

Oxfordshire Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025



Foreword

Oxfordshire's urban and rural rights of way, the Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails, contribute to it being an outstanding place in which to live, work and visit.

These routes provide significant economic, health and well-being and environmental benefits. Economic benefits arise from the desire of people wanting to, visit, live and work in an area with such wonderful access to such beautiful countryside. Health and well-being benefits come from walking, riding and the many ways to actively enjoy the countryside as well as being able to connect with the natural environment. Environmental benefits come from attractive alternatives to encourage walking or cycling instead of using cars for short and longer journeys and therefore reducing congestion. Paths between fields, alongside hedgerows and watercourses, and along sunken lanes offer superb opportunities to protect and enhance wildlife and habitats. Many routes are also ancient highways that by themselves are evidence of times past and some give access to historic and prehistoric sites. All routes and green spaces in towns and countryside are part of the continually evolving cultural landscape of Oxfordshire.

In line with the rest of the country, the County Council will face a challenging financial position over the life of this plan. With a clear vision in the form of a Rights of Way Management Plan the authority will be better placed to seek additional funding opportunities as and when they become available and enable innovative methods in the delivery of services to ensure that the Rights of Way meet the needs of their users as far as practicable.

Despite this we will aim to manage the public rights of way and countryside access network effectively and efficiently, working with communities, farmers, landowners, partner organisations, volunteers and users. We will also try to improve the connections, responsible use, and economic benefits of the network and help adapt it to limit the impacts of climate change, and address the changing needs and demands of users, non-users and landowners.



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Introduction

This document is the second statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) for Oxfordshire. RoWIPs set out the vision for managing and improving access, mainly on the public rights of way network.

Public rights of way are valuable assets for current and future generations. They are used by countless Oxfordshire residents and visitors for many different sports, pastimes and physical activities, mostly based around walking, cycling or horse-riding, which take place on the network. Oxfordshire's countryside, urban and rural rights of way and landscape, including the Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails, contribute to it being an outstanding place in which to live, work and visit.

This iteration of the plan has been called the Rights of Way Management Plan (RoWMP) to bring more weight and focus to the management of the existing public rights of way network whilst continuing to identify and seek opportunities for improvements. The plan mainly covers rural and urban public rights of way as OCC is the main authority responsible for these. Other accessible natural green spaces and routes are touched on in the plan as they form part of the total access resource and are of value to the public regardless of which organisation manages them.

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is required to produce a RoWIP under s60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This plan is one of the 'daughter' documents of the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The LTP sets out the County Council's vision for roads and transport.

The first section forms the *Assessment of Need*, and after looking back at the achievements of the first RoWIP, sets the RoWMP within the policy framework and shows how the RoWMP helps meet the aims of some of the most relevant strategy themes. It then provides a relatively light touch update to the background and analysis of the countryside access and public rights of way

network in Oxfordshire undertaken for the first RoWIP, including some of the network mapping undertaken as part of the implementation of the first RoWIP.

The second section is the *Statement of Action*, that introduces and sets out what the authority will aim to do over the life of the plan



Access for all on the Swan's Way at Swyncombe Down (Chilterns Conservation Board)

to secure better management and improvement of the countryside access network in Oxfordshire. The overall vision and aims are set out, together with sections on the Definitive Map and Statement as well as Countryside Access Management. A new '*Rights of Way Management Framework*' is provided that summarises the main areas of responsibility and how this may change over the life of the plan.

The *Appendices* contain the maps of the network connectivity mapping as well as the aspirational access improvements in the areas likely to have significant levels of housing growth.

Contact details for the Countryside Access Team are provided at the end of the main document.

Achievements of the original Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

The first RoWIP and each of the annual delivery action plans focused on achieving better provision and improvements over and above the 'day to day' work of recording, protecting, and maintaining the public rights of way and access land network. Despite the impacts of cuts, partners and volunteers groups managed to achieve a significant amount since 2006 to meet access, transport, health and community needs.

✓ **Good value for money**

Oxfordshire County Council provides good value for residents in maintaining the 4,200km (2,600 miles) of public rights of way. In 2013/14 maintenance budgets averaged just £26/km. This is compared with an average cost of £82/km of a sample of county councils and county unitary authorities with PRow networks between 3,100km and 9,200km¹. These budgets have been supplemented by attracting other funding to supplement core budgets. As a result customer satisfaction remains very high when compared to the same authorities. ***This new plan aims to continue to achieve as much as possible with the available budget.***

✓ **High levels of use and satisfaction with the rights of way network**

The National Highways and Transport Network Survey is an annual postal survey which collects public perspectives on, and satisfaction with, highways and transportation services in local authority areas. This includes questions on public rights of way. In 2014 and out of 22 comparator county councils, Oxfordshire came 2nd for signposting, 6th for satisfaction with aspects of rights of way, 6th for condition of footpaths and bridleways, and 5th for information about rights of way (NHT, 2014).

Every two years OCC has undertaken research about access using a Residents Panel or online consultation facility. The survey in 2012² showed that of the 600 respondents:

- *Nearly all respondents had used the countryside for leisure in the last 12 months*

and nine out of ten had used public rights of way

- *A high value is placed on Oxfordshire's countryside - nearly all respondents rated it as either very important or quite important*
- *There were reasonable levels of spend when people are out and about, mainly on food and drink from pubs, cafes and shops*
- *There were reasonably good levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the provision and management of access*

This new plan will aim to continue to monitor use and satisfaction levels and use these to try and improve services.

✓ **Significant community involvement & external funding for access projects**

Over sixty communities and groups across the county were able to meet local needs and make practical improvements to access on their local rights of way and greenspace areas for walkers, cyclist and equestrians. By partnering with the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment and using Landfill Community Funds from Grundon, Viridor and the Waste Recycling Group, over £300,000 of additional external funds were secured, plus cash and volunteer contributions from communities.

This new plan aims to build on that work and improve support for local people to improve their areas.

✓ **Extensive practical work by the key volunteer access groups**

In Oxfordshire, two key self-managing volunteer groups, the South Chilterns Paths Maintenance Volunteers and the Cotswolds Voluntary Warden Service, have worked tirelessly over many years to improve their local areas, in close liaison and partnership with OCC rights of way officers. They have installed gates, cleared routes and improved signing and overall amenity on many paths. Other groups have also undertaken much work over the years. ***This new plan aims to maintain support for existing groups and***

encourage other groups to become just as effective.

✓ **National award winning**

In 2009, Oxfordshire County Council won the 'Most Innovative and Enterprising RoWIP' award at the national RoWIP awards run by Natural England.

✓ **More involvement in access planning at the community level**

A large number of local communities have produced "Community-Led Plans", and more are developing statutory Neighbourhood Plans. Access and rights of way often feature in them and reflect the value of these routes for local journeys and contributions to their health and quality of life. These community plans help galvanise local action and are useful in the development planning process. Many local communities and organisations also undertake work to protect, maintain, improve and promote the routes and areas that are important to them. **This new plan aims to continue to support local communities and organisations.**

✓ **Increased joint working with Roads & Highways using external funding**

The RoWIP provided a framework to improve understanding about the needs of vulnerable users of the rights of way and roads network, especially in the more rural areas. A road verge linking route at Ducklington used highway land to create a safer margin from a bridleway to a minor road. This used the expertise of OCC's Highways Team but was able to access external funding. A number of local communities benefited from some village paths being asphalted to bring them to a condition that matched local needs. **This plan aims to reinforce the opportunities for rights of way to form part of day to day journeys on foot and by bicycle and for consideration of the needs of equestrians, cyclists and walkers on the roads network.**

✓ **Secured access provision from developments**

The first RoWIP provided the basis to negotiate mitigation and improvement countryside access measures with major residential, commercial, and minerals/waste developments across the county which will be implemented over the next few years. These include sites at Barton, Ardley, RAF Upper Heyford, Wallingford, Bicester, Witney, Faringdon and Grove. **The new plan aims to continue to mitigate the impacts of development and secure access provision.**

✓ **Improved awareness, understanding and appreciation of access matters**

The RoWIP helped steer improvements to awareness and understanding by making the website better, including development of the interactive countryside map and the online reporting tool, making all walking leaflets downloadable and putting the definitive map and statement online. The RoWIP enabled better understanding across the authority and in partner organisations of how public rights of way and access to the countryside can contribute to better quality of life for residents and visitors – including running regular residents' surveys and making sure the Service's work remains relevant and of value to Oxfordshire's residents and visitors. **The new plan aims to improve understanding and support other organisations to provide information and promote access.**

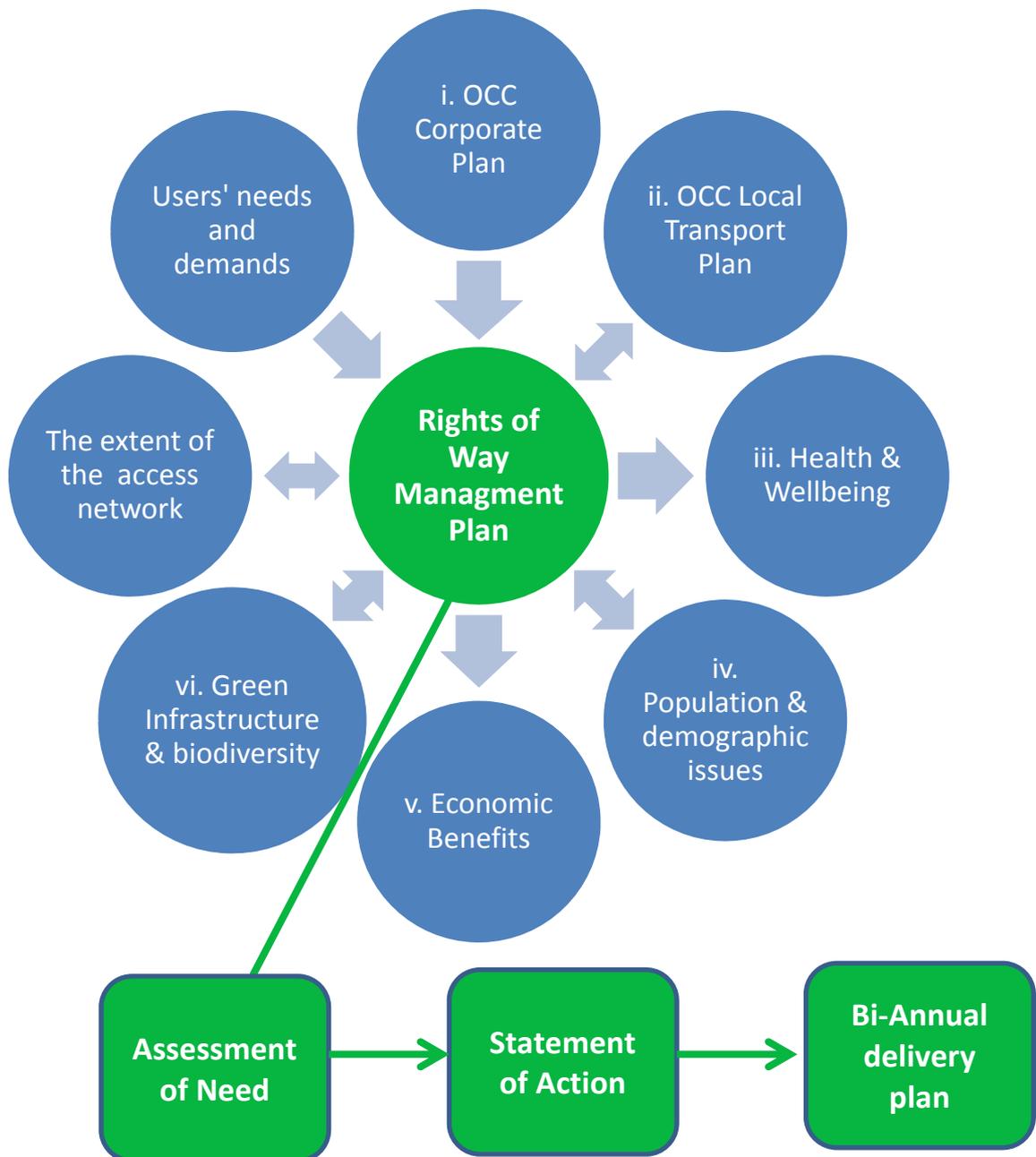
Overall, the Rights of Way Management Plan aims to build on the significant successes and experiences of the first RoWIP.

Cross cutting policies and strategies with the Rights of Way Management Plan (RoWMP)

This section forms the *Assessment of Need*, and sets the RoWMP within the policy framework and shows how the RoWMP helps meet the aims of some of the strategy themes that are most relevant to it. It then provides a relatively light touch update to the background and analysis of the countryside access and

public rights of way network in Oxfordshire undertaken for the first RoWIP. Figure 1 highlights the key areas that influence and are influenced by the RoWMP. Arrows indicate main influence direction. Each theme is then expanded on in the rest of this section.

Fig 1: RoWIP influence areas and outline structure



i. The RoWMP and the Oxfordshire County Council Corporate Plan

Oxfordshire County Council's overall ambition is to deliver 'A *Thriving Oxfordshire*' through its Corporate Plan 2014-2018:

"Our ambition is for a county where local residents and businesses can flourish – a Thriving Oxfordshire.."

The Corporate Plan has three strategic objectives and the RoWMP helps meet all three:

Strategic Objective: A Thriving Economy

Oxfordshire's countryside, urban and rural rights of way and landscape contribute to it being an outstanding place in which to live, work and visit. Many visitors, businesses and residents choose Oxfordshire because of the quality of this environment.

Access to this landscape using the countryside access network provides significant economic, health and well-being and environmental benefits. Economic benefits come directly from spending on goods and services in the local area when people are on walks, cycles and horse-rides, and whilst people are staying in local accommodation. Properties in close proximity to green spaces can be more attractive to purchasers resulting in increased values or speed of purchase. Improving the environment and access around workplaces can increase active commuting on foot and by bicycle, and give opportunities for healthy and stimulating lunchtime activities.

Strategic Objective: Thriving People and Communities

The use of the countryside access network has a valuable role to play in the physical and mental health of the people of Oxfordshire. The Rights of Way Management Plan aims to maintain and improve public access and open-air recreation, including walking, cycling and horse-riding, for the

benefit of all in order to help the people in Oxfordshire to live healthier and happier lives.

Countryside access and rights of way benefit physical, mental and social wellbeing. Access to green space, through well planned and properly linked walking and cycling routes, enables people to choose healthy lifestyles, and improve mental health and wellbeing.

In a county with an increasingly ageing population and large differences in income levels, some areas of deprivation and inequality exist. Countryside access and opportunities for walking can improve people's quality of life and this is a freely available activity. The public rights of way network is a part of the Oxfordshire living landscape and the network forms part of people's day to day lives – whether when walking their dog, exploring their local area or somewhere new, or going for a family walk or ride. The more connected and easier to use a network is then the more people will choose to use it and gain the health and social benefits.

Strategic Objective: A Safety Net

The public rights of way network is freely available, subject to the provisions of the various legislation. The network has developed historically and may not always be suitable for modern use. Stiles and other features on public rights of way can restrict and sometimes even prohibit access for some users, in particular the disabled, mobility impaired, visually impaired, the elderly and the very young could be at a particular disadvantage. The County Council will work with others to limit restrictions and encourage responsible access and try to manage and improve the network to meet current and future needs and provide more equitable access to services.

ii. The RoWMP and the Local Transport Plan

The Rights of Way Management Plan is a 'daughter' document to the Local Transport Plan for Oxfordshire (LTP) – which sets out the strategy for delivering nationally set priorities for transport.

The five transport goals of the emerging “*Connecting Oxfordshire: Local Transport Plan 2015-2031*” are:

1. *To support jobs and housing growth and economic vitality across Oxfordshire*
2. *To support the transition to a low carbon future*
3. *To support social inclusion and equality of opportunity.*
4. *To protect, and where possible enhance Oxfordshire’s environment and improve quality of life*
5. *To improve public health, safety and individual wellbeing*

The RoWMP forms an intrinsic part of all of these goals and can help meet five of the LTP’s strategic objectives in the following ways:

- **Strategic Objective 10: Improve public health and wellbeing by increasing levels of walking and cycling, reducing transport emissions, reducing casualties, and enabling inclusive access to jobs, education and services** - This is the key strategic link between the two plans. Walkers, cyclists and equestrians are all vulnerable road users and may be affected by vehicle speed, frequency and driver behaviour. These factors should be addressed as part of the LTP. The rights of way and countryside access network is free to use and plays an important role in giving opportunities for physical activity for walkers, cyclists and equestrians.
- **Strategic Objective 3: Reduce the proportion of journeys made by private car by making the use of public transport, walking and cycling more attractive** - A good local rights of way network in urban areas can provide attractive alternatives to car use for short to medium local journeys to work, school and local facilities, and for longer recreational trips, especially at weekends. Often this can tie into public transport provision.

