

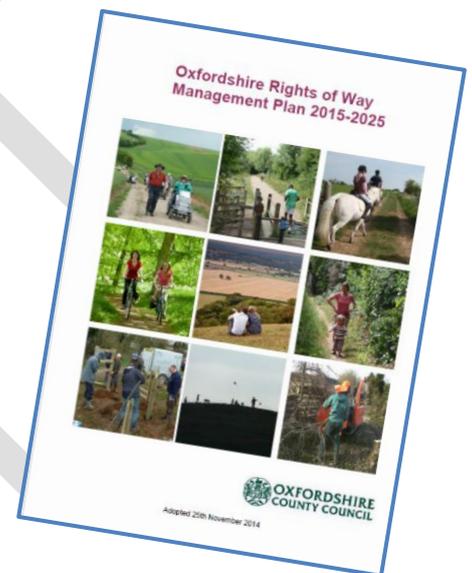
Annex to the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). Reasons for non-amendment of the RoWIP.



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Introduction

This document is the statement of reasons for non-amendment of the current Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) and the inclusion of relevant current policies adopted by the County Council since 2015.

Reason 1: Continual review. The County Council keeps its Rights of Way network, user needs, strategy, policy and operations under constant review. It does this by following processes for receiving and acting on reports, through its work modifying the definitive map and statement, through its engagement with the development planning process and through the work of its professional team members, volunteers, user groups and community representatives.

Reason 2: Public Survey of network, needs and perspectives. A public survey was undertaken in spring 2025 in accordance with s60(2) Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 matters. This asked participants about PRow issues, areas they were satisfied/dissatisfied with, suggestions for a replacement RoWIP and some demographic information. The surveys highlighted areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is considered that the work outlined in Reason 1 together with the policies set out in Reasons 3 and 4 in this document will go some way towards addressing areas of dissatisfaction.

Reason 3: policies adopted since the RoWIP was published. As part of continual review a number of policies have been developed. Each policy has been through its own formal adoption process and so adds to or supersedes any previous policy wording. They do not conflict with the content, format or intention of the 2015 RoWIP and accordingly the policies implemented since 2015 fully align with this plan. This document sets out below a summary of these policies. A web reference link to the source file for each policy is provided.

Reason 4: Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Local government in many areas is being changed by central government. There are three options for unitary authorities currently being promoted for Oxfordshire. The result and impact of this is expected to be known for certain in 2026/7 and may result in boundary changes. Devolution is also on the horizon, albeit on a longer timescale for Oxfordshire, and this may result in mayoral strategic authorities overseeing and coordinating some council strategies and plans but it is not known if public rights of way will fall under this strategic coverage. These strategic authorities may extend beyond the proposed unitary boundaries.

Having assessed the RoWIP in accordance with section 60(2) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 it is concluded, in light of the four reasons set out above, that an amended plan is not required at this stage.

However when LGR has concluded and the new authority/ies formed it is anticipated that another review will be required at that time and the production of a new or amended RoWIP(s) may be required.

1. Statement of Priorities for maintaining the Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way (December 2018)

The Definitive Map and Statement (DMS) of Public Rights of Way for Oxfordshire is the legal record of public rights of way in the county. The Council is the Surveying Authority for such purposes. In accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 section 56, the DMS is conclusive evidence of the existence of a public right of way and its status, width, position and any limitations or conditions that affect it. It has a relevant date of 1 February 2006.

In accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 section 53, Oxfordshire County Council has a duty as the Surveying Authority to keep the DMS under continuous review and to modify it by way of Orders as and when relevant events occur.

The Council's priorities in respect of its DMS are to: Process applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders; and Update and maintain the DMS, including addressing anomalies and errors. This Statement of Priorities replaces the previous version dated October 2007.

The prioritisation of applications is, therefore, as follows: -

1. As a principle, all applications will be investigated in date order of receipt.
2. The Council will exercise discretion to take cases out of the 'date order' sequence where, for example:

- There is a development proposal or planning application that affects or threatens the claimed route.
 - An affected party can demonstrate that they are experiencing exceptional problems due to the impact of an application on their property, such as where this potentially affects its sale.
 - The evidence in support – or geographical location – of an application is shared with another and, therefore, it would be efficient to investigate them concurrently.
 - The path would help fulfil one of the Council's strategic aims, such as where routes have been identified in a Transport Strategy or Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
3. With the aim of reducing its caseloads and bringing down waiting times, the Council uses discretion to identify any application on its Register where there may be opportunity to, for example: -
- Address an application by some other means (such as a public path order or agreement).
 - Address an application where the extent of the evidence and/or the lack of opposition would involve minimal workload to conclude the matter.

