a sufficient amount of cycle parking can encourage 'informal' cycle parking on street furniture which can affect pedestrians.

Developing Cycling Networks

12.27 The concept of a dual network has proved problematic to implement and should not be continued as the basis for

developing future cycle networks. A more realistic approach is to take a pragmatic approach to developing safe, appropriate and attractive routes which can cater for the majority of cyclists, as is the case in many European countries with high levels of cycling. This will form the basis for developing networks.

12.28 This process will include investigations of the following:

* Improving conditions for inter-urban cycling by joining up existing routes identifying new routes;
* Improving safety and convenience on cycle paths at side roads and junctions by providing raised entry treatments giving pedestrians and cyclists priority and thereby reducing stopping;
* Measures to improve cycle permeability in built up areas by the addition of new cycle links;
* Measures such as contra-flow cycling on one-way streets and the use of direct “cut-through” routes;
* The provision of safe cycle "bypasses", allowing cyclists to avoid traffic signals, should be investigated where appropriate and advance stop lines added at other locations;
* Providing more and better quality cycle parking at strategic places where it is likely to be used. Install cycle parking to improve integration at public transport hubs, for instance Park & Ride sites;
* Promoting cycling as a quick, flexible alternative for short trips, e.g. to or from Park & Ride sites by providing cycle parking and safe/direct cycle access from sites to major destinations;
* Converting footpaths between urban locations or employment centres to bridleways to allow cycling where feasible;
* Linking new residential or commercial development with businesses, employment, retail, leisure and health centres with signed cycle routes and improving access at some existing main employment sites such as business and retail parks and encouraging businesses to install cycle parking, changing and shower facilities etc.; and
* Encouraging travel plans to include information on origins/destinations and distances and what should be improved to encourage more cycling.

12.29 In addition, cycling can be encouraged by appropriate design and maintenance of other road features, including:

* On shared or dual use paths sufficient space for both pedestrian and cyclists should be provided. Paths should be properly maintained (e.g. to prevent the effects of adverse weather), should not be over-grown and obstacles should removed. On-road cycle lanes should be of an adequate width to allow for safe cycling.
* Public realm improvements should consider cyclists during design stage. Apart from main shopping areas/streets where footfall is extremely high and pedestrians should take precedence, provision for cyclists should be incorporated into improvements especially where it provides an important link or short-cut.
* Improved signage of best routes for cyclists should be provided coupled with mapping, information and marketing to have a positive impact on cycling levels.
* Innovative techniques should be employed in road design and in particular cycle infrastructure. In areas where there is scope for increasing cycling levels, or where cycle safety is identified as a problem, then a programme of cycling audits should be carried out on the existing transport network to identify current deficiencies and opportunities for improvement.

12.30 Parking policies and related initiatives (e.g. car clubs) can help to reduce car ownership and use and therefore encourage cycling for shorter trips. Cycling should be promoted in these areas and information should be provided on preferred routes. Where parking restrictions are implemented, suitable cycling infrastructure such as cycle parking should be provided.

Partnership working

12.31 The County Council will encourage work places and other locations to set-up or expand bicycle user groups (BUGs) to help promote and encourage cycling and inform it of problems/barriers and potential solutions. Working with schools, workplaces, the Health Sector, Public Transport Operators and cycle user groups is important for any cycling strategy to be successful.

12.32 We will work with our partners to provide, or encourage the provision, of appropriately located areas where young people can ride their bikes in relative safety to spark interest in cycling and which could have an impact on improved health and fitness.

Public rights of way and access to natural areas

12.33 A well-maintained and connected public rights of way and accessible green space network, with information and improvements that meet the needs of users and potential users, enables residents and visitors to enjoy all of Oxfordshire on foot, by bicycle and on horseback.

12.34 People use public rights of way, cycle tracks and open areas for recreation and some commuting journeys and are also able to connect with nature and experience wildlife. In addition to transport, the paths provide opportunities for fitness, relaxation, education and play.