- **Strategic Objective 4: Maintain and improve transport connections to support economic growth and vitality across the county** - A well-maintained local rights of way network can form part of a journey to neighbourhood services like schools, surgeries, bus stops, green spaces, railway stations and shops for residents and visitors.



Walkers and horseriders sharing minor road to the White Horse (OCC)

- **Strategic Objective 5: Influence the location and layout of development to maximise the use and value of existing and planned sustainable transport investment** - New sites can benefit from being integrated with the internal and surrounding 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.
- **Strategic Objective 9: Mitigate and wherever possible enhance the impacts of transport on the local built and natural environment** - Modal shift away from cars helps reduce carbon emissions and provides healthy living benefits. The availability of off-road networks can reduce some conflicts with motorised vehicles and increasing the amount of traffic free routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, especially families, can help build confidence and levels of activity.

iii. The RoWMP, health and wellbeing

The use of the rights of way and countryside access network has a valuable role to play in the physical and mental health of the people of Oxfordshire. The Rights of Way Management Plan aims to maintain and where possible improve public access and open-air recreation, including walking, cycling and horse-riding, in order to help the people in Oxfordshire to live healthier and happier lives.

What are the benefits of physical activity?

Physical activity improves both mental and physical health. Getting out and about in the countryside is an enjoyable, sustainable way to improve general mental and physical fitness. In addition, access to the natural environment is important to people and promotes a feeling of wellbeing.

Being physically active can reduce the risk of premature death by 20-30%, and the chance of developing major chronic diseases by up to 50%. In older people it helps promote independence and reduces the likelihood of fall related injuries. Nationally the levels of physical activity are declining. The white paper published in 2004 'Choosing Health, Making Healthy Choices Easier' identifies that over a third of people are not active enough to benefit their health. Increased physical activity does not just have benefits to physical health. The mental health charity MIND reports that regular physical activity can make people feel better about themselves. It helps relieve depression and anxiety, reduces stress and increases feelings of well-being.

What are the recommended levels of physical activity?

It has now been clearly defined that for general health benefit, adults should aim to achieve 'a total of at least 30 minutes a day of at least moderate intensity physical activity on five or more days of the week.' Any type of physical activity can contribute to the daily target and a moderate intensity level of physical activity is defined as 'all types of physical activity that makes your breathing and heartbeat faster and you feel warmer.'

For most people, the easiest and most acceptable forms of physical activity

are those that can be incorporated into everyday life. Recreational walking, trips to the countryside, walking and cycling to work, and active volunteering can all contribute to the recommended levels of moderate physical activity.



Runner and cyclist on footpath and cycle track in Marston (OCC)

Physical activity and access to the countryside

The link between easy access to the countryside and the uptake and continuation of physical activity has been well documented. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds report '*Natural Fit, Can Green Space and Biodiversity Increase Levels of Physical Activity?*' states that 'The countryside can be seen as a great outpatient department whose therapeutic value is yet to be fully realised.'

Oxfordshire County Council can play an important role in this agenda particularly in encouraging physical activity and wellbeing. The countryside access network offers enormous potential to deliver public health benefits and improve outcomes at a local level by:

- Maintaining and extending accessible public rights of way and green space areas to provide healthier green landscapes.
- Ensure access to up to date and relevant information about the public rights of way network.

- Supporting and enabling community and volunteer involvement in practical access initiatives

What type of activity takes place in Oxfordshire?

The Oxfordshire countryside access and public rights of way network is used by huge numbers of people for many different sports and physical activities based around walking, cycling or horse-riding, Figure 2. These range from geocaching and Duke of Edinburgh Award training to cross-country running and cycling; and from using the structures found on paths as an outside gym to Nordic walking using assistance poles. A large number of led and guided walks are undertaken by the Ramblers and other walking groups for existing members and to encourage less confident people to access the countryside.

Fig 2: Some activities that take place on public rights of way:

Dog walking, walking and riding to work, school and local facilities, keeping fit, training for events, farming, single track mountain biking, guided and led walks, hacking, charity and sponsored events, family walks and rides, national curriculum, outside gym, keeping horses fit, kite-flying, picnicking, health walks and rides, reading, Nordic walking, ornithology, night walks and rides, sharing time with friends & family, cani-cross, tourists exploring, voluntary practical activities, Duke of Edinburgh Award, cross-country running, rock climbing, geocaching, stargazing, botany, peace & quiet, den building, enjoying the views, meeting new people, writing, photography & painting, country pub trails, music, observing wildlife, food gathering, orienteering.....

Many people choose to volunteer with organised groups such as the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails, the Green Gym, Cotswolds Wardens, Chilterns Society, British Horse Society, Trail Riders Fellowship and the Ramblers, as well as many other local community and neighbourhood groups. These groups undertake physical work to maintain

and improve the Oxfordshire countryside access and public rights of way network at the same time as improving their levels of physical activity, They also share time and a sense of achievement with like-minded people. Some of these run independently and some are facilitated through experienced project leaders.

The very first ‘Green Gym’ was set up in Sonning Common in 1998 and most of them are now independently run by local people in the areas where they are based. The scheme inspires people to improve both their health



Volunteers installing gate (Howard Dell)

and the environment at the same time - experienced leaders guide people through a range of practical projects, giving them the opportunity to tackle physical jobs in the outdoors. This improves their strength and stamina, boosts their practical skills and confidence and benefits their local green spaces.

All of these factors have direct and indirect economic benefits for the individual, the wider population, and the health authority

iv. The RoWMP, population and demographic issues

Oxfordshire has a 2011 Census population estimate of 653,800 and this is projected to rise by 90,000 by 2026, with up to 100,000 new homes built by 2031 (OCC, 2014). The Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire, and South Oxfordshire are projected to have the greatest proportion of this increase whilst Oxford City and Cherwell districts have smaller proportions of growth.

Overall, the proportion of older people is increasing with 16% of the population over 65 – but this is slightly less than the rest of the south east region at 17.3%. The age profile changes indicate that more needs to be done to consider the needs of an ageing population in rural areas so that they can continue to access and enjoy the benefits of the countryside access network.

From the 2011 Census, in Oxfordshire 594,000 people (90.9%) were White and 59,800 Non-White (9.1%). The greatest number of non-white people were Asian/Asian British broad ethnic group (4.8% of the total population). From 2001–11 there was a population increase of 48,300 (8.0%) (ONS, 2011). This increasing proportion presents an opportunity to increase access and participation in countryside access amongst non-white ethnic groups.

There are around 20,200 'Blue Badge' parking permit holders in the county (DfT 2012). This gives an indication of the need to provide for users with disabilities on the public rights of way network. In addition there are innumerable parents and guardians with children in pushchairs, plus people simply a bit less agile. Replacing stiles with gates is often the simplest step to increasing the accessibility of rights of way.

On horseback, the most recent National Equestrian Survey (2010-11) found that of the 3.5 million people have ridden a horse at least once in the past 12 months, 8% of riders considered themselves disabled in some way. A quarter of all GB riders are under 16 years old (BHS, 2013). This indicates a need to provide for less

physically strong riders in the provision and management of access, especially bridleway gate installation and maintenance.



Mother and toddler enjoying the countryside (P. Harris)

Many of these users require additional provision over and above the authority's statutory duty in order to make the countryside accessible and enjoyable to them. This provision is actively sought by rights of way officers but is dependent on funds being available, and relies on the goodwill and cooperation of land managers. Under the Equalities Act 2010, the County Council has a responsibility to make sure that policies and practices do not unfairly prejudice people with protected characteristics. See the separate Service and Community Impact Assessment.

More than half of all countryside visits are undertaken by dog-walkers (Natural England 2014) and dog ownership provides many health and social benefits. However, in urban and urban fringe areas work also needs to be done to inform and educate some dog-owners so there are less potential impacts with farming or biodiversity. In places it may be appropriate to make it easier and safer to access less vulnerable areas of countryside and green spaces. It is estimated that 24% of households own a dog in 2014. In the south-east region the estimate is 22% dog ownership (PTMA, 2014). This amount of dog ownership should be an important consideration in access management and planning.

v. Economic benefits of countryside access and levels of use

Oxfordshire's countryside, paths and landscape, and the way that farmers manage it, contribute to it being an attractive and outstanding place in which to live, work and visit.

The economy is assisted by spending on goods and services in the local area when people are on walks and rides. This includes visitors who are attracted to the area to make use of the countryside. Environmental benefits come from the impacts of choosing to walk or ride instead of using cars for short and longer journeys. Many routes also provide ecological benefits as green corridors allowing movement of wildlife and the provision of a linear habitat that is an intrinsic part of the Oxfordshire landscape.

A well-maintained and connected public rights of way network, with information and improvements that meet the needs of users and potential users, offers almost unlimited potential for residents and visitors to enjoy all of Oxfordshire's countryside and landscape on foot, by bicycle and on horseback.

OCC is proud to have hosted the Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails Team for over 20 years, and recognises the local, national and international value of these two routes from a tourism perspective as well as their exceptional management and use of a dedicated group of volunteers.

The national Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey has been carried out for since 2009. The 2012/13 full year annual report identified that:

- Nearly 2.9 billion visits were made to English countryside, coast and open spaces last year - around 65 visits per adult.
- An estimated £21 billion was spent each year during visits to the natural environment that includes countryside, greenspace in towns and cities, the coast and seaside resorts and towns.

- 27% of visits involved any expenditure and £27 was the average spend on those visits. Of that spend, 37% was spent in the countryside, generating £7.9 billion with over half the money on each visit being spent on food and drink.
- The mean amount of money spent per visit was £5.92 in Oxfordshire

Spending by people using the countryside helps towards keeping local services viable and rural tourism is an important source of income for many local businesses.

The Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001 demonstrated the levels of day-to-day use of the rights of way network and the value of that access. It also showed the negative impact that the closure of access can have on tourists, local businesses and local communities.



The Chilterns Cycleway benefits the local economy with a high quality product (Chilterns Conservation Board)

In terms of the levels of use of the countryside access network, the MENE survey found that:

- Volumes of visits to paths, cycleways and bridleways have increased by 20 per cent since 2010/11
- 68% of visits were to places within two miles of the respondent's home
- 93% of the population agreed that having open green spaces close to where they live is important and 86% agreed that

spending time out of doors was an important part of their life.

- 54% of people visit the natural environment more than once a week, and only 16% visit the natural environment twice or less a year

Table 1: Types of natural environment used

	England (%)	Oxfordshire (%)
Path/cycleway/bridleway	14	21
Park in a town/ city	23	18
Another open space in the countryside	12	18
A village	7	18
Farmland	8	12
Woodland	12	9
River/lake/canal	9	6

Implications: This demonstrates that people enjoy the variety of natural environment that Oxfordshire has to offer. Linear routes and all public greenspace areas are well used, as are small rural villages and farmland.

Table 2: Distance people travel to enjoy nature and method of travel to get there

	England (%)	Oxfordshire (%)
Less than 1 mile	41	51
1-2 miles	26	21
3-5 miles	15	14
	England (%)	Oxfordshire (%)
On foot	63	70
Car/van	30	21
Bicycle	3	5

Implications: An accessible natural environment close to where people live or work is especially important in Oxfordshire. People tend to walk to where they want to go when visiting the natural environment, even more so in Oxfordshire.

Table 3: Top 3 motivations for people to access natural spaces

	England %	Oxfordshire %
Exercise the dog	48	48
For health/exercise	36	30
For fresh air/to enjoy the pleasant weather	18	23

Implications: Exercising the dog and deliberately using green spaces for health and exercise show the direct benefits of the countryside access network for many people.

Table 4: Reason for not visiting the natural environment more often

	England %	Oxfordshire %
Too busy at home	18	15
Too busy at work	26	13
Poor health	14	28
Old age	12	21
Physical disability	8	13
Not being interested	6	17
Lack of public transport	0	0
Lack of suitable places or paths	0	0
Lack of information	0	0

(All source MENE survey 11/12 Natural England)

Implications: It is important to have good quality and easily accessible green spaces close to where people live and that people know about them and feel confident using them. The aim is that making better provision and finding ways to help with accessing green spaces (in company or independently) helps overcome a person's perception that he/she is 'too old' or 'too ill' to be able to access and enjoy the outdoors. At work taking a 'walking lunch' break in a natural space can often allow creative thoughts to flow and stress levels to reduce.

Oxfordshire's Countryside Access Team has undertaken web-based surveys of Oxfordshire residents every two years and results are at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/rowip. In terms of use and spending the survey found that a high proportion of people use the countryside and public rights of way with nearly all respondents using the countryside for leisure in the preceding year.

The Oxfordshire survey identified that people regularly spend money whilst out and about in the countryside. The spend is mostly on food and drink, whether refreshments eaten in at pubs and cafes or bought from local shops. Higher spending rates are noticeable for food at a pub. Higher value spends are also made on cycle, walking or riding equipment.

vi. The RoWMP, Green Infrastructure and biodiversity

Green Infrastructure (GI) in the context of countryside access, includes publicly accessible parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, river and canal corridors, public rights of way, unsurfaced roads, archaeological and historic sites, cemeteries and public gardens. It needs to be planned and delivered at all spatial scales from national to neighbourhood levels. The greatest benefits will be gained when it is designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.

Why is Green Infrastructure important?

Green Infrastructure can provide many social, economic and environmental benefits close to where people live and work including:

- Space and habitat for wildlife with access to nature for people
- Places for outdoor relaxation and play
- Climate change adaptation - for example flood alleviation and cooling urban heat islands
- Environmental education
- Local food production - in allotments, gardens and through agriculture
- Improved health and well-being – lowering stress levels and providing opportunities for exercise

Green Infrastructure and economic growth

Literature and case studies across the world show that investment in green infrastructure can act as a catalyst to local economic growth of an area through:

- Increased investment in the built environment in the surrounding area
- Attracting businesses and residents to the area through increasing its attractiveness
- New developments contributing to increased local taxation revenue
- Increased number of visitors coming to and spending in the area

- Business expansion or start-up on the back of increased visitor spending
- Improving the physical and mental health of the population leading to increased productivity and reduced medical expenditure
- Providing an appreciable contribution, at lower cost than would be possible through grey infrastructure, to environmental management, such as alleviation of urban heat island effects, carbon sequestration, improved air quality and reduction of flood risks
- Increase in disposable household income or business surpluses due to cost savings or lower taxation as a result of environmental and health gains
- Growth in direct and indirect employment from provision, maintenance and associated services
- Local multiplier effects of increased income and spending

(Defra, 2011)

Oxfordshire County Council is leading on the production of a county-wide strategic Green Infrastructure study and the aims of the RoWMP will be an intrinsic part of this. The district councils have produced linked plans such as the Oxford Green Spaces Strategy 2013-2027 and the RoWMP ties in to these too.

Biodiversity

Oxfordshire County Council can play an important role in species and habitat protection and enhancement through the management of the Rights of Way network. The Natural Environment White Paper (DEFRA 2011), the “biodiversity duty” of the NERC Act 2006, and “Oxfordshire 2030” - the Sustainable Community Strategy for Oxfordshire all give clear signals to the need for every opportunity to be taken for biodiversity enhancement.

The public rights of way network already makes a very significant contribution to the “coherent ecological networks” referred to in

the Natural Environment White Paper, but it could provide an even greater contribution. The vegetation along many public rights of way plays a critical role in linking larger areas of species-rich semi-natural habitat, such as woodlands, lowland meadows and calcareous grassland. Of particular importance are the paths between fields, alongside hedgerows, sunken lanes and green lanes, many of which support a wealth of biodiversity and well as the ability to appreciate our cultural heritage.

The County Council will try to ensure that, as a far as possible, the management and improvement of access results in a net gain for biodiversity through protecting and enhancing habitats and species.