Updating and Maintaining the Definitive Map and Statement

The processing of Definitive Map applications must be addressed in parallel with other duties necessary to keep the DMS as up to date as possible. Managing the integrity of the Map data entails:

- Addressing any issues of the accuracy of the DMS by systematically investigating discrepancies such as: -
 - Errors in drafting
 - Discrepancies between the Map and Statement
 - Possible errors or omissions in the DMS (such as an unexplained change of status where a path crosses a parish boundary or where the route on the ground differs from that shown on the DMS).

Whilst these will be prioritised and researched as resources permit depending on their significance or impact, these are not matters that normally feature on Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 s53b Registers of Applications. As such, any work undertaken will impact on the rate at which formal applications on the Register are addressed.

Undertaking an investigation on a particular 'anomaly' may have a degree of urgency where, for example, a sale of property is reliant on it. The DMS can usually only be amended by fully researching the case and making and advertising a DMMO. As such there is inevitable impact on priorities.

- Keeping the DMS up to date by making regular 'Legal Event' Modification Orders to modify it in respect of changes resulting from Public Path Orders, Agreements, etc.
- To periodically republish the DMS, currently dated 2006. The timing for such a major piece of work will be kept under review and carried out when appropriate and balanced against other workloads.

2. Public Rights of Way - Management & Prioritisation of maintenance and access issues (November 2019)

- Oxfordshire County Council, as the Highway Authority, is ultimately responsible for the protection and maintenance of most Public Rights of Way (PRoW) throughout Oxfordshire.
- Over 2600 miles of PRoW exist across Oxfordshire, including Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic.
- A PRoW Priority Caseload Approach (PCA) considering need and risk is required to better manage public expectations, make more efficient use of existing resources and to introduce a measured, objective approach to the management of Oxfordshire's rights of way.
- The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025 is the statutory adopted overarching statement of policy relating to public rights of way. This policy supports that plan.

Policy CA1: Public Rights of Way Issue Prioritisation

The majority of public rights of way issues reported to the County Council or identified through internal inspections will be prioritised or programmed by Area Officers after the issue has been assessed. This assessment may use supplied reports, photos, database records, and site visits to help in the determination and will normally consider one or more of the following factors where applicable:

- Overall level of hazard or actual risk that the issue (if a safety matter) represents.
- The degree of obstruction.
- The cause and likely duration of the issue.
- The character of the route, its normal use and the route's normal state of repair.
- The impact of the issue looking at the wider network.

The two factors of issue prioritisation and other workload demands are combined in the following table.

Policy PCA2: Public Rights of Way Priority Categorisation

Priority Category	Guideline circumstance
1	<p>Public Safety Incident – where an accident has occurred resulting in significant injury</p> <p>Public Safety Issue – with high likelihood of imminent accident resulting in significant injury</p>
2a	Lesser Safety Issue – with possibility of accident resulting in injury

2b	Priority Repeat Process – higher priority maintenance task such as key route vegetation clearance that comes up each year or more regularly
2c	Non-hazardous but significant or time-limited issue – likely to completely obstruct access very soon or a major planning issue
3	Lesser hazard/lesser significance issue – affects a PRoW but does not completely obstruct it or may not be time-limited
4a	Area or bulk processing – lower hazard or lower priority issue such as signing or furniture that can be packaged together with others
4b	Repeat Process – Lower priority maintenance task such as less frequent vegetation clearance that comes up regularly
4c	Opportunity – standalone improvement or minor repair issue
5	No Action intended/Record update – very minor issue

Policy PCA3: Balancing Wider Public Rights of Way Operational Areas

Oxfordshire County Council commits significant resources to public rights of way maintenance and repair work such as bridge repair and replacement, vegetation clearance, surfacing and drainage, signing, as well as responding to large and small planning applications and liaising with and supporting community and volunteer groups. All of this work is part of officers' potential workload but all of these involve decisions being made about relative priorities.