12.35 In addition to rights of way and areas of green space walkers, cyclists and horse riders are legitimate users of the road network and these roads often form part of their journeys. They are vulnerable road users and so should have measures put in place to ensure their safety and consideration by vehicular traffic as well as measures to give them options on hazardous sections of roads. This will have positive impacts on all road users.

12.36 Under section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Oxfordshire County Council has produced a *Rights of Way Improvement Plan* (RoWIP) (2006) which sets out its vision for improving, modernising and sustaining access to the countryside for residents and visitors. The RoWIP is directly compatible with the Local Transport Plan and both strategies can contribute to and complement each other. This chapter demonstrates that these two strategies are effectively integrated as Government intends.

12.37 As part of developing Oxfordshire's RoWIP, user groups, individuals and local councils were asked to supply views about access needs and their suggestions for improvements to the network. Since then annual delivery action plans have sought improvements and there have been significant gains – but at the same time the network still has improvements that need to be

made. Community Led Plans also often flag up connecting, maintaining and publishing local walks, plus they ask for new walks and, in particular, cycle paths to nearby settlements. These all form part of the 'demand picture' for making the network easier, safer and more pleasant to use.

Assessed User needs

12.38 There are three main types of non-vehicle user in the countryside – walkers, horse riders and cyclists. Each person wanting to use a path has their own set of needs and expectations that help build confidence and encourage greater participation. In general these can be summarised as:

* All users – need no obstructions or unnecessary physical restrictions to access; paths signed according to the ease of following the route; enough information about a route on and off site in order to assess its suitability for their intended use; secure car parking or preferably easy access from settlements or public transport; opportunities for refreshments and toilet facilities; safe and convenient crossings of road and rail routes; safe and convenient furniture on paths; overall, an integrated and well-managed green network that allows them to explore and enjoy the whole of Oxfordshire with confidence
* Users with lower levels of agility – all of the above plus need gaps or pedestrian gates instead of stiles or field gates, handrails on steep slopes or beside steep drops, steps instead of steep slopes, resting places. Information about short, pleasant routes close to settlements and attractions
* Users with mobility impairments (wheelchair/pushchair) – all of the above, plus need no man-made obstructions – need gaps or accessible gates; car parks with designated spaces and direct access, dropped kerbs, shallow vertical and horizontal slopes and minimal cambers, reasonably flat and stone/mud free surfaces; information at a suitable height and position. Well-publicised information and guide leaflets
* Users with visual impairments – all of the above plus need no hazards within path surface and in the space surrounding the path at sides and to a reasonable height; well-defined edges, signing and information - possible tapping rails or Braille signage.

* Cyclists – all of the above, plus need wide, well maintained traffic-free paths, with firm and smooth surface; no low branches or other hazards; gates should be easily opened
* Equestrians – all of the above, plus need wide paths with any reasonable surface apart from sealed asphalt and sharp flint or stone; no branches below 10' height; gates should be wide enough and easily opened from horseback; safe refuges at roadside enabling risk-free gate negotiation. Links along the roadside to connect public rights of way and avoid traffic impacts. Where road use is necessary traffic should be controlled and aware, using for example, measures such as speed controls, better sight lines and good road signage.

Challenges to meeting needs

12.39 There are a number of challenges associated with meeting the needs and desires of residents and visitors to Oxfordshire, and meeting the authority's statutory duties. These come under the two areas of network availability- the physical side of the network, and network accessibility – the where and how this access can be taken. Both of these areas can be influenced by capital and revenue resourcing and whether OCC staff and contractors, district and local councils, landowners or the third sector are able to undertake the work.

12.40 Network Availability - The public rights of way network on the ground is subject to a number of dynamic seasonal, natural and manmade factors, both regular and random. This makes it challenging to be able to guarantee that all the paths will be available all of the time. Reasons for this may include the right of farmers to disturb the path under certain conditions, seasonal or cyclical vegetation growth, random third party impacts such as fly-tipping and vandalism, or elemental impacts such as flooding or river bank collapse. Whilst Oxfordshire County Council can and does aspire to all paths being open all of the time, in reality all we can do is to prevent and manage these impacts to the best that resources and technology allow.