Examples of practice and advice given include:

- undertaking protected species surveys when planning works
- Timetabling maintenance activities to avoid or minimise harm and disturbance to species and habitats, for example when planning heavy clearances
- Working closely with ecological colleagues for specialist advice
- Obtaining appropriate activity licences, for example to address badger damage causing danger on rights of way
- working with planners and developers to provide multi-purpose green routes that benefit people and wildlife



Thames Path near Pinkhill Lock, Farmoor, providing social, economic and biodiversity benefits (OCC)

The extent of local rights of way and other access resources

What is the Oxfordshire 'Countryside Access Network'?

Access to Oxfordshire's countryside is predominantly achieved through the 2,600 miles (4,200km) of public rights of way in the county. These public rights of way have evolved over many years, and continue to evolve today through the modification order and public path order processes. Public rights of way do not always meet today's recreational needs because originally these and other highways were the ways used for travel and trade. Many of these ways evolved into the surfaced roads network whilst some stayed as unsurfaced routes,

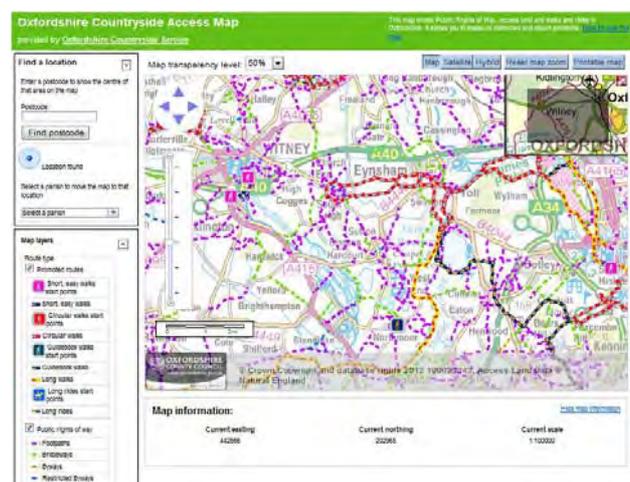
In 2013 and according to the status of public rights of way as recorded on the Definitive Map and Statement, walkers should be able to use 100% of the network, horse riders and cyclists should be able to use 879 miles, 1,417km (33.5%) of the network as bridleway, restricted byway and byway open to all traffic (BOAT). Horse carriage drivers should be able to use 204 miles, 330km (7.8%) of the network on restricted byways and BOATs, whilst motorised users should be able to use 48 miles, 78km (1.8%) of network on BOATs; Figure 3.

The County Council's online countryside access map shows all public rights of way as well as OCC promoted routes. Users can also show the combination of routes that are available for each class of user.

However all of these figures must be taken in the context of a sometimes disjointed, fragmented and obstructed network as, although it is similar in length to the county roads network, there is less connectivity between individual rights of way, and people in settlements are not always able to access a right of way to enjoy an environment of traffic-free or quiet countryside. See Appendix A for the network assessment maps. The main reason for this is because the roads originally used as part of a walking or riding journey are now busier and with faster moving vehicular traffic. Other

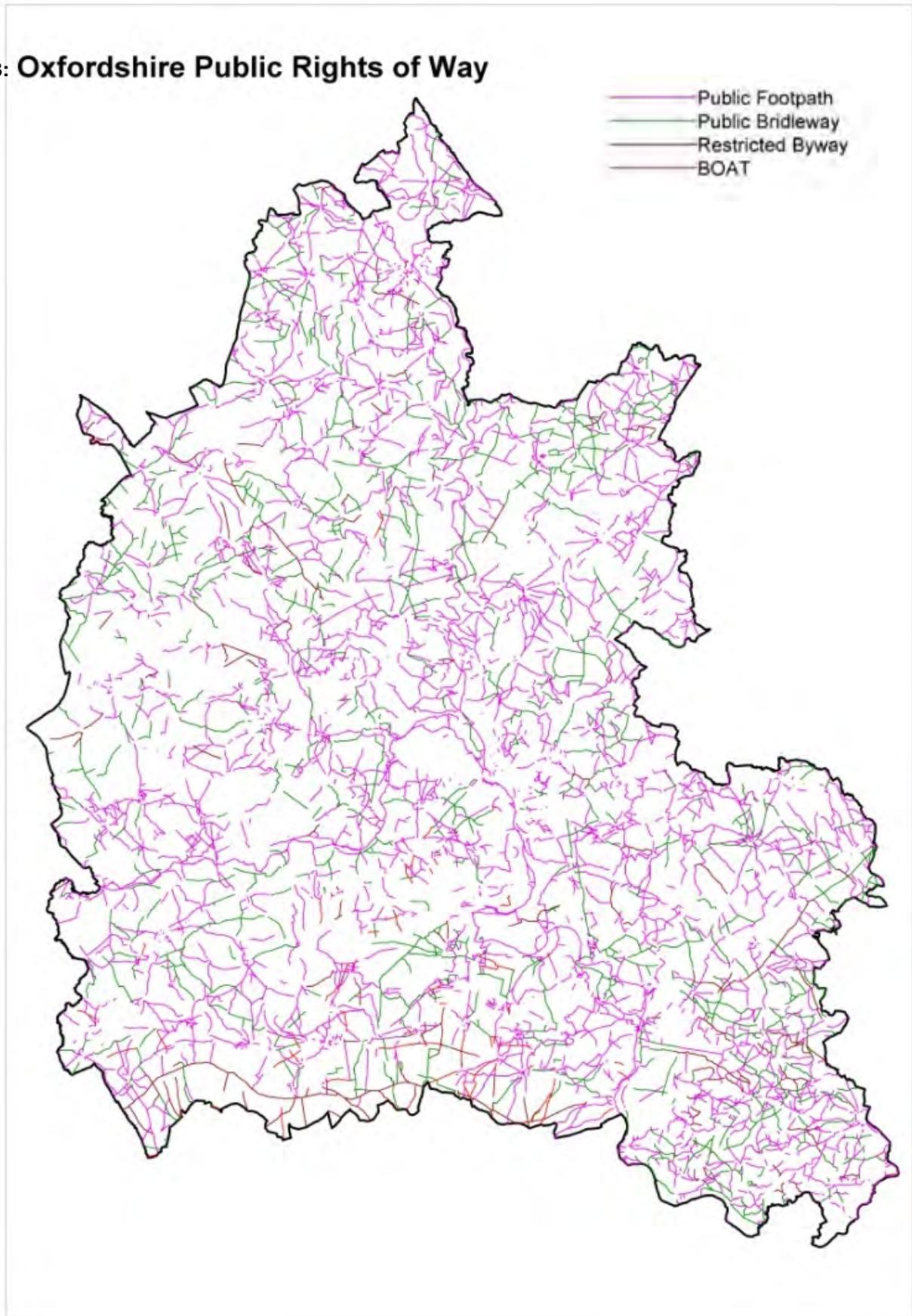
reasons include some landholdings and estates that never had public access, and possible omissions in recording the first definitive map following the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act.

The distribution and density of the network differs widely between different areas of the county and especially for the different user types. Relatively small links or status upgrades may go a long way towards making the network more usable. It should be recognised however, that nearly all public rights of way pass over private land and therefore such improvements must be undertaken in negotiation with the landowner. The County Council will however actively seek to enable local communities and others to identify and seek to implement these links as and when opportunities through housing and commercial developments, or where landowners are agreeable to the necessary access to their land. The necessary resources also need to be available.



online map of Oxfordshire's public rights of way - available at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countrysidemap

Fig 3: Oxfordshire Public Rights of Way



Countryside access resources

Access Land: The Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) granted rights to walk on Access Land - areas of 'open country' and registered commons. Open country is defined as: mountain, moor, heath or down. Only downland and common land access land areas are present in Oxfordshire. There is no right of access to cultivated fields or other areas of 'excepted land' such as gardens, quarries and golf courses. Access land is shown on up to date 'Explorer' Ordnance Survey maps and as local information on the Countryside Access Team's webpages. In Oxfordshire there are 455 hectares (ha) of 'open country', 940 ha of common land and 463 ha of dedicated land. In total there are 1,858ha of Access Land out of the total land area of 260,595ha (less than 1%).

Unlike on public rights of way, land owners can suspend access for up to 28 days a year. Restrictions and closures information can be found on Natural England's website and sites will also display notices advising when restrictions are in place. The right to enjoy access land is only for walking or quiet recreation. Some sites require that dogs must be kept on a lead between March 1st and July 31st to protect ground-nesting birds, or at any time when near livestock.

Cycle tracks: Cycle tracks are the routes that often run parallel to roads or they may be stand-alone routes in urban or rural areas. They are not the designated cycle lanes found marked on roads with white lines. Cycle tracks are often surfaced with stone or asphalt to make them easier for year-round cycle journeys. The organisation Sustrans has created many cycle tracks where they form part of the National Cycle Network or local cycle networks. Cycle tracks are not a category of highway that are recorded on definitive maps and are usually managed by OCC's Highways Team and/or Sustrans. They are however, shown on up to date Ordnance Survey Explorer and Landranger Maps.

National Trails and longer distance routes: Throughout Oxfordshire there are a number of longer routes that enable a themed suggested walk or ride to be followed over a number of days or in stages. The two most important are the National Trails running through the county. The Thames Path National Trail is a walking route which follows the river for 180 miles from its source in the Cotswolds through Oxfordshire nearly to the sea east of London. The Ridgeway National Trail is one of the oldest walking or riding routes in Britain and runs for 87 miles from near Avebury in Wiltshire through the south of Oxfordshire before crossing the Thames at Streatley and heading north along the Chilterns scarp.

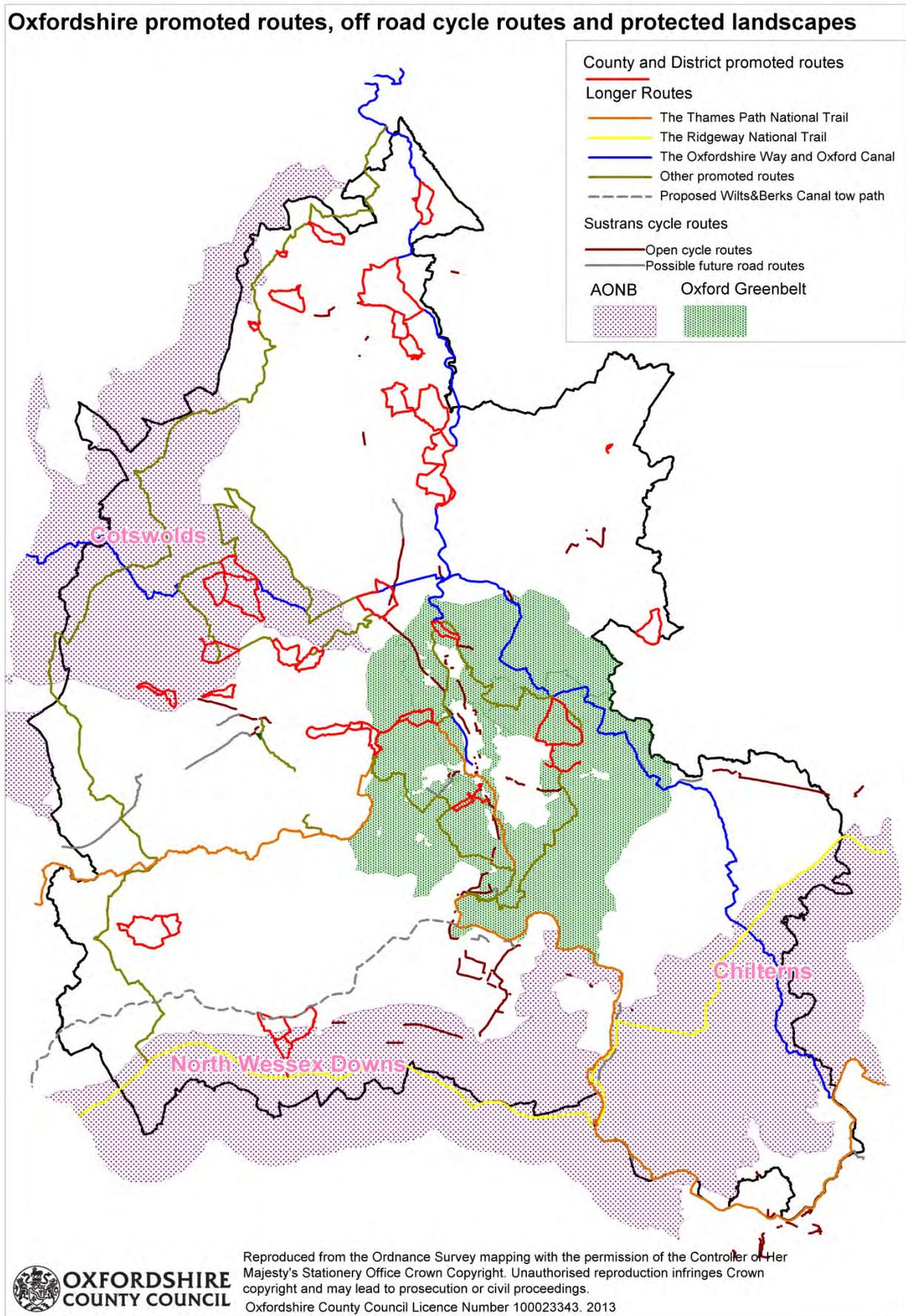
Other longer themed routes are usually accompanied by a leaflet or booklet with some also providing additional circular walks. These routes may also be signed or waymarked with special badges. Just some of those for walkers include:

- Oxfordshire Way
- d'Arcy Dalton Way
- Wychwood Way
- Oxford Canal Walk
- Oxford Green Belt Way
- Chilterns Way
- Shakespeare's Way
- Seven Shires Way

Riders and walkers can enjoy the Judges Ride, Claude Duval Way and Swan's Way. In addition the County Council promotes shorter walks and rides on the webpages: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/walks-and-rides

Many of the key promoted routes and designated areas are shown on figure 4.

Fig 4: Oxfordshire promoted routes, off road cycle routes and protected landscapes



Other access not shown in Fig 4:

Green Lanes, ORPAs or white roads – maps and guidebooks may list other terms for ways such as ‘green lanes’, ‘white roads’ and ‘ORPAs’: ‘Green lane’ is a purely descriptive term just meaning an un-surfaced route, usually between hedges or walls. A green lane might be of any of the four types of public right of way, or not a right of way at all. ‘White roads’ are found on older Ordnance Survey (OS) maps. These are simply un-coloured routes that may or may not carry public rights. Later OS maps show ‘ORPAs’ – Other Routes with Public Access. These are often un-classified and un-surfaced roads but the actual status of them may not be recorded.

Permissive access: Permissive access comes in two forms – formal and informal. Formal permissive access is sometimes included in Agri-environmental grant schemes. Details of current access can be found on Defra’s website at <http://cwr.naturalengland.org.uk/walk-ride.aspx>. As at September 2014 there were 47 such agreements in Oxfordshire. Annual payments for this access were stopped in 2012 and it is expected that many of these routes will not be kept open once the funding agreements end, normally after 10 years. Since the 2012 RoWIP extension was published a number of these access routes have stopped being provided. There are no plans to replace the current permissive access routes at the end of their agreement.

Formal access to land may also be provided under Inheritance Tax Exemption schemes. www.hmrc.gov.uk/heritage/lbsearch.htm. Local councils, including parish councils, might also provide permissive countryside access on land that they own or manage.

Town and Village Greens and Commons: Town and Village Greens are places that the public have customarily enjoyed for exercise and recreation. They and Common Land are recorded by the County Council.

There is a right on foot to most areas of Common Land.

Roads: In addition to rights of way, permissive access 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.