A balance has to be struck that enables the tackling of the highest priority workload issues as well as making time for lower priority work, especially that delivered by communities and volunteers where this doesn't limit highest priority action. This means that across the county a greater focus will normally be paid to the two highest priority categories 1 and 2a-c and may mean that there is less of a focus on area-based management areas. Priority derived caseloads will be kept under review.

Some non-safety issues may warrant prioritised attention to maximise outputs and make the most of available finance, staff, volunteer or community resources. This may result in them being worked on with greater urgency. Examples of when this might occur include:

- When the issue is part of the same path or close by a higher priority issue receiving attention
- When the issue is part of work being funded and delivered by the landowner, volunteer group, parish council or community group
- When the issue is time limited e.g. planning application
- When the issue can benefit from external funding such as TOE2 or s106/CIL
- When action is linked to seasonal or cyclical issues – e.g. installing bridges outside of flood periods and arable cultivations, or cutting vegetation outside of bird nesting period
- When a likely rapid deterioration could be prevented by swift action
- When a sudden change of circumstances makes it possible to resolve a long-standing problem, e.g. minor misalignment

3. Rights of Way Management Plan – Managing Motor Vehicles on Public Rights of Way Policy (November 2019)

- Oxfordshire County Council, as the Highway Authority, is ultimately responsible for the protection and maintenance of most public rights of way throughout Oxfordshire.
- Public rights of way include Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic.
- The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025 is the statutory adopted overarching statement of policy relating to public rights of way. This policy updates this plan.

Managing Motor Vehicles

Policy MMVP1: Oxfordshire County Council acknowledges the lawful right that road legal Motor Vehicle users have to use Byways Open to All Traffic (BOAT). OCC does not encourage this activity but will assert and protect rights by ensuring routes are managed for all users.

Policy MMVP2: OCC recognises the vulnerability of walkers, horse riders and cyclists compared to motor vehicles on PRow. OCC will therefore repair, maintain and improve PRow to benefit these vulnerable users, ensuring access is maintained for lawful motor vehicles.

Policy MMVP3: OCC acknowledges the existence of some private rights of access along PRow and will work with land managers, to ensure this use does not interfere with the safe exercise of public rights.

Policy MMVP4: OCC will work with landowners, occupiers and the Police to address security and land management issues connected to illegal use of motor vehicles on PRow and will support preventative measures that reduce or remove such access taking place.

Policy MMVP5: OCC will encourage responsible behaviour by providing signage on site, and by making guidance and restrictions information easily accessible on the website.

Use of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) on Public Rights of Way

Policy MMVP6: Oxfordshire County Council will, at its discretion, act to control or prevent access by vehicles using seasonal or permanent restrictions where this access causes, or is likely to cause conflict with walkers, horse riders, or cyclists as vulnerable PRow users, damage to the route, or to the character of the site or local environment, or where improvements are being developed to promote walking, cycling or horse-riding access.

Policy MMVP7: Oxfordshire County Council will, at its discretion, consider other options which may include the use of Voluntary Restraint, seasonal restrictions or weight limits to

see if the problems can be overcome without the imposition of a permanent year-round TRO.

Policy MMVP8: Oxfordshire County Council will not rule out the immediate use of a Temporary TRO (TTRO) to restrict use of a PRow where the safety of users is at imminent risk, or in circumstances where the extent of physical damage, or the likelihood of it, is so severe that a TTRO is necessary.

Policy MMVP9: Oxfordshire County Council will support the use of TTRO's to allow statutory undertakers and others to carry out works that affect a PRow including time for settlement of restoration works. Where possible an alternative route should be provided and maintained for the duration of the closure on land owned or under the control of the applicant.

Adopted at the Cabinet Member for Environment Delegated Decisions November 2019
<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=931&MID=5740#A120786>

4. Local Transport and Connectivity Plan Policies - July 2022

a) Policy 5: Public Rights of Way

There are nearly 4,000 kilometres of Public Rights of Way (PRow) throughout Oxfordshire comprising Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways. These routes are highways and have evolved over many years to reflect historical and cultural changes in the county. Unlike the roads network many of them pass over and through farmed land and through areas kept for wildlife. Most in the wider countryside provide leisure routes for people walking, cycling and horse riders and a number provide essential linking walking and riding routes within settlements.