12.41 Residential and commercial developments of all sizes may impact on the public's access. Development should not damage or reduce public rights of way and countryside access provision, either directly or indirectly. Residential and commercial developments should be integrated with the existing public rights

of way in ways that allow the continued and increased use of the routes as part of a wider network and to meeting shared sustainable transport, healthy living and healthy environment goals and provide mitigation for any increased population, traffic impacts, additional pressure of use as well as providing community benefit.

12.42 Public rights of way and accessible natural green spaces need to be well maintained, safe and easy to use, and they need to interact positively with the roads network. This means that the legal line, surface, drainage, infrastructure (bridges, gates, signs etc), vegetation management, and use of the land should be fit for purpose across the whole of the county in all settlement types. It also means that safe road crossings, linking road verge routes and the minor roads and unsurfaced highways network need to be provided and maintained so that there is continuity of experience and safety.

12.43 The public rights of way network is disjointed and disconnected in many places where it interacts with the road network – predominantly where rights of way start and finish at busy roads with nowhere to go safely to reach settlements or attractions, or where rights of way are staggered along a busy or hazardous road with no safe connection between them. This lack of connectivity can prevent users, especially equestrians, from making the most of this resource and may increase the risk of accidents involving vehicles. Road verge links and in-field links as well as traffic control measures can all help to address this.

12.44 Some parts of the county have denser or a more connected network than others. Where there are areas of low provision there could be measures to provide new key routes to give access to the wider networks, and where there are areas of apparently high provision there needs to be improved management of the network and also smaller links so that the whole area is better connected.

12.45 Network Accessibility - Local residents and visitors need readily available and easy to understand information on where they can go and what they can and should do whilst they are using public rights of way and accessible natural areas. This includes options for how to get to the countryside, for example, if there is a regular or frequent bus or train service. The countryside is made up of a living and working landscape of farms and rural

businesses that can pose potentially hazardous situations or offer opportunity for conflict – such as between livestock farmers and dog walkers. These situations mean farmers and path users need mutual appreciation and respect, and the council can assist by providing information and positive intervention with all parties.

12.46 The public rights of way network and multi-purpose routes such as the *Phoenix Trail* or other Sustrans routes can offer a means for people to use walk and cycle for leisure and also build their confidence in an environment with less traffic. This can lead to greater use of non-vehicle travel modes for commuting and social journeys as well as contributing to the local economy when used for leisure.

12.47 Unfortunately, to add to the issue of the disjointed network, a missing area of information is about how less experienced users can find out whether a particular road or linking road section that forms part of their chosen journey is reasonably safe. This could be seen in terms of whether there is a footway, cycleway or multipurpose verge, or is the road relatively wide for the volume and speed of traffic so offers comfortable space for pedestrians, cyclist and horse riders. One way to address this is to ensure promoted routes offer relatively safe options. Other approaches may include the provision of better links and providing more information on the ground and in local communities.

12.48 Shared space or access corridors for pedestrians, cyclists and other users are widespread throughout Oxfordshire, especially on the rural public rights of way network for leisure use and on sections of the Thames Path in Oxford for commuting, leisure and sporting activities. However there is concern about what is seen as the intrusion of cycles into what have traditionally been pedestrian only areas, such as on shared footpaths/cycleways, or onto routes previously only used by walkers and horse riders, such as when rural bridleways are surfaced to allow easier cycling for commuters.

12.49 Vulnerable pedestrians such as the elderly and the visually impaired, or those with pushchairs and young children may be especially apprehensive about the proximity of fast and perhaps inconsiderate cyclists. On public rights of way, fast moving and brightly coloured cyclists can startle horses and cause potentially dangerous reactions. On country paths walkers can also be

startled by fast moving cyclists or may not be aware that they are approaching and step into their paths. Any proposals for additional shared access corridors therefore need to carefully assess the impact on all potential users before they proceed.