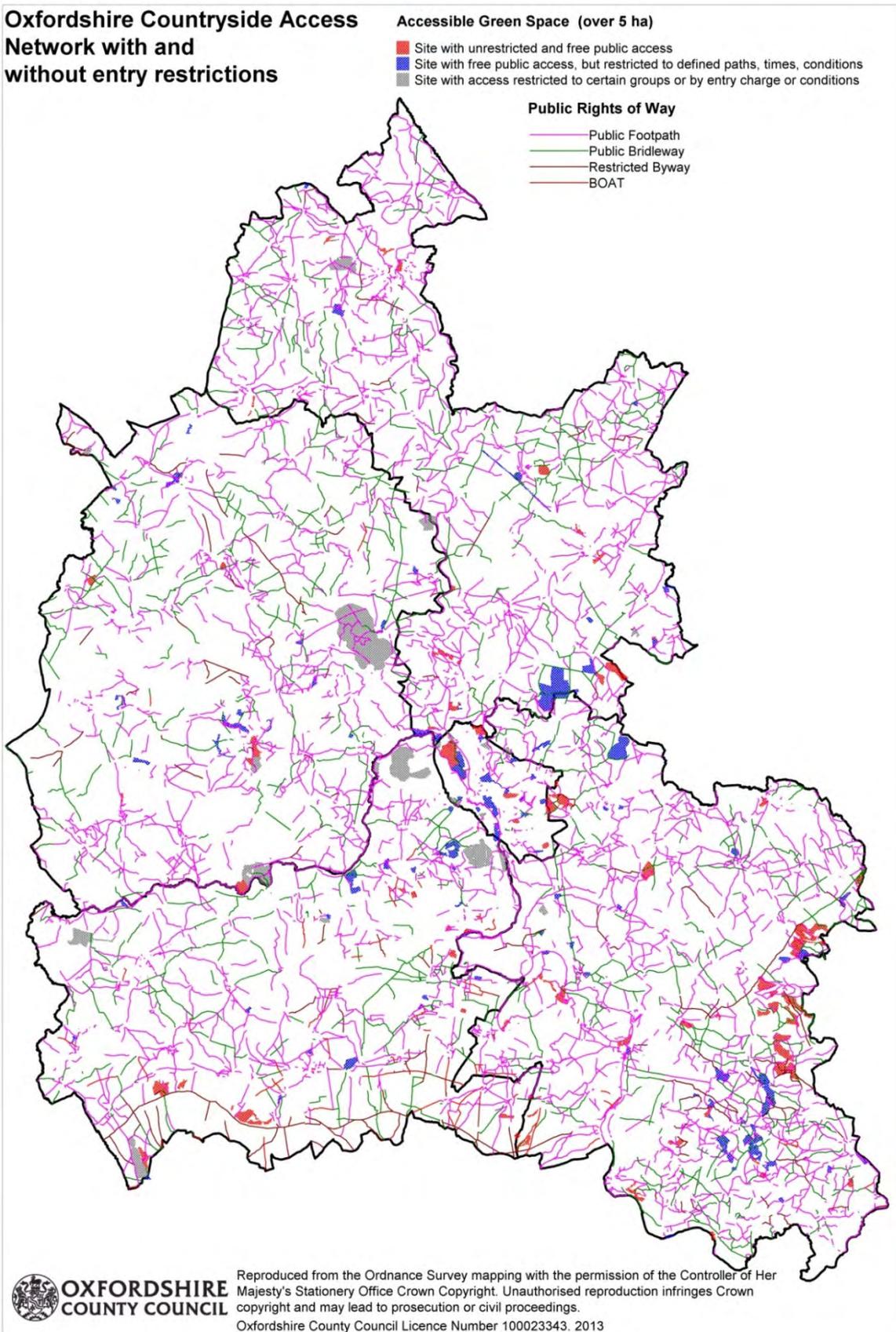
‘Other Access’ Many charitable, private and public bodies including the Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Woodland Trust, Earth Trust, RSPB, universities and colleges, Oxford Preservation Trust, district, town and parish councils and private estates may own and manage land which can have varying levels of access. Sometimes this is free and unrestricted and sometimes access is subject to an entrance fee or restrictions for member access only. All of these areas contribute to the wider green space and provide access to more natural areas.

Some of these larger areas of additional access are shown on figure 5.



Minor roads are often valuable for recreational users (OCC)

Fig 5: Oxfordshire Countryside Access Network with and without entry restrictions



Users' needs

The Countryside Access Team has undertaken a wide range of information gathering and primary research in order to contribute local perspectives to the RoWMP, and also for the day-to-day management and improvement of the network. This helps OCC to consider the needs and circumstances of people with a range of expectations, interests and levels of ability, and includes both local people and visitors to the area. Some of the ways we have gathered information include:

- Ongoing receipt of reports about path problems, through email, website and telephone
- Focus groups and surveys to inform the first RoWIP and user surveys every two years since RoWIP1 was adopted
- Developing the RoWMP by continuous discussion and liaison with key stakeholder groups, neighbouring and local authorities, OCAF and professional access practitioners
- Making use of national and local needs based research such as Natural England's Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment

What does this research tell us?

Overall, from all survey sources, there was strong and encouraging support for all aspects of the County Council's work on public rights of way. Most suggestions were all centred around "*doing more of what the service does already*". Other sections of this plan show the use levels and spend on the network. The top four suggestions for better maintenance and improvements are regularly:

1. **More vegetation cutting** Users would like a greater frequency of summer and winter vegetation cutting, especially targeted on

paths closer to settlements or on promoted/linking routes.

2. **Increasing path surfacing and drainage** Some users want easier surfaces so, even where resources are available, OCC needs to balance the benefits of surfacing path for users such as families and lower agility people against the risk of urbanising or over-managing the countryside or increasing future maintenance liabilities. We also need to guard against conflicts on multi-use paths (such as between cyclists and walkers on narrow routes).
3. **Path protection** Users say that OCC should be making access easier for people with mobility impairments; including wheelchair users, older people and families with pushchairs. OCC need to speed up the removal of obstructions and work with land managers to prevent ploughing problems. Litter is seen as a problem on many routes, as is dog fouling and the loss of green spaces as a result of housing and commercial developments.
4. **Access to information** Users want OCC to improve this but on the path and off it through path signage and information. Many users say that they lack confidence and knowledge regarding their rights and responsibilities when out in the countryside.

Importantly, all of these factors will affect the likelihood of non-users wanting to, or being able to, access the countryside access network.

Oxfordshire County Council tries to meet these user needs as resources allow. The next section shows to what extent the Countryside Access Team manages the network and links to the second part of the RoWMP, the 'statement of action'.

The accessibility of local rights and natural greenspace areas to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems

The public rights of way and wider access network can have barriers that prevent equal access for many members of the public. These barriers may include man-made and natural *physical* issues as well as information and understanding *knowledge* issues.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has been replaced by the Equalities Act 2010. The Act broadly requires that in carrying out their functions, public authorities must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that it is not impossible or unreasonably difficult for people with disabilities or other 'protected characteristics' including age, gender and ethnicity to benefit from those functions as others would do, or to show that there are good reasons for not doing so.

Whilst there is no specific reference in the Equality Act to any aspect of rights of way management, it is clear that authorities are required to have regard to their obligations under the Act wherever changes or additions to the rights of way network are proposed and are encouraged to make improvements to structures wherever appropriate opportunities arise.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has issued guidance about structures on public rights of way: (<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/countryside/prow/gpg-equality.pdf>). The purpose of this is to show good practice to public authorities on the way that equalities legislation impacts on their public rights of way functions.

Oxfordshire County Council seeks to enable a public rights of way and countryside access network that offers as few restrictions as is reasonably possible through its own work and that of partner organisations, farmers and landowners. These groups and individuals, especially parish councils, the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers, and the voluntary

Cotswolds Wardens, have initiated, negotiated, obtained funding for and delivered many improvements over the life of the original RoWIP and it is hoped that this will continue.

The Countryside Access Team has undertaken a Service and Community Impact Assessment of the RoWMP and this is available in a separate annex, available at



Wheelchair users in Oxford's Milham Ford Park (OCC)

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/rowip. The assessment's summary judgement is that "*The public rights of way network is freely available, subject to the provisions of the various legislation. The network has developed historically and may not always be suitable for modern use. Stiles and other features on public rights of way can restrict and sometimes even prohibit access for some users, in particular the disabled, mobility impaired, visually impaired, the elderly and the very young could be at a particular disadvantage. The County Council will work with others to limit restrictions and encourage responsible access and try to manage and improve the network to meet current and future needs.*"

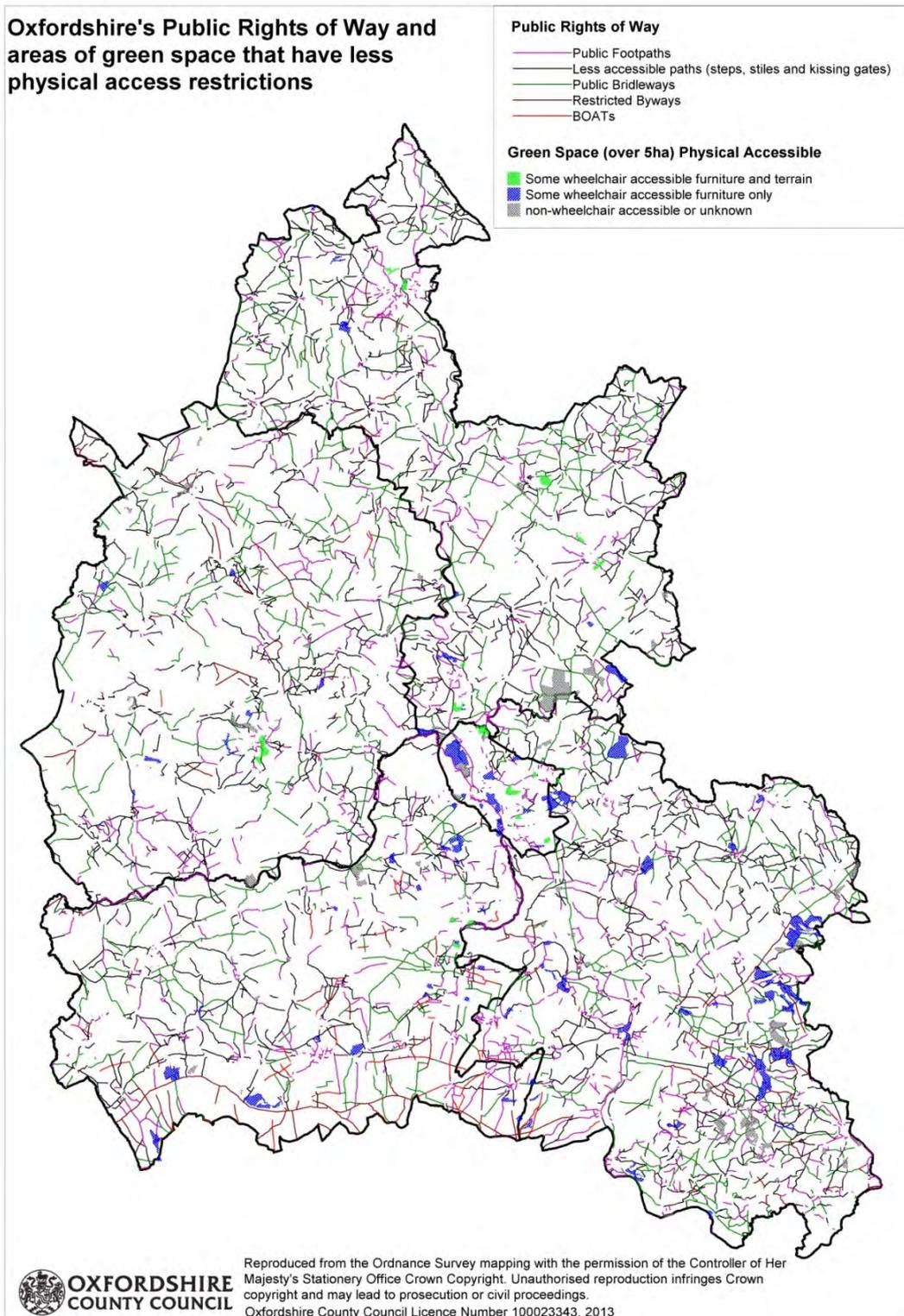
As well as providing a small range of short routes suitable for wheelchairs the Countryside Access Team provides an interactive web map of access

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countrysidemap to show all rights of way and access land areas together with a switchable path gradient mapping tool, so that slopes along a chosen path can be assessed. In time it is hoped that more accessibility information can be displayed on the map – such as path furniture (stiles, gates etc) and the surface

type, and other non-rights of way access resources. This, combined with more access improvements on the ground should help to make longer routes possible.

Figure 6 shows the relative accessibility of the county's public rights of way and green space access areas over 5 hectares. .

Fig 6: Oxfordshire's Public Rights of Way and areas of green space that have less physical access restrictions



Measuring how available the rights of way network is in Oxfordshire

This section covers the practical aspects of managing routes on the ground, the condition of the network's infrastructure, and how this affects users and non-users.

The nature of public rights of way is that they are a dynamic and complex system of seasonal, regular and random, natural and man-made interactions so perfect or 100% access cannot be guaranteed or really expected at any one time. Reasons for this may include for example, the right of the farmer to disturb the path under certain conditions, seasonal or cyclical vegetation growth, random third party impacts such as flytipping and vandalism, or elemental impacts such as flooding or earth shifting.

Whilst the Council can and does aspire to all paths being open all of the time, in reality all it can do is to prevent and manage these impacts to the best that resources and technology allow.

The Countryside Access Team has developed a comprehensive database of rights of way management information. This database allows the following information, Table 5, regarding the state of the path network to be detailed.

Twice a year in spring and autumn, staff from the Countryside Access Team undertake a survey of around 2.5% of the network. As well as recording condition information the surveyors also replace faded waymarkers, report hazardous situations, and undertake small scale clearance of stiles and fingerposts in order to 'improve as they move'.

Since 2008 the Team has used the Countryside Access Management System, linked to a Geographical Information System (GIS) which allows the records to be shown on a map, Figure 7.

Table 5: Snapshot comparison of OCC RoW network availability data, 2006 and 2013

(Source: OCC Access Management System January 2006 and December 2013)

	2006	2013
Paths easy to use	63% of paths were found to be easy to use*	76.7% by length of paths passed
	<i>*the 'easy to use' figure adopts the Audit Commission's quality standard (BVPI 178, now discontinued) for position, furniture, signing, surface and vegetation. Routes assessed according to definitive line, rather than alternatives used on the ground such as paths the 'wrong' side of hedges or bridges that are off line.</i>	
Signing	89% of 5073 roadside locations were signed	93% (5290) of 5711 roadside locations were signed
Waymarking	33% of 'easy to use' links would benefit from waymarking	2013: 41.6% of easy to use links surveyed in 2013 would benefit from waymarking (total passed links 680) 58.9% of not easy to use links surveyed in 2013 would benefit from waymarking (total links failed 151) (Total Links 831)
	40.6% of 'not easy to use' links would benefit from waymarking	
Stiles	85% of 4834 stiles were in useable condition, 14% unsatisfactory, 1% dangerous	67.9% of 4108 stiles were useable (Good/Fair), 13.7% unsatisfactory, 5.9% redundant, <0.2% Dangerous, 1% obstructed, 1% Missing
Gates	88% of 5784 gates were in useable condition, 12% unsatisfactory	73.6% of 7492 gates were useable (Good/Fair). 7.4% unsatisfactory

Bridges	93% of 2050 bridges in place and in useable condition, 7% unsatisfactory, 5% missing, 1% dangerous	82.06% of 2247 bridges useable. 4.8% unsatisfactory, 4.5% missing, <0.3% dangerous,
Surfacing	408 instances of unsatisfactory surfaces, 8 dangerous, 239 surfaces causing obstruction to passage	93.54% of Surfaces easy to use (Good/Fair)
Access items	2001-2005	2006-2013
	stiles <i>decreased</i> from 4999 to 4834	<i>Stiles decreased</i> from 4834 to 4108
	gates <i>increased</i> from 5117 to 5784	Gates <i>increased</i> from 5784 to 7492
	bridges <i>increased</i> from 1924 to 2050	Bridges <i>increased</i> from 2050 to 2247

Shortcomings and challenges to undertaking improvements

Although Oxfordshire County Council won a national award in 2009 for producing one of the most innovative and enterprising RoWIPs, it has faced a number of challenges and it is felt that the RoWIP fell short in a small number of areas:

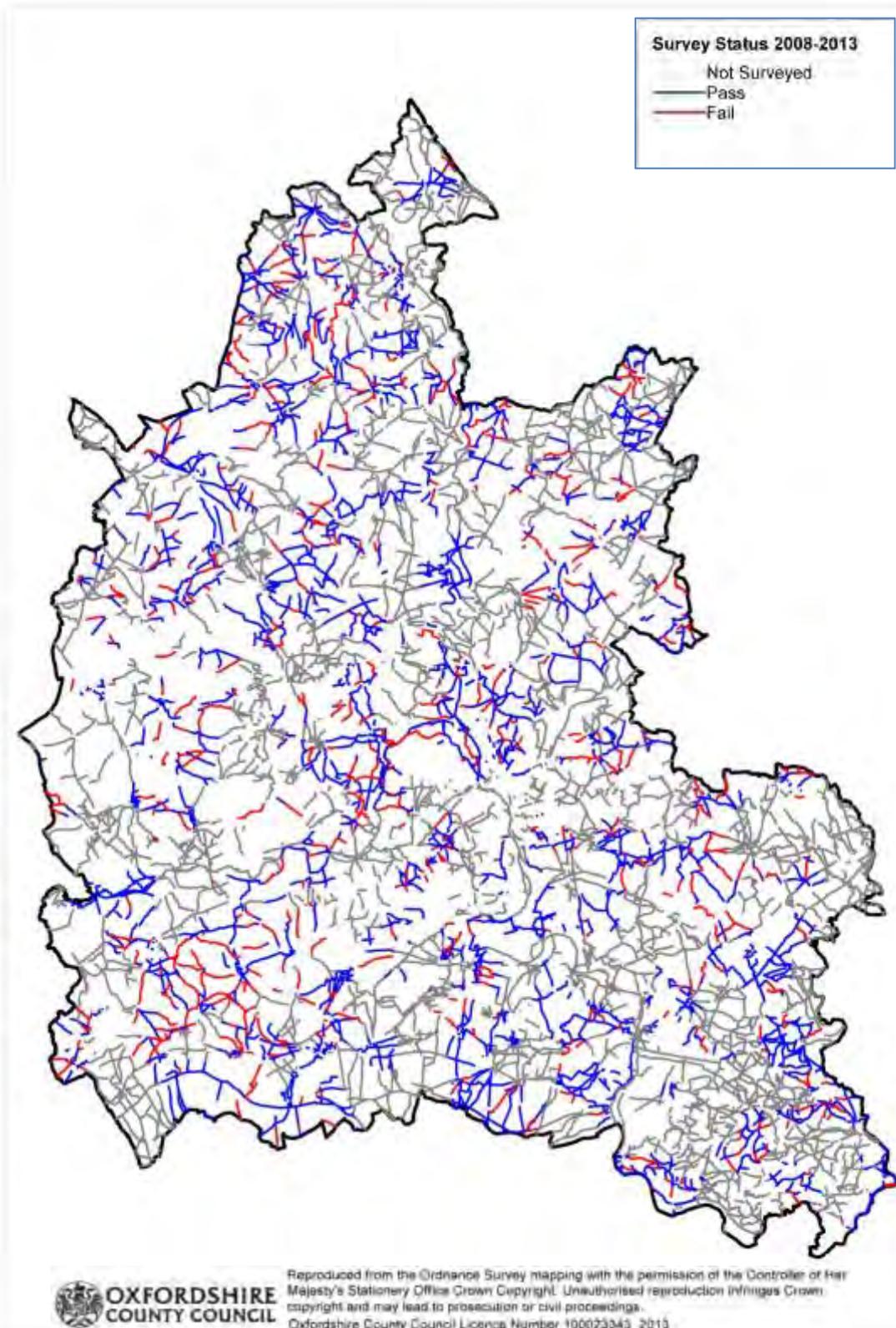
Funding - This has always been in short supply – from government as well as what the County Council can allocate but the authority has been successful in attracting additional streams of funding to supplement these budgets. It is recognised that such pressures will only increase over the life of this RoWMP. Unfortunately this has meant that a number of the actions in the original RoWIP have not been achieved as they relied on additional staff and budget to be provided to enable increased activity to be undertaken, including definitive map modification orders and maintenance work. Unfortunately external sources of funding cannot usually be used for these core activities.

Fewer new rights of way and upgrades to existing routes put in place on the ground - The expectation from many participants in the development of the original RoWIP was that new routes and upgrades would be a

key benefit arising from this document. For the development planning work areas there have been fewer path improvements implemented than anticipated because new residential and commercial developments take a long time to move through the stages from design to planning permission to build and occupation. Following a period of stagnation in developments we have recently seen a significant growth in this area and as a result some significant new routes, upgrades and funds have been secured from major planning developments, but most works on the ground have not yet commenced. This is because the development hasn't started or the 'trigger point' of the development (that would release funds or require action on the ground), such as number of dwellings occupied or period of time after planning conditions met, has not yet been reached.

It can be a challenging process to create new links or upgrade status outside of the definitive map modification, diversion or planning processes; particularly where there is no immediate or clear benefit to the landowner. Communities and staff can come up against blockages which can cause frustrations with the legal processes or options that are available

Fig 7: Snapshot of public rights of way surveyed between 2008 and 2013 meeting 'easy to use' standard



Statement of Action - Maintaining and improving public rights of way through the Rights of Way Management Plan

This section is the *Statement of Action* that introduces and sets out what the authority will aim to do over the life of the plan to secure better management and improvement of the countryside access network in Oxfordshire.

Since the economic crisis of 2008 there has been increased scarcity of resources both within the public sector and for volunteer groups. The priority, as with the previous RoWIP, is to meet the statutory duties of the authority to record, protect and maintain the public rights of way network. However, promoting the network, seeking to improve the network's quality and accessibility, and altering the network to meet contemporary needs are still important as they contribute directly to the local economy, give more opportunities to walk and ride instead of using

the car, as well making a big difference to the local environment and residents' sense of place and wellbeing.

By working closely with other authorities and organisations, local communities, developers, volunteers and other stakeholders and partners it is hoped that 'added value' can be obtained for the public rights of way and access network. The ambition is for a network that best suits local community needs within the constraints on resources that the authority faces.

The overall vision and aims are set out below which builds on the assessment of need and continues in the same vein as the previous RoWIP.

Vision Statement

The Rights of Way Management Plan's vision statement broadly reflects that contained in the first RoWIP and sets out the authority's ambition:

Vision: To record and maintain the existing public rights of way and countryside access network for all users and would-be users, and where possible improve the extent, facilities, use and understanding of the network, so that public rights of way fulfil their role as a vital part of life in the County.

Aims:

1. Public rights of way are recorded, protected, maintained, promoted, and improved when opportunities arise
2. A public rights of way and countryside access network that adapts to balance the current and future needs of communities and users, farmers and landowners and the natural and historic environment
3. A public rights of way and countryside access network which is reasonably accessible to those with limited mobility, vision or understanding
4. Countryside access contributes to a thriving local economy and communities are able to be actively involved in caring for and promoting responsible walking and riding in their area.

Rights of Way Management Framework

A new 'Rights of Way Management Framework' is provided that summarises the main areas of responsibility and how this may change over the life of the plan, illustrated in Figures 8 and 9.

This framework includes the three main areas of public rights of way and countryside access management: i) the definitive map and statement, ii) countryside access management and iii) countryside access and development planning. Within the framework diagrams the three principle stakeholder groups are shown with arrows and text to summarise the actions these groups may take to achieve the overall outcome of a 'reasonably fit for purpose' public rights of way and access network. Each of the following sections develops the framework, by giving a summary of current operations and then setting out a broad sense of what is anticipated to change over the life of

the plan (the 'direction of travel') along with anticipated short to medium term actions.

The reason for developing a framework is to reinforce the interconnectedness of the areas of work undertaken and to set out how the aims of the RoWMP will be achieved, but without being too prescriptive. This will allow some flexibility of approach depending on available resources and any changes to legislation or the operating environment.

The framework has evolved from experiences gained from the first RoWIP, research undertaken since the first RoWIP was adopted, the responses to the review consultation, and from work to develop the revised content for the assessment of need. The RoWMP links into other strategies such as the Local Transport Plan and the Highway Asset Management Plan.

Fig 8: Simplified Rights of Way Management Framework

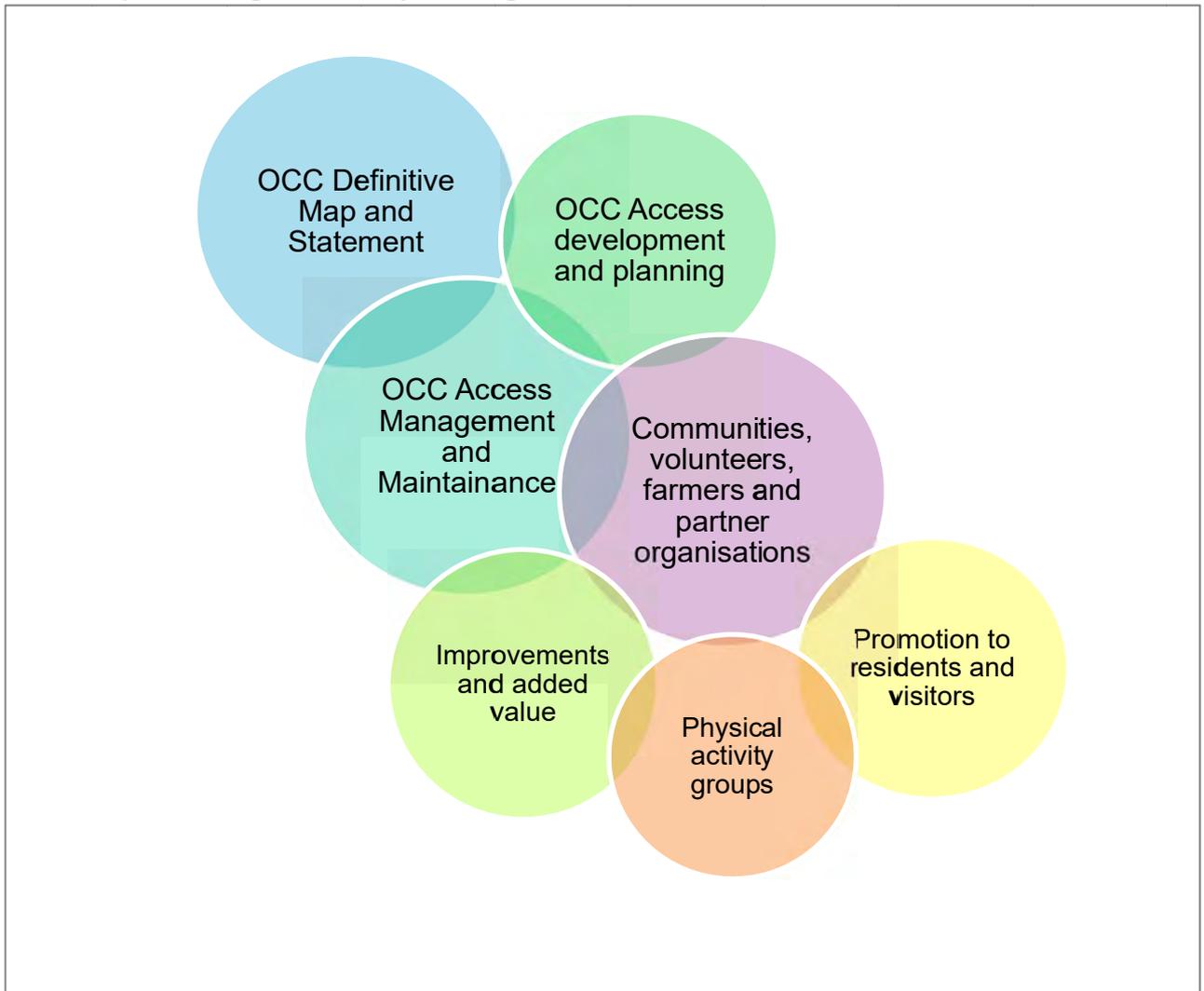
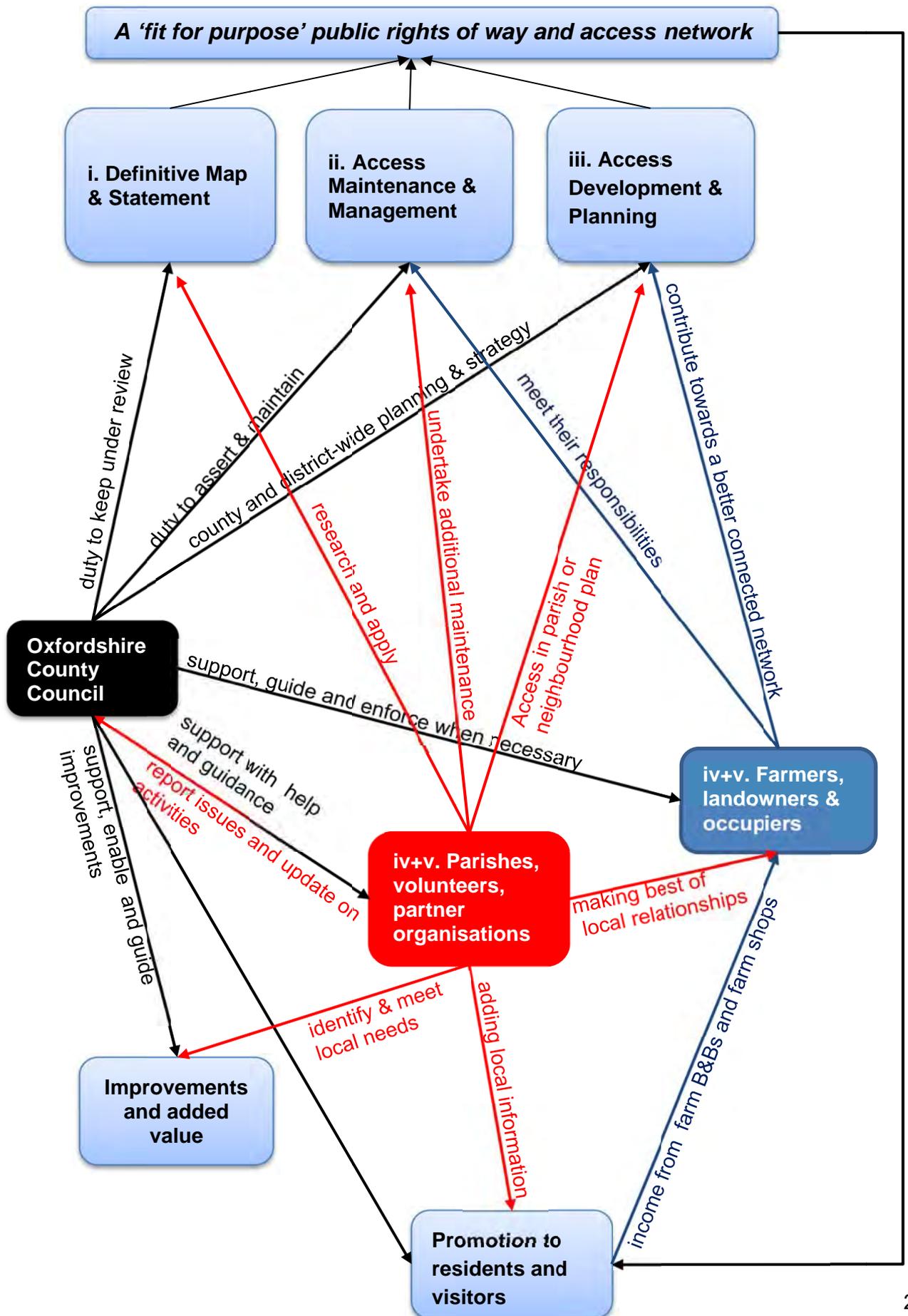


Fig 9: Expanded Rights of Way Management Framework

The three main areas of work and how the three main groups work with each other on them



Duties, rights, powers and responsibilities in countryside access and public rights of way

Local communities have been involved in the management of tracks and paths for many hundreds of years for the benefit of inhabitants of an area as well as the general public. The construction, maintenance and management of these tracks evolved to meet society's changing use and needs; from paths used for predominantly transport journeys to paths mostly used for recreation. As the range of rules, responsibilities and expectations changed so have the responsibilities and involvement in them,

In England, most formal practical management of public rights of way is undertaken by the county council, unitary authority or national park authority acting in the role of highway authority. In operational

terms this usually means there is a rights of way team as part of a wider directorate or service that deals with the day to day management of the network – providing the link between users, land-managers and local communities.

Furness (2009) identifies the wide range of duties, powers and rights applicable to local councils, authorities, landowners and users (the key stakeholders in public rights of way management), showing that there are no duties for local councils in relation to public rights of way, table 6. There are now no real responsibilities on the public at large or in a community's area.