The adopted Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan sets out the detail of the assessment of user needs and the council's strategy for the protection, maintenance, management, improvement and extension of the PRow network. This Plan is reviewed and republished every ten years and is integrated with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). The biggest area of change since the last plan was produced in 2014 is the climate emergency. Climate change adaptation will be better taken account of in this policy.

Why is this policy needed?

Public rights of way experience the impacts of the climate emergency through increased extremes of weather, especially rainfall/flooding, stronger winds, fire/overheating and disturbances to the timing and duration of 'normal' seasons. This makes adaptation and mitigation necessary to consider and then implement. Public rights of way are mostly negatively affected by the impacts of the climate emergency. For example, the increased strength and duration of rainfall can lead to unusable or unsafe flooded routes. Similarly, increased rainfall combined with elevated temperatures can cause vegetation to grow faster causing physical access and maintenance challenges

To mitigate these issues, public rights of way assessments will be undertaken using best practice from other authorities and emerging government guidance. Possible interventions across the network or in priority areas might include:

- Choice of materials used
- Locations for structures and how far they extend

- Surfacing choices
- Maintenance, management and repair programmes

What are the benefits to people in Oxfordshire?

The overarching PRow policy will improve the quality, resilience, accessibility and connectivity of the network so that public rights of way fulfil their potential role as a vital part of life in the county. Adapting and mitigating the impacts of the climate emergency will ensure that Oxfordshire's PRow network and countryside access network remains accessible for all users and would-be users. This will support rural residents to reduce car use and take trips by walking and cycling. It will also help to improve residents access to green areas which will support both mental and physical health benefits.

Policy 5

We will:

- a) Adapt the public rights of way network to current and future climate change by conducting assessments that involve communities, users, farmers and landowners as well as respecting the natural and historic environment.
- b) Protect the rights of access for the public by working closely with farmers, landowners, developers and householders to ensure the line, width, surface, vegetation and furniture is appropriate to the path and user.
- c) Conduct maintenance and management of the public rights of way network that reflects the route, landscape characteristics and responds to the needs of users.
- d) Whenever possible make the public rights of way more accessible to those with limited mobility, vision or confidence.
- e) Extend and improve the public rights of way network by securing on and offsite mitigation measures from developments and increasing partnership working with a range of stakeholders to achieve shared outcomes.

b) Policy 6: Greenways

Building on the existing PRow networks discussed, there are unsurfaced roads, disused railway lines, canal corridors, and other tracks that, if better linked, improved and managed, could provide a set of high-quality Oxfordshire Greenways. These Greenways could be used by a range of residents and visitors for active recreation, social use and travel whilst also providing benefits for habitats, landscape character and wildlife. They would be particularly important for improving walking and cycling connectivity in rural areas.

Why is this policy needed?

In line with the aims of the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the development of Oxfordshire Greenways will provide routes for active leisure routes. Families with younger children, people with disabilities and those who need easier access, horse riders and carriage drivers, and those people who prefer to cycle away from busy roads will especially benefit from shared spaces away from the noise, pollution and speed of motor vehicles.

What are the benefits to people in Oxfordshire?

Oxfordshire Greenways would be free to use and could play an important role in giving opportunities for outdoor physical and social activity for non-motorised users on routes that are more attractive to inexperienced people or those that need to be assured of a certain standard of accessibility. They would enable connectivity with nature which is important for mental wellbeing. They would also help to contribute to reduced private car

usage, support economic sustainability in the county and can be designed and managed to provide and improve habitats, biodiversity and landscapes.

Policy 6

We will develop a number of Greenways across the county providing routes for people walking, cycling and equestrians. Priority will be given to routes that benefit communities and that have a deliverable route.

c) Policy 17: Equestrians

As well as traditional road users, Oxfordshire has a high number of horse riders and horse owners who use the roads and PRow network. These equestrian interests contribute to the local economy through spending on livery and associated goods and services. In 2011 the government endorsed the Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales. Aim 5 of that strategy is increasing access to off-road riding and carriage driving. The aim's strategic objectives are:

- Ensuring a joined up and well-maintained network of equestrian PRow.
- Increasing provision of other off-road equestrian routes and of areas with equestrian open access.
- Continuing safety education for motorists, riders and carriage drivers.
- Ensuring urban and suburban riding and carriage driving are promoted and improved as well as rural riding and carriage driving.