Appendix
Oxfordshire's public rights of way network – assessment of connectivity

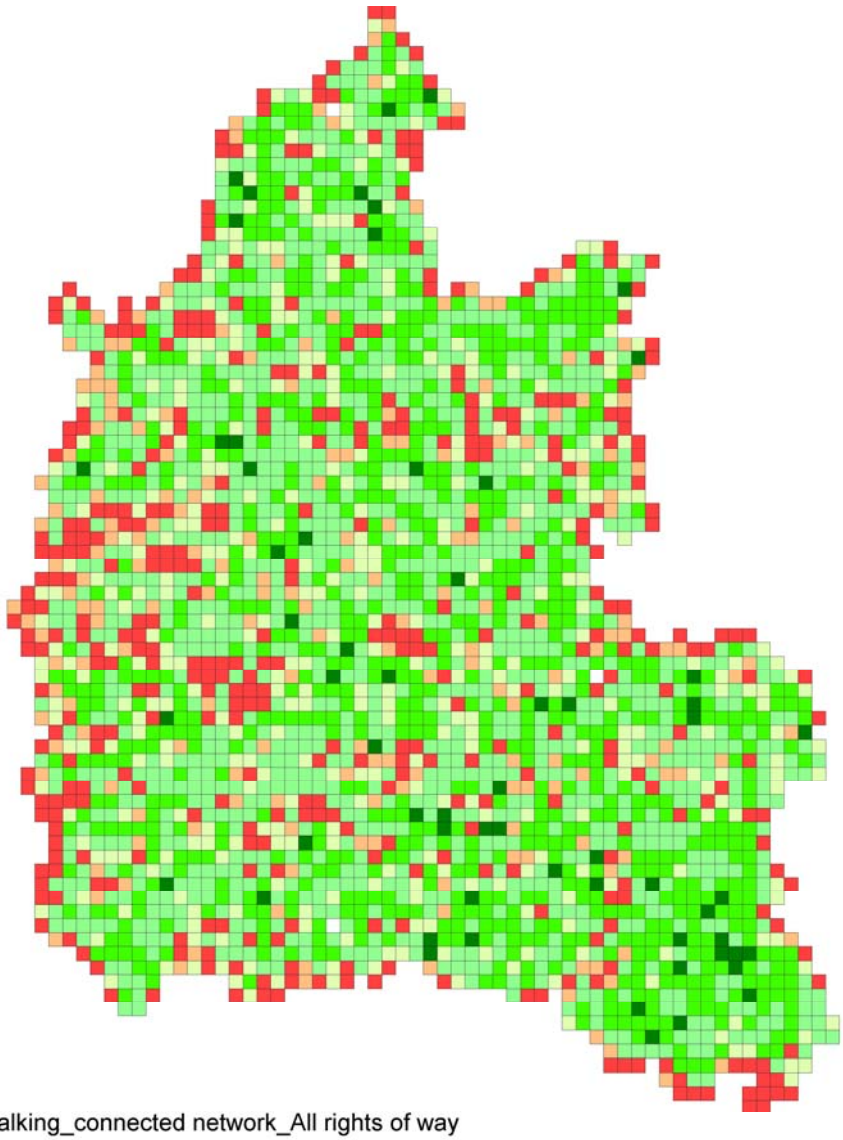
As part of Oxfordshire County Council's work to achieve the aims of the Oxfordshire Rights of way Improvement Plan, the public rights of way network has been assessed using a Geographical Information System (GIS).

This has enabled the production of graphics to show the relative connectivity for each kilometre square across the county. The graphics are colour coded for ease of reference and simple comparison. Shades of green are areas better connected, whilst areas shaded red are more poorly served. Figures are in metres per square kilometre.

There are two graphics – the first for the connected walking network options using all types of public right of way (footpath, bridleway, restricted byway and byway). The second is that connected network available to cyclists and horse riders using all types of public rights of way except footpaths. It is not simply a count of the routes within each square, it is a count of the amount of connected network that each square has access to.