Table 6: Summary of stakeholder duties, powers and rights on public rights of way

Duties ■ Powers • Rights ▲	Users	Land managers	Parish councils	District councils (non-highways)	County council/ Unitary
Publish and keep the DMS up to date					■
Hold copies of the DMS and orders			•	•	■
Apply for changes to the DMS	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Make orders to change the DMS based on evidence – adding or changing status					■
Divert or extinguish paths			•	•	•
Object to an order	•	•	•	•	•
Keep a register of applications for changes and statutory declarations					■
Produce and review a Rights of Way Improvement Plan					■
To assert and protect the rights of the public			•		■
Maintain public rights of way			•	•	■
Overgrowth removal		■	•	•	•
Undergrowth removal			•	•	■
Bridge maintenance and repair		■		•	■
Surfacing and/or drainage		•	•	•	•
Stile and gate maintenance and repair		■	•	•	•
Force the highway authority to take action on repair	▲	▲	▲	▲	
Duties ■ Powers • Rights ▲	Users	Land managers	Parish councils	District councils (non-highways)	County council/ Unitary

Require the removal of obstructions and the abatement of nuisances, e.g. barbed wire	▲		▲		•
To enforce re-instatement after ploughing or secure removal of crops			•		■
To take action to prevent or remove misleading signs			•		•
Within reason, remove obstructions to personal passage	•				
Removing litter or fly-tipping				■	
Signposting from a road			•	•	■
Other signposting and way-marking			•		•
Create new paths		•	•		•
Process planning applications (not schools, minerals/waste or county applications)				■	
Authorise temporary diversions					•
Enter into agency agreements			•	▲	•
Lighting			•		
Litter bins			•	•	•
Safety barriers					•
Seats and shelters		•	•		•
Other improvements		•	•	•	•
Promote access for residents and visitors		•	•	•	•

(adapted from Furness, 2009)



Livestock can present management and user issues on public rights of way (OCC)

i. Definitive Map and Statement

The legal record of public rights of way is called the Definitive Map and Statement (DM&S) of Public Rights of Way. It is an important document that records the 2,600 miles of public rights of way in Oxfordshire. In 2006 the DM&S was updated for only the fourth time since 1949.

Inclusion of a way on the DM&S is proof of the existence of that right at the relevant date. The *Definitive Map* shows the location of public rights of way and also their status (i.e. whether they are footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways or byways). The *Definitive Statement* gives a description of the public rights of way, including any limitations, conditions or defined width. This legal record underpins the majority of the day to day countryside access work on the ground as well as improvements undertaken by local communities.

The DM&S is looked after by the County Council's Definitive Map and Commons Team. The Team keeps the DM&S and other associated documents available to the public, and carry out the legal processes required to amend it. This includes investigating applications to add new rights (modification orders), processing applications to change existing rights of way or create new paths by agreement (public path orders and dedication agreements), maintaining registers of processes, and providing help and guidance.

Availability of the Definitive Map and Statement - The DM&S is available to view as a paper copy or on OCC's website at: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/definitivemap.

Paper copies of the DM&S are kept at the Countryside Access Team offices and can be viewed during standard office hours by appointment (tel: 01865 810808). Copies can also be viewed at the Reference Library in Oxford Central Library and at the Oxfordshire History Centre in Cowley. Each parish and town council has also been supplied with a paper copy of the DM&S covering their area. Extracts are also available at a number of district council locations as well as at some

of the larger libraries. Details are available on our website.

Electronic copies of the DM&S are available online at the website address above.

Note that the record shows the position as the relevant date, currently 21.2.2006. Legal changes since this date (through diversions, extinguishments, creations or modification orders) will not be shown. However this information is available on a separate list and up-to-date information is available on OCC's interactive web map facility at: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countrysidemap

Modifications to the Definitive Map and Statement - The DM&S is conclusive evidence at the relevant date that the rights exist, but this is without prejudice to other rights which may exist. These can be proved by way of a legal process known as a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO). Anyone may make an application to us with evidence to back up their claim. As 'Surveying Authority', we must then research further and if certain legal tests are met, make an order to amend the DM&S. Claims may be made to add rights which were overlooked when the first DM&S was compiled (sometimes called "lost ways") or which have come into being more recently through public use for a period of 20 years or more "as of right", i.e. without force, secrecy or permission. Further guidance on the DMMO procedure is available at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/modificationsanddiversions

Diversions or stopping up of public rights of way - A footpath, bridleway or restricted byway can be diverted if it meets certain legal tests, by applying for a Public Path Order (PPO) under s119 of the Highways Act 1980; occasionally applications for stopping up can be made under s118 of the same Act. Other processes exist for byways via application to Magistrates' Court.

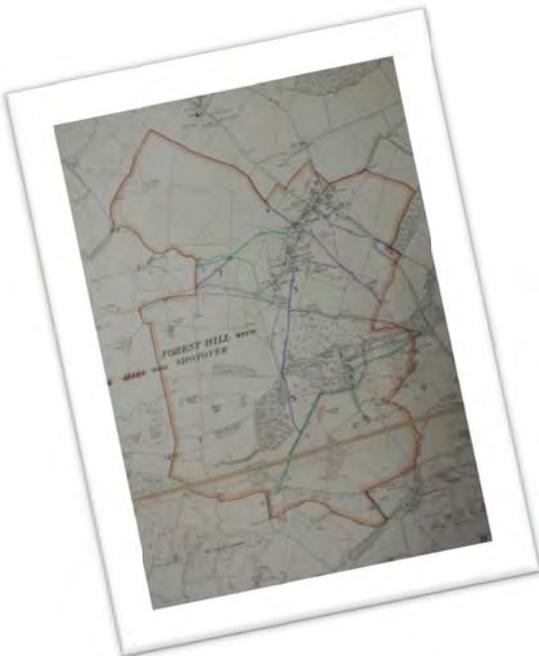
The County Council sometimes needs to divert a public right of way itself due to decisions on planning proposals that are concerned with the management of waste or extraction of minerals, as well as proposals

for its own operational use such as extensions to schools or libraries. Applications for PPOs associated with these types of proposal must be made under s257/261 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Other authorities, such as District Councils and the Secretary of State, also have various powers to make orders.

Statutory registers - We maintain two statutory registers for public inspection:

The *Landowner Statements Register* lists plans, statements and statutory declarations deposited by landowners to protect against future rights of way and village green claims: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/landownerdeposits

The *Definitive Map Modification Orders Applications Register* lists all applications, outstanding and completed, received since 1995. We also publish a list of Pending DMMO cases providing additional information to enable people to track progress of applications. www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/modificationsanddiversions



Parish claim map for Forest Hill with Shotover – carried out under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act

Providing help and support - The Definitive Map and Commons Team can provide further information on processes and guidance on key application procedures is available online.

STATEMENT OF ACTION TARGETS

Changes to legislation and the operational framework 'sense of direction'

Major reforms to DM&S and PPO processes are currently proposed (Deregulation Bill 2014) and expected to come into effect over the term of this document. These reforms originated primarily as a way to address the 2026 DM&S cut-off date, after which it will not be possible to apply for "lost ways" based on documentary research only. The full extent of these proposals and impact on the County Council will only be clear when regulations are published. OCC's existing priorities and operations will then be reviewed and incorporated into the RoWMP through the bi-annual update or delivery plan.

Action for the next two years

- Continue work to keep DM&S under review
- Assess and review operations and priorities once legislation changes have come into effect

Action for the next five years

- Adapt operations to any alterations in budgets, staff resources and legislative changes

Meets RoWMP aims 1 and 2

ii. Countryside Access Management

Public rights of way are predominantly managed by the Oxfordshire County Council, through the authority's Countryside Access Team in partnership with farmers and landowners, user groups and local communities. Each of the Team's area officers manages a defined area and a specialised small unit oversees and undertakes the majority of the practical maintenance work.

Team role and challenges - The Team's role is to assert and protect legitimate use of public rights of way and ensure that all people and organisations involved with rights of way understand their responsibilities and are able to meet them effectively. Issues tackled on the network vary from simple signing issues, to complex areas such as providing access for people with disabilities, development control, public safety, or land management.

The peculiar challenge of rights of way work is that generally, although highways, public rights exist over private land that is still 'worked' or farmed. This contrasts with country parks and greenspace areas where access is the principal function, or roads management where the road itself is the only land use. Therefore although the highway is legally vested with the highway authority (controlling as much of the land as is necessary to ensure the right of way can be exercised), it is necessary and desirable to work closely with land managers, users and local communities so that work is done in a spirit of goodwill and cooperation. OCC is statutorily obliged to have due regard to the needs of agriculture, forestry and horticulture.

For countryside access management and maintenance functions, Oxfordshire County Council works to the information contained in the Definitive Map and Statement (DMS). In very exceptional circumstances, and where budgets allow, we may undertake maintenance on routes not on the DMS

Protection and maintenance work undertaken - As other sections in this document show, the network generally is in fair condition. The work the Team does to

keep the network open and available includes:

- investigating thousands of reports of issues a year and taking appropriate action as necessary to ensure rights of way are unobstructed
- removing excessive natural vegetation growing on public rights of way to maintain a reasonably clear route – and maximise the opportunity for biodiversity to flourish
- providing and maintaining bridges over natural watercourses and ditches (there are over 2,000 bridges on rights of way in the county).
- signposting routes where they leave a metalled road and waymark along them where required (there are over 7,500 PRoW signposts in Oxfordshire).
working with planners and developers to protect and enhance access through the development process
- considering, under the Equality Act 2010 and current British Standard 5709 (2006) (Specification for Gaps, gates and stiles). Includes the principle of 'Least Restrictive Option' relating to the decision to select a gap, gate or stile, to permit people to use a path crossing a field boundary (such as a hedge fence or stone wall) when maintaining the network and authorising structures on the PRoW network and seeking removal and improvements to existing structures where it would be beneficial.
- providing information to assist users, visitors, landowners and others to manage and enjoy access. This includes the interactive web-based map
- having due regard to protecting sensitive habitats and biodiversity in managing and improving access
- providing financial contribution to the maintenance of stiles and gates (there are over 11,000 gates, kissing gates and stiles in the county).
- working with community groups and parishes to find local solutions to local challenges
- offering free access advice and encouraging land managers & occupiers to make access easier on public rights of way,

using current British Standard as the standard sought.

Keeping public rights of way available

Oxfordshire County Council's public rights of way statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980 centres on ensuring that, across the network, rights are not obstructed and routes are maintained in a reasonable condition.

Where possible, Oxfordshire County Council will seek to add 'value' to the statutory duty, by working to secure additional resources and supporting and encouraging farmers, land managers, local communities, groups, volunteers and individuals to improve the network for all users, especially on those routes that provide the most value to their users or that provide other benefits.

In order to make the best use of available resources and give clarity to stakeholders, it is necessary to have some sort of prioritisation approach in place to manage issues that arise on the network in accordance with the resources available.

Developing an improved approach - A reasonable approach to Issue Prioritisation will be developed in the early years of the RoWMP, based on both an Issue Impact Assessment (A) and a form of Path Categorisation (B), to be used in combination with operational standards to enable the authority to make the best use of available resources.

Initial approach to Issue Prioritisation

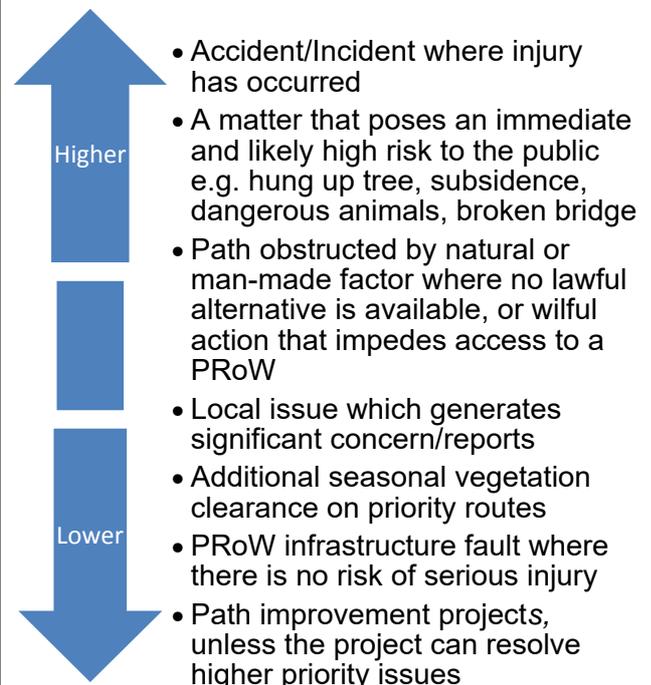
A) Public rights of way issue impact assessment

Public rights of way issues reported to the County Council or identified through inspections will normally be assessed with regard to their impact on public safety. This assessment usually forms the main basis for priority setting, Figure 10. The impacts considered are:

- Overall level of hazard or risk that the issue represents
- The degree of obstruction
- The cause and likely duration of problem
- The character of the route, its normal traffic and the route's normal state of repair

- The impact of the issue looking at the wider network

Figure 10: Examples of possible higher and lower priority issues assessed through the Issue Impact Assessment stage



B) Public rights of way categorisation

Category 1

- Routes used as key routes to schools or local facilities and that are used by many people for daily commuting journeys
- Routes that provide direct tourism economic benefits (e.g. Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails) and the key linking routes that connect the route to villages or facilities)

Category 2

- Known daily recreation or exercise routes
- Key Oxfordshire County Council promoted routes
- Key District Council and other organisation's promoted routes that are actively managed with/by OCC

Category 3

- Other OCC or an authority's promoted routes

Category 4

- The remainder of the network

A separate process of study and evaluation will be undertaken in order to research

possibilities and inform the development of this approach. It is hoped that such an exercise will enable OCC to better understand local use and position itself to access any additional funding that may become available as it will be better able to demonstrate the benefits that may be derived from investment. It is also anticipated that path categorisation will help in identifying key routes to prioritise how improvements and other 'added value' works are targeted by OCC and by other organisations including local councils, volunteers, community and interest groups.

STATEMENT OF ACTION TARGETS

Changes to legislation and the operational framework 'sense of direction'

It is not expected that legislation will bring about significant changes to the practical side of public rights of way management over the ten years of this Rights of Way Management Plan. If there is change which affects how the authority carries out its public rights of way functions then this will be incorporated into the RoWMP through the bi-annual delivery plan and revisions to operations.

The biggest area of challenge is the pressure on funding and resources available to the authority either directly or through third party support to undertake the full range of maintenance or improvement works that the authority would like to aspire to. This means a continual monitoring of operating practices and priorities is necessary as well as making the best use of technology and enabling experienced and enhanced engagement with, and skilled officers to provide support to, partners.

With this in mind, the Countryside Access Team's work is focused on, as far as reasonably practicable, protecting and managing the existing public rights of way network with communities and stakeholders, and where possible, improve involvement, extent and understanding of the network, so that public rights of way fulfil their role as a vital part of life in Oxfordshire.