In the years since then, Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plans and Local Transport Plans have included some consideration of equestrian issues. The government's strategic objectives are still relevant and still require additional action.

Why is this policy needed?

Equestrian interests need to be considered and integrated as part of development planning, transport planning, road safety and road maintenance strategies and work on the ground. This will help to improve safety, minimise risk and improve inclusivity. Engagement with local equestrian users will also help to identify where limited resources could be best targeted and where opportunities could be gained. Key points for considering equestrians

The following points will help ensure more safe access to off-road riding and carriage driving and use of roads and public rights of way:

- Development affecting public rights of way that are available for horse riding need to provide safe and convenient routes at all stages.
- Horse or multi-user crossings on carriageways should be planned in from the start or retrofitted, ensuring that they are maintained to be fit for purpose.
- On a case-by-case basis, highway authority powers can be used to provide horse riders with access to cycle paths and grass verges.
- Maintenance for unclassified and unsurfaced roads could be adapted to make use by horses safer
- Inclusion of equestrians in urban fringe and rural area network assessments can facilitate better connectivity and reduce the need to mix with road traffic.
- Public rights of way maintenance need to be inclusive of horse interests to ensure a safe, pleasant and easy to use network for more people.
- Educating all road users about horses on the road.

Policy 17

We will:

- a) Consider the needs of equestrian users in roads and highways strategies and planning as well as operations.
- b) Continue to embed Aim 5 of the Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales into relevant guidance and decision-making processes in order to improve safety, network connectivity and network quality for equestrians.

d) Policy 30: Green Infrastructure (GI)

Oxfordshire has a rich and varied natural and historic environment, which makes it an attractive place to live, visit and work. The county contains three National Landscapes/ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) located wholly or partly within Oxfordshire, 111 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 4 National Nature Reserves (NNRs). Oxfordshire also has a rich heritage and archaeological resource.

However, transport and the associated emissions are having negative impacts on this natural and historic environment. Transport emissions can have a corrosive impact on buildings and also damage natural habitats. Transport also has significant impacts on biodiversity through ecosystem destruction and fragmentation. Improving air quality will help to protect our natural and historic environment.

There are also opportunities to develop green infrastructure to contribute towards delivery of our vision and tackle some of the issues outlined previously. Green infrastructure (GI) is a network of multi-functional green space and other green features, urban and rural, which can deliver quality of life and environmental benefits. GI includes parks, open spaces, public rights of way, playing fields, roadside verges, woodlands – and also street trees, allotments, private gardens, green roofs and walls, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and soils. It includes rivers, streams, canals and other water bodies, sometimes called 'blue infrastructure'. Developing GI adjacent to infrastructure has the potential to deliver many ecosystem services. For example, road and railway verges and canal banks form important wildlife corridors. GI can also help to increase transport infrastructure's resilience to extreme weather events and natural disasters. The delivery of biodiversity enhancements within GI can also contribute to countywide ecological networks such as the current system of Conservation Target Areas and a future Nature Recovery Network.

Why is this policy needed?

The protection, maintenance and enhancement of GI is required in Oxfordshire if we are to deliver our vision for air and environmental quality, healthy places and increased walking and cycling. The GI network is multi-functional and a core part of Oxfordshire's 'living landscape' of attractive and healthier places.

What are the benefits for people in Oxfordshire?

The key features of GI are that it is a network of integrated spaces and features, not just individual elements; and that it is 'multi-functional' – it provides multiple benefits simultaneously. These benefits can be to:

- Support people's mental and physical health
- Encourage walking and cycling
- Cool urban areas during heat waves
- Attract investment
- Reduce water run-off during flash flooding
- Carbon storage

- Deliver biodiversity enhancements
- Provide ecological linkages
- Provide sustainable drainage

Policy 30

We will:

- a) Embed the protection, maintenance and enhancement of Green Infrastructure (GI) into relevant guidance and decision-making processes in order to improve connectivity of the GI network, its environmental and community value.
- b) Work to deliver a transport network that achieves and where possible exceeds government and local biodiversity net gain targets.

Adopted as part of the local transport and Connectivity Plan at Full Council in July 2022
<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=116&MID=6802#A125206>. Full document available here <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-connecting-oxfordshire/LocalTransportandConnectivityPlan.pdf>