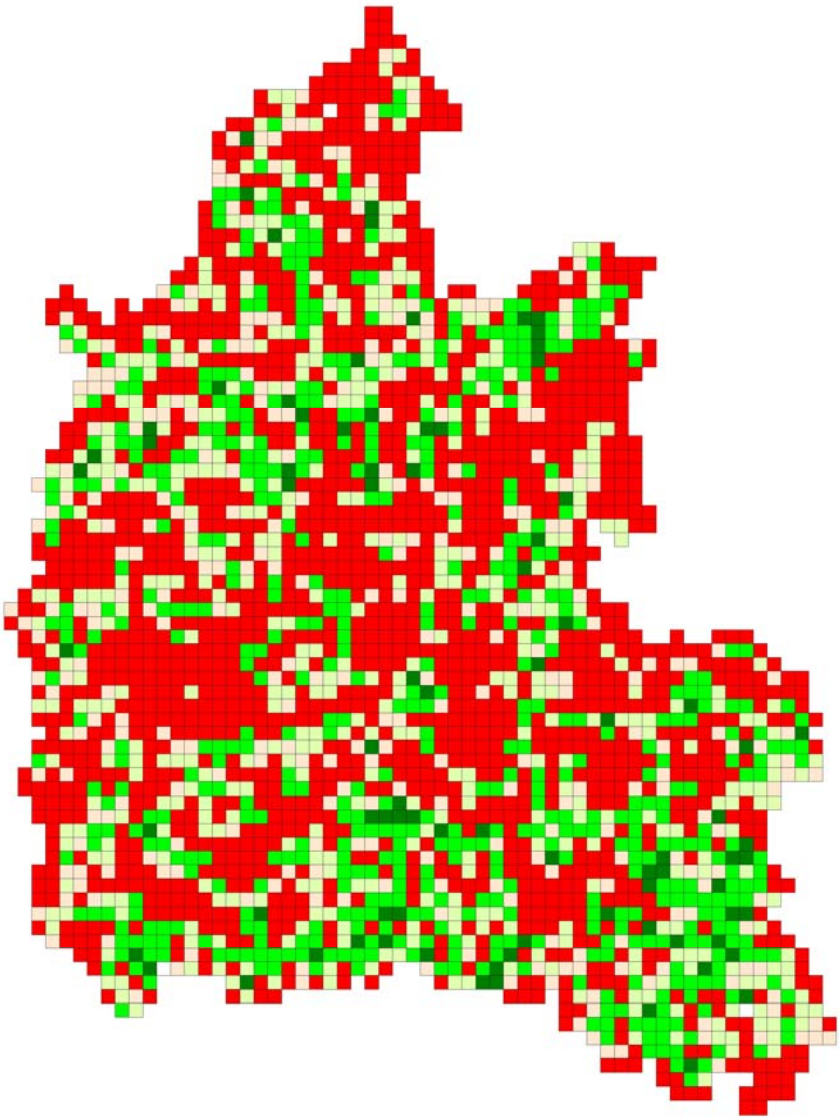
This information is intended to be used as a tool to help inform the identification of locations in poorly connected areas that could potentially benefit from additional routes through the countryside, as well as measures on roads that could help improve connectivity and safety in areas with a more connected network. These could be stand alone projects or schemes that are linked to an area's Local Development Framework, green infrastructure strategy or a particular development.

The study was not able to take account of the other access resources that are available the public, including access land, the minor and unsurfaced road network, cycletracks, permissive paths under stewardship agreements, nature reserves, Woodland Trust and National Trust and areas made available under Inheritance Tax exemptions -so these should be considered as part of any detailed assessments.



Walking_connected network_All rights of way

Very high (4,000m to 7,000m)	(61)
High (2,000m to 4,000m)	(766)
Medium high (1,000m to 2,000m)	(1033)
Medium low (500m-1000m)	(374)
Low [200m - 500m)	(190)
Very low (0m to 200m)	(404)



Cycling or horse riding__all rights of way except footpaths

High (2,000m to 4,000m)	(85)
Medium high (1,000m to 2,000m)	(554)
Medium low_(500m to 1,000m)	(458)
Low (200m to 500m)	(309)
Very low (0m to 200m)	(1422)