Action for the next two years

- Maintain focus on managing the network making best use of available resources
- Assess and review operations and processes in line with any alterations in budgets, staff resources or changes to legislation
- Seek to refine the information and operations to enable the Issue Impact Assessment and Path Categorisation approach to be considered for implementation by end 2016/17
- Maintain and extend the Parish Path Warden scheme alongside other path monitoring approaches
- Encourage and support the development of community-led improvement projects that can access external funding

Action for the next five years

- Assess and review operations and processes in line with any alterations in budgets, staff resources or changes to legislation
- Work with Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum and key partners to improve PRow processes

Meets all RoWMP aims

iii. Countryside access and the development planning process

Countryside Access Team priorities for working with developments are to protect existing countryside access and where possible and reasonable to mitigate the impacts of development to enhance the network for all users in three key areas:

i) Protecting and enhancing access on individual developments

For most applications, large or small, standard suggested conditions will be promoted to the Local Planning Authority to protect and enhance PRow and public green spaces within an application's boundary. Depending on individual circumstances these conditions normally cover:

1. Temporary obstructions. No materials, plant, temporary structures or excavations of any kind should be deposited / undertaken on or adjacent to the Public Right of Way that obstructs the public right of way whilst development takes place. Reason: To ensure the public right of way remains available and convenient for public use.
2. Route alterations. No changes to the public right of way direction, width, surface, signing or structures shall be made without prior written permission by Oxfordshire County Council or appropriate temporary diversion. Reason: To ensure the public right of way remains available and convenient for public use.
3. Vehicle access (construction): No construction / demolition vehicle access may be taken along or across a public right of way without prior written permission and appropriate safety/mitigation measures approved by Oxfordshire County Council. Reason: To ensure the public right of way remains available and convenient for public use.
4. Vehicle access (Occupation): No vehicle access may be taken along or across a public right of way to residential or commercial sites without prior written permission and appropriate safety and surfacing measures approved by Oxfordshire County Council. Reason: To ensure the public right of way remains available and convenient for public use
5. Gates / right of way: Any gates provided in association with the development shall be set

back from the public right of way or shall not open outwards from the site across the public right of way. Reason: To ensure that gates are opened or closed in the interests of public right of way user safety

6. Improvements to routes: Public rights of way through the site should be integrated with the development and improved to meet the pressures caused by the development whilst retaining their character where appropriate.. No improvements may be implemented without prior approval of Oxfordshire County Council. Reason: To ensure the public right of way through the development retains character and use as a linear corridor and is able to integrate with the development

The Pet Food Manufacturers Association estimates that 24% of households own a dog in 2014 and this is around 9 million dogs. In the south-east region the estimate is 22% dog ownership in a range between 8 and 36% (PTMA, 2014). This amount of dog ownership should be an important consideration in access management and planning of new developments.

ii) Securing mitigation measures linked to individual development site

Where appropriate mitigation measures to manage the impacts on public rights of way as a result of additional usage in and around an individual development site will also be sought. Contributions may be sought towards improvements to existing rights of way in the wider area which are likely to be affected by the development in order to ensure that the right of way is of a suitable standard to code with the additional usage. These measures are normally:

- a) Making existing routes surrounding the development site easier to use and more attractive, by providing surface treatments, landscaping and planting measures and better infrastructure items
- b) Providing additional linking routes surrounding a development site's area of influence to make the network more joined up and easier to use.

iii) Seeking pooled contributions towards important county and district countryside access route assets

Certain access routes are considered to be of high value at the county and district scale because of their location, quality, length, availability or status. This makes these routes likely to be used by more people than the residents and workers in the vicinity of the route which means they will be affected as population in districts and across the county increases, Table 7.

iv) Supporting growth, the economy and quality of place in the priority development and growth areas

Oxfordshire has six areas that are priorities for economic growth. These are Bicester, Oxford, Science Vale UK, Banbury, Witney and Carterton. The City and District Councils are also developing their Local Plans to identify sites to accommodate the anticipated housing need arising from this growth. Each of these key areas plus the other areas with significant growth are shown in maps in Appendix B with the broad areas of access measures highlighted. These tie into the network connectivity assessments in Appendix A. These maps were devised using available map-based information and local knowledge and expressions of need, including from the first RoWIP. Overall, the additional routes and links are intended to make travelling safer or to better connect the network as a means to improve the local environment, health and wellbeing and

‘place-making’ for local residents and the local economy.

STATEMENT OF ACTION TARGETS

Changes to legislation and the operational framework ‘sense of direction’

The planning system is continuously evolving at all scales, and it is expected that this rate of change will continue. If planning issues significantly impact on OCC’s public rights of way functions then the authority’s approach will be reviewed through operational changes and linked to the RoWMP’s annual update or delivery plan.

Action for the next two years

- Manage responses to all planning aspects alongside other demands and keep under review
- Promote the infrastructure needs of countryside access

Action for the next five years

- Work with Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum and key partners to improve PRow processes and prioritise

Meets all RoWMP aims

targeting at the district and locality level

Table 7: Planning authority area and the key access route assets for which that require contributions will be sought

County-wide	Thames Path National Trail corridor, Ridgeway National Trail corridor, Oxford Canal Walk corridor, Wilts & Berks Canal Walk corridor, Oxfordshire County Council promoted walks and rides
Cherwell District	Cherwell District Council circular walks and rides, Claude Duval riding route, Oxford Green Belt Way
West Oxfordshire	West Oxfordshire District Council and Cotswolds AONB promoted circular walks and rides, Lower Windrush Valley Path, Wychwood Way, Oxford Green Belt Way, Bablock Hythe crossing, d’Arcy Dalton Way
South Oxfordshire	South Oxfordshire District Council, Chilterns AONB and North Wessex Downs AONB promoted circular walks and rides, Oxford Green Belt Way, Judges Ride, Swans Way, Chilterns Way
Oxford City	Oxford Green Belt Way, Oxford Green Spaces Walk, Bablock Hythe crossing
Vale of White Horse	Vale of White Horse District Council and North Wessex Downs AONB promoted walks and rides, Oxford Green Belt Way, Bablock Hythe crossing

iv. The current and future role that key existing organisations play in countryside access

The main organisations and their current roles are summarised in Table 8 – plus some possible options for how the relationship or role might be able to change in the future to maximise benefits to the public. Importantly, individual farmers and other land managers are included as they play a vital role in meeting the access ambitions for most of these groups.

Table 8: Key organisations and roles

Organisation	Current role with rights of way and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)	Possible changes over the life of the RoWMP
Farmers and rural land managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most farmers and rural land managers understand and meet their responsibilities – although it can need reminders • Rights of way may often be regarded as cross-farm liabilities that interfere with agricultural operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase opportunities for communities to work with farmers to create links that meet local needs • Work with partners to reduce conflicts and misunderstanding, especially on farmland • Increase pro-active levels of compliance with responsibilities
District councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult officers directly on planning matters that affect rights of way • Some undertake promotion of access and rural tourism • Manage own areas of countryside • Local Development Framework and policy work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage contributions from the Community Infrastructure Levy to improve area rights of way in liaison with OCC and local councils • Greater coordination of improvements and volunteer working • OCC moving to more effective response to major planning applications
Local councils (parish and town councils and parish meetings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many undertake monitoring and maintenance work on rights of way • Some also promote routes and provide maps and other local information • Some 'path champions' collate reports on path condition and issues and contact OCC officers to seek resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to combine existing rights of way representatives and other organisations with the new Parish Path Warden scheme to ensure full coverage across the county • Seek to add 'value' to the statutory maintenance work that OCC must undertake as highway authority, possibly using parish precept or available Community Infrastructure Levy funds from local developments (see Fig.11) • Improve access and promotion of their areas by applying to external funding sources such as charities and Lottery
Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (a Local Access Forum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory advisory group to OCC and other bodies about access to the countryside • Brings together representatives of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking more responsibility in promoting and increasing sustainable access to the countryside - following other LAF examples • Acting as access 'champion' to encourage highway, transport and

	landmanaging and farming interests alongside user and other relevant Oxfordshire-specific interests	surveying authority to modify policy strategy and delivery
User and amenity groups (e.g. Ramblers, British Horse Society, Oxford Fieldpaths Society, Chilterns Society, CPRE etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly volunteers with local or national support • Protect and support public rights of way through campaigning, getting involved in planning and rights of way legal processes, undertaking practical work including some seeking funding for this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry on with valuable work • Work with partners to reduce conflicts and misunderstanding, especially on farmland • Encourage the promotion of the aims of the RoWMP • Seek opportunities to secure additional funding for access-related projects
Landowning' charities like the Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), National Trust, Woodland Trust, Canal & River Trust, Sustrans and Oxford Preservation Trust etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have to focus on management of own sites or areas to meet charitable objectives and as part of wider remit • Rights of way may be regarded as cross-site liabilities or integrated with site management for maintenance or ecological purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include these access facilities as a county-wide access asset and promote them • Increase joint working and project partnerships across boundaries to meet shared aims • Use rights of way and improvements as key connections to enable traffic-free access to the sites • Enable shared learning by users
Chilterns and Cotswolds Conservation Boards and the North Wessex Downs AONB office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the character and special qualities of their areas • Promote and support access, tourism and understanding in their areas • Produce management plans and policies that OCC has to take account of • A RoWIP should take account of the local distinctiveness, character and quality of AONBs in its development and delivery of access to the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue all existing work • Increase joint marketing activities to support and develop sustainable tourism and contribute to the local economy • Help to deliver RoWMP objectives through own initiatives • Target grants to communities seeking access improvements • Encourage 'Access for All' so that people of all levels of mobility can use and enjoy the countryside • Maintain and increase volunteer work on countryside access
National Farmers Union and Country Land and Business Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represent interests of their members and wider industry • Will promote best practice to their members • Assist with liaison between their members and OCC staff on specific issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage to think of access and local communities positively in terms of small link creation and providing targeted improvements and facilities that could provide services and generate goodwill and revenue
Oxfordshire Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longstanding group that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include issues and 'horizon scanning'

of Way Monitoring Group	<p>meets twice a year and receives six monthly reports from rights of way Teams on delivery of services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides forum for airing issues directly between groups and the Countryside Access Team • Links to OCAF and Local area RoW Forum meetings 	<p>in meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine normal meeting agenda with an occasional discussion workshop to encourage collaboration to solve a particular problem or to address a current issue • Keep under review in terms of duplication with OCAF and meeting effectiveness
Local area rights of way meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet twice yearly in each rights of way area. Bring together local people with varied interests so local issues are discussed and solutions agreed on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include more forward planning and shared reporting • Invite local community representatives where possible • Keep under review in terms of duplication and meeting effectiveness
National Trails Management Group/ Trails Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCC hosts the National Trails Team. • National Trails Team coordinates the management and promotion of The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails • Extensive use of volunteers to maintain and monitor the Trails and circular routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review management of National Trails in line with Natural England's review and the 'New Deal' strategy • Develop more inclusive National Trail Partnerships for both National Trails • Improve OCC's promotion of NTs as key assets to link better access to in its area.
Others incl. CTC, Local Nature Partnership, Local Economic Partnership, Health & Wellbeing Board, Oxon Assoc. Local Councils etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countryside access is currently a relatively marginal part of their work in cycle tourism, conservation, biodiversity, economy or health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding and shared working so these groups increase wider recreational access provision and understanding of landscape, farming and nature
Natural England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary permissive access was included in many agri-environmental schemes and this includes the areas of downland access land Support for Local Access Forum and partnership work • Provides majority funding for National Trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing support for National Trails Management • Promoting access creation through use of Common Agricultural Policy funds or schemes such as Paths for Communities • Commission and share research on use of countryside and health • Higher level support and links between partner organisations • Continuing support for Local Access Forum

v. Local community, neighbourhood and volunteer participation in countryside access maintenance, improvement and promotion

The County Council retains the statutory duty for funding and maintaining the definitive map, and the protection, maintenance and providing information about public rights of way

Many local communities, user and interest organisations, individual users, farmers and land-managers play an active and valuable role in surveying, reporting, recording and managing public rights of way and countryside access in Oxfordshire. This involvement adds public benefit and quality to the network, demonstrates the importance of an accessible countryside and urban rights of way in people's local areas, and enables more people to enjoy access responsibly and safely. Oxfordshire County Council needs to continue to work with existing groups and individuals to make the best of their efforts and enthusiasm and to target resources where the work will make the most difference, and where possible, build up levels of new local participation across the county.

Needs and demands from existing groups and individuals as well as potential new ones will have to be carefully managed so that the best outcomes for path users are achieved and demands on staff time are not excessive and ensure priority and legally-complex work can be undertaken.



Local people in the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers improving their area (Howard Dell)

It is hoped that three types of partnership with OCC's Countryside Access Team, outlined in the next sections, pages 42-47, will become more established and integrated with each other over time and lead to a countryside access network that enables partnership working to meet the needs of local people, as well as visitors and leads to more people becoming involved in the protection and improvement of an important part of Oxfordshire's cultural heritage.

When considering the application of any or all of these elements in an officer's area or across the wider authority area, OCC officers will need to assess available capacity, budgets and the expected outcome of such involvement. This work also needs to be balanced against existing responsibilities and priorities. The Team will seek additional external resources and capacity to enable a proper investment in this to be made in order to achieve the best outcomes for local communities, neighbourhoods and users of the public rights of way and countryside access network.

STATEMENT OF ACTION TARGETS

The Countryside Access Team wants to carry on working with existing organisations and bring in other organisations or expand to areas without any involvement as much as possible, and in a balanced way that meets shared ambitions.

Action for the next two years

- Maintain current approach to supporting existing community groups and volunteers
- Work with Ramblers and others to maintain and extend the county wide Parish Path Warden scheme to complement existing parishes' work
- Review the self-help resources available to local councils and other groups

Action for the next five years

- Assess and review operations and processes in line with budgets or staff resources and legislation changes

Meets all RoWMP aims

v1. Local Councils and neighbourhood/community groups – how their existing work or a new area of work could improve countryside access management

Fig 11: Activities and roles that could be undertaken – or are undertaken already



- i. Key contact for local issues – A group made up of local people can be the best single place for local people to report access issues to as it means that the group knows what is happening in their area and can use their local contacts and knowledge to take action when it can. It also encourages a sense of ownership of shared responsibility and pride in a local area. Local people can decide on their priorities through their Community-Led Plan or Neighbourhood Plan which can refine and reinforce community access to the rights of way network.
- ii. Survey routes and gather information – Local groups can organise regular walks or rides of their local rights of way by individuals or groups to both check on paths but also as a fun social and recreational activity that brings all parts of the neighbourhood together. Using paths regularly means that knowledge about the route's location and condition, and the state of the vegetation, stiles, gates and bridges etc. can be monitored, and problems identified at an early stage.
- iii. Assess issues and send to OCC or manage locally – The local group could assess what are the most important issues in their area and send these through to OCC. There would have to be a balance struck between the needs of the neighbourhood and the issues identified by all the other neighbourhoods in an OCC Field Officer's area. However there may be some issues found on surveys and reports that can be resolved at a local level by the group, perhaps by speaking to a landowner, householder or local business, without having to refer the issue to OCC. This might include overgrowing vegetation and repairs to stile and gates for example. Other issues reported might be considered so temporary in nature that it is decided that nothing can be done, for example

seasonal flooding of a riverside path, and it is not worth sending the issue through to OCC.

- iv. Undertake additional maintenance or improvements using precept and other funds – Local councils have powers to undertake maintenance and improvement works on public rights of way and on its own land, above and beyond on what the County Council undertakes on rights of way as its statutory duty. They may choose to fund this through existing parish maintenance funds or bid for funds from third party sources. They can also work with volunteer groups such as BTCV, the Ramblers and other walking groups, British Horse Society or the Chiltern Society and Cotswolds Wardens. Some parish and town councils already do this to add to the work that the authority does. .
- v. Identify key upgrades or provide evidence on Definitive Map Modification Order applications – As the group most 'in touch' with the needs of local residents, they are best placed to know where the needs and demands for safe links and access improvements are as well as extensive local history knowledge. This could feed into local action to make applications or provide evidence for applications by others to modify the definitive map. The group can also choose to influence how the local neighbourhood works with planning applications in their area as these might be able to provide the funding for these measures through developer contributions or local allocations under the Community Infrastructure Levy. Putting these access aspirations in the Community-Led Plan or Neighbourhood Plan may add weight to the requests for these measures to be provided from developments.
- vi. Promote best routes for locals and visitors – Local councils and community groups are often best placed to promote their local area to residents, visitors and tourists, and encourage use of their local facilities such as village shops, cafes,

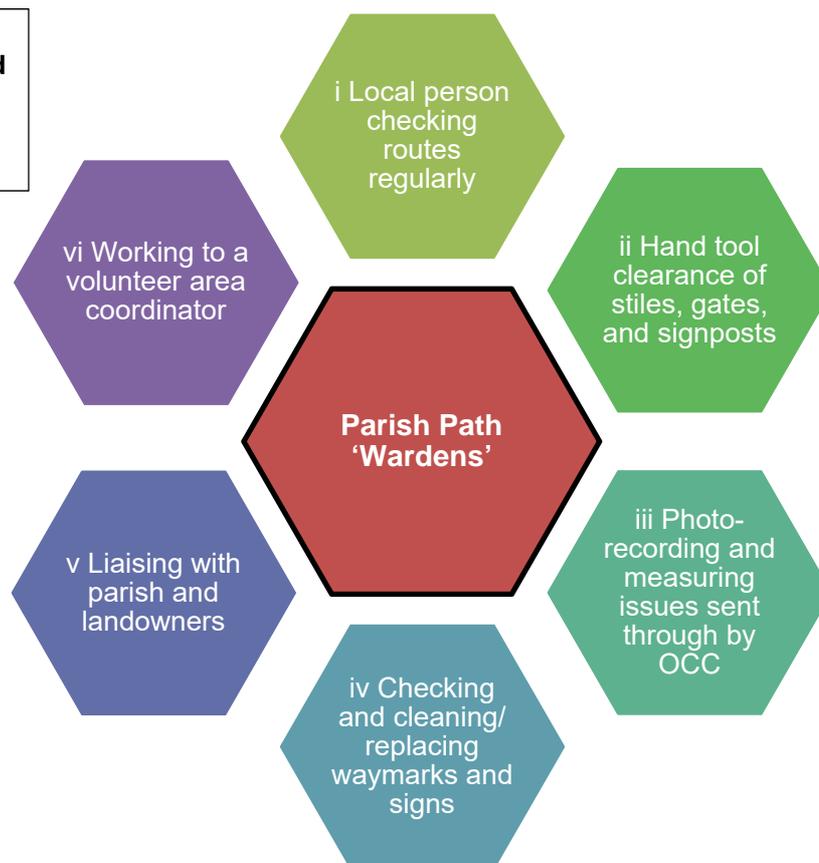
accommodation, and pubs etc. Incorporating these into suggested walking and riding routes can increase use of the facilities and help keep them viable. Having a selection of routes with different 'themes' or reasons to use them can encourage visitors to stay for more nights, which usually results in an increase in spending. More interesting routes also encourages more local people to use them more often which has resulting health and social benefits as people make more active use of their local area.



Cuttle Brook Volunteers replacing bridge at Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve in Thame (Thame Town Council)

v2. Parish Path ‘Wardens’ – how this recently developed approach does and could further improve countryside access management

Fig 12: Activities and roles that could be undertaken – or are undertaken already



- i. Local person checking routes regularly– A Parish Path Warden (PPW) living reasonably locally to an area and working through the Ramblers or other group is able to check routes regularly. By undertaking to check all the rights of way in a designated area, problems can be spotted at an early stage and steps put in place at a local level before they escalate. More serious problems can be identified quickly and the appropriate information obtained so that OCC officers can minimise delays in resolving them, which encourages a sense of ownership of shared responsibility and pride in a local area.
 - ii. Hand tool clearance of stiles, gates, and signposts– Carrying a pair of secateurs is one of the best ways to keep paths clear of stray barbs of bramble, especially around stiles and signposts. Another useful item is a cloth to wipe signposts and waymarkers clear of algae or mud.
 - iii. Photo-recording and measuring issues sent through by OCC– The PPW could be in a better position to be the eyes on the ground which reduces the need for OCC officers based centrally to drive out to sites to inspect an item for risk assessment and prioritisation. By visiting the site and recording the item or issue with digital photography and taking measurements and emailing these through (or reporting via the interactive mapping tool) it will
- These are usual practice for walkers and riders on paths and no special provision or permission is needed. A development of this is to form working groups of volunteers to undertake smaller scale clearances using hand tools like loppers and bowsaws but these activities normally require training and insurance from an organisation such as the Ramblers, and authority to undertake works on the County Council’s behalf from the area Rights of Way Field Officer.

enable the path warden to make a real difference in their local areas. This information could then be passed to the OCC officer or to the local community group as appropriate.

- iv. Checking and cleaning/replacing waymarks and signs - Replacing existing faded or damaged waymarker discs is a simple procedure and, although a relatively low priority for officers, really helps enable people to be able to follow the line of a right of way more easily which reduces the likelihood of trespass. The PPW could be issued with a supply of waymarkers and this activity could be undertaken as part of their coverage of an area over a period of time. The same applies to replacing fingerpost plates and giving them a wipe over to enhance legibility.
- v. Liaising with parish and landowners - Ideally all PPWs should have a connection to the local council for the area they are checking so that there is a shared

awareness of what the issues are in the area. This does not have to be a formal arrangement and the warden doesn't have to be an elected or co-opted member or officer of that council, but some councils already have such a person. The warden could feed back what they find to the council and this would allow the council to consider the next steps that members would like to see. There is also nothing to stop path wardens speaking to farmers they meet on the paths or making contact with farmers, landowners or householders provided certain guidelines are followed.

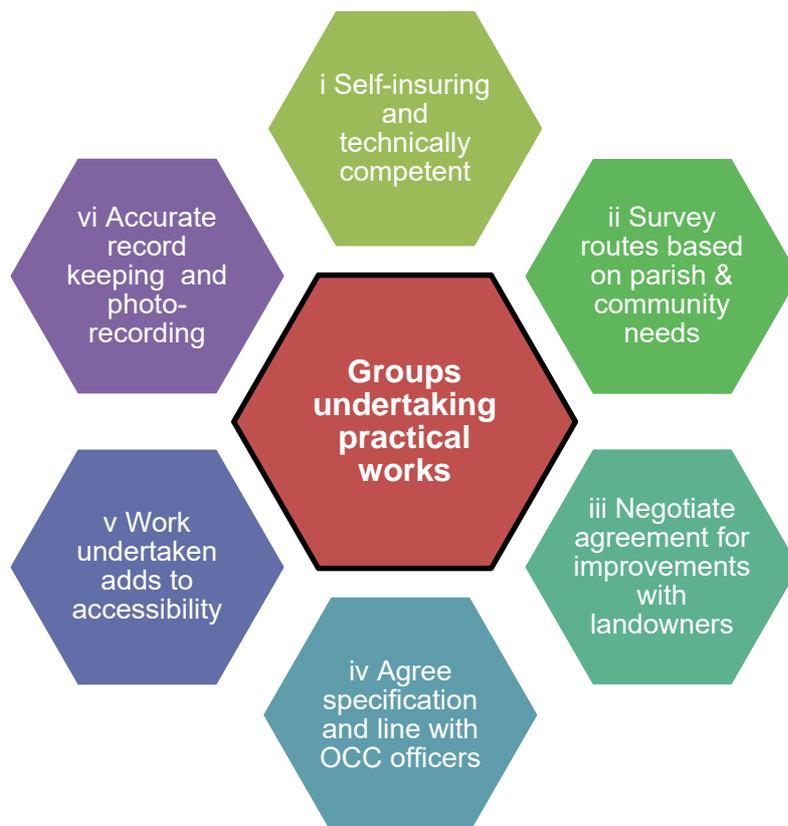
- vi. Working to a volunteer local coordinator – To be most effective the PPWs should have a volunteer area coordinator to help the individual PPWs to feed into and who could then be the principle contact for OCC. The person or persons may enable a standard approach to be taken and help to manage expectations and increase the flow of information.



Potential Parish Path Wardens attend training session with OCC staff (OCC)

v3. Groups undertaking practical improvements – how their work can improve countryside access management

Fig 13: Activities and roles that could be undertaken – or are undertaken already



i. Self-insuring and technically competent – Depending on the level of work carried out, groups undertaking practical works on public rights of way need to be able to carry out their work with a minimum of risk to the public, themselves or the farming and natural environment they are operating in. Their work should also have limited need for OCC officer commitment. There are long-established groups such as the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers and the Cotswolds Voluntary Wardens which have performed this practical role for a number of years and who work closely with OCC officers. New groups linked to user groups or local neighbourhoods and communities may be capable of emulating this work or working towards this, and this will generally be welcomed, providing there is an organisation behind the group that insures, trains and coordinates the group’s work, there are enough members to be able to undertake

work, that there is a need for the work to be undertaken in the group’s local area, and that the OCC officer has capacity to work with the group.

ii. Survey routes based on parish & community needs – Working directly with the communities and neighbourhoods is one of the best ways for a group to meet the public’s needs, especially if work is linked to community-led plans or statutory Neighbourhood Plans. The local group can identify potential routes or individual paths to be worked on, survey the routes to identify what is needed, meet with the OCC officer to agree what they can do and to ensure the correct timings and processes are undertaken. Groups might also encourage wider sections of the community to get involved.

iii. Negotiate agreement for improvements with landowners – When groups are confident and competent there is nothing

wrong with them approaching landowners, householders and farmers directly to undertake improvement works on their behalf. This can be especially effective when a group member creates a relationship with an estate or property owner which means a greater number of improvements and works can be undertaken and there are efficiencies of scale for deliveries and access to the various sites. This type of work can also be attractive to external grant funders such as the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2).

- iv. Agree specification and line with OCC officers - Before agreements are made the group should always liaise with the OCC officer to ensure that works are on the legal line, the specification and timings are reasonable and appropriate for the area, access to the site is agreed, and that ongoing maintenance responsibilities are confirmed from the outset.
- v. Work undertaken adds to accessibility – Any proposed changes to furniture (gates etc.) should meet Equalities Act tests for reasonableness and BS5709:2006 standard. Although farmers with public rights of way across their land are not generally classed as 'service -providers', it is important to assess the accessibility and the impact of the item of furniture when public funds

are being spent. There is always a balance to be reached between controlling the movement of livestock, the terrain, and making the furniture as least restrictive as possible – and the OCC officer will be able to provide a professional opinion.

- vi. Accurate record keeping and photo-recording – In order to optimise OCC officer time commitments to volunteer and community groups and demonstrate the value of these groups' work it is vital that record keeping is good. This will be the responsibility of the group to coordinate. A key part of this is taking digital photos at all stages in the projects - especially at path survey, when the works are being undertaken, and when the works are complete. If the images could be taken in the same locations with the same viewpoint then this makes comparison easier. For post-works publicity to the local community or wider media then images showing people working and using the paths are very good. Images are also essential to help funders decide on allocation of funds and they too need during and after shots for their records and ongoing publicity. Lastly, any land-owners who have given permission should always be thanked after the work has been completed and acknowledged in any media item with their agreement.



Cotswolds Volunteer Wardens busy installing kissing gate (OCC)

Summary

This Rights of Way Management Plan sets out Oxfordshire County Council's assessment, vision and aims for the management and improvement of the public rights of way and countryside access network. The County Council will try to meet its responsibilities and, by working closely with other authorities and organisations, local communities, volunteers and other partners, it is hoped that significant added value and improvements can be achieved.

A bi-annual RoWMP delivery/business plan will look back over the achievements and challenges of the preceding two years before setting out aspirations for the coming year. This will feed into team and individual performance plans and reports to stakeholders. The content of each delivery/business plan will be directly dependent on the level of resources that are available at that time. All information will be on the dedicated web pages at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/rowip.

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Glossary of terms

Access Land, Open Access Land,	Land that has been mapped and is subject to the new rights of access, mainly on foot. Land is either Mountain, Moor, Heath, Downland or Registered Common Land – sometimes known as the “right to roam”.
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Oxfordshire has three - Chilterns, Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs, each with their own management team and management plan.
BHS	British Horse Society
BOAT, Byway	Byway Open to All Traffic a highway over which the public have a right of way for vehicular and all other kinds of traffic but which is used by the public mainly for the purpose for which footpaths and bridleways are used. Waymarked by red arrows
Bridleway	Public Bridleway A highway over which the public have a right of way on foot and a right of way on horseback or leading a horse, but with or without a right to drive animals of any description along it. Bicycles may also be ridden on bridleways. Waymarked by blue arrows.
BS5709:2006	British Standard Covers the specification for gaps, gates and stiles.
BVPI 178	Best Value Performance Indicator BVPI 178 related to ‘ease of use’ of public rights of way. Ceased being a statutory indicator but still used by many authorities to measure the state of the network.
Citizens Panel/ Oxfordshire Voice	A panel of 3000 Oxfordshire residents run by the County Council that is used to gain an understanding of the public’s opinion on a number of matters. Countryside Access questions were included in the September 2002, 2006 and 2008 Citizens Panel survey. Later surveys were internet based.
Common Land	Land usually held in private ownership but with certain rights of registered “commoners” to use it and with a right of access to the public on foot to most registered commons. Recorded in Commons Registers
CLA	Country Land and Business Association
CoAg/ Natural England	Countryside Agency Government agency that lead on countryside access. From 2006 renamed Natural England and combined the land, access and recreation part of CoAg combines with English Nature and the RDS
Countryside Access Team	The part of Oxfordshire County Council who’s work includes protecting, maintaining, improving and promoting public rights of way and other countryside access resources. Close working with the Definitive Map and Commons Team
CRoW Act	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 – part I established the new right of access to access land, Part II set out improvements to rights of way legislation (including the duty to prepare RoWIPs), part III strengthened laws about wildlife and nature conservation, Part IV dealt with AONBs and Conservation Boards, Part V contained the provisions to establish LAFs.
Cycle Track	A way over which there is a right to cycle, and possibly also to walk.
CTC	Cyclists’ Touring Club
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act (1995 and 2005)
de facto access	Access which is available on the ground, even though it may not be officially recorded.
Definitive Map and Commons Team	The part of Oxfordshire County Council wh whose work includes producing and keeping under review the DMS. Team undertakes DMMOs, PPOs, Public Path Agreements and also maintains statutory registers.
DM&S	Definitive Map and Statement Legal document comprising maps and written information, which records the existence of those rights. Other rights may exist, but may not be recorded. The DMS is not conclusive of the non-existence of rights which are not recorded. These may be recorded by means of a DMMO.
DMMO	Definitive Map Modification Order Legal order which changes the Definitive Map and Statement if confirmed.

Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Government department whose responsibilities include rights of way.
de jure access	Access rights which are recorded legally (“based on law”).
DfT	Department for Transport Government department responsible for highways other than rights of way.
Discovering Lost Ways Project	Project set up by the Countryside Agency to research historic rights of way before the Definitive Map closes to historic claims in 2026.
Diversion	The changing of the route of a right of way on the ground using a legal order.
ERDP	England Rural Development Programme The ERDP comprises seven separate but integrated schemes designed to help rural businesses and communities protect the countryside and adapt to the demands of an increasingly competitive rural economy – includes Environmental Stewardship.
English Heritage	Government agency responsible for the historic built environment and archaeology.
Environment Agency	Government agency responsible for river management, waste management, pollution control and other environmental matters.
Equalities Act 2012	Replaced the DDA
Finger post	A signpost placed where a public right of way leaves a metalled road. Shows the status, direction, and where appropriate the destination and distance.
Footpath	Public Footpath A highway over which the right of way is on foot only. Waymarked by yellow arrows.
Footway	A way set aside for pedestrians at the edge of a carriageway (a pavement).
GIS	Geographic Information System a computer system capable of assembling, storing, manipulating, and displaying geographically referenced information (ie spatial data).
Green lane	A common term with no legal meaning. A physical description of an unsurfaced track, often enclosed by hedges. The land may be a public right of way or may carry no public rights at all.
Highway	A way over which the public have the right to pass and re-pass
Highway Authority	The body responsible for the maintaining of highways and keeping them free of obstructions. In Oxfordshire it is the County Council.
Highways Agency	Government agency responsible for trunk roads and motorways.
LAF	Local Access Forum The countryside access advisory body established by the County Council under the CRoW Act 2000. Comprised of volunteers including land managers, users and other relevant interested parties. Oxfordshire’s LAF is known as the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (OCAF).
National Trail	Long distance route supported by Natural England.
NFU	National Farmers’ Union
ORPA	Other Route with Public Access A non-statutory designation route shown by the OS on its Landranger and Explorer mapping. Generally includes unsurfaced UCRs.
OS	Ordnance Survey Government owned company that produces and licences map based information.
OCAF	Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum – see LAF

OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
Path	In this document a shorthand term for all public rights of way and other linear access routes
Permissive path	Path made available through the goodwill of the landowner. It may be withdrawn at any time and the public have no permanent rights over it. Permissive Paths are not usually shown on the DMS or OS maps.
PPO	Public Path Order Legal order which creates, extinguishes or diverts a footpath ,bridleway or restricted byway.
Private Right of Way	A right of way for an individual or any group other than the public at large.
PRoW	Public Right of Way
Public Right of Way	A right of passage by the public over the highway for the purpose of passing and re-passing and for incidental reasonable purposes. There are four classes of rights – Footpaths , for walkers, Bridleways for walkers, horse riders and pedal cyclists, Restricted Byways for all users except mechanically propelled, and Byways for all users
RA	Ramblers' Association
Recreational use	Using the rights of way network for informal enjoyment or exercise.
Restricted Byway	Highway open to all traffic except mechanically propelled vehicles waymarked by purple arrows.
RoWIP	Rights of Way Improvement Plan A statutory plan that assesses access and sets out an authority's ambitions to manage and improve this access. Oxfordshire's second RoWIP is called a ROWMP
ROWMP	Rights of Way Management Plan Oxfordshire County Council's term for the second statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plan
Spatial	Relating to distribution, distance, direction, areas and other aspects of space on the Earth's surface.
Surveying Authority	The body responsible for the preparation and upkeep of the DMS.
SUSTRANS	SUSTainable TRANsport A charity that works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport. Also manages a national network of cycle routes.
Tourism providers	Includes tourist attractions, destination marketing organisations and tourism officers working for local authorities.
Town and Village Greens	Land which local inhabitants can use for recreation purposes
TOE2	Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment A charity that aims to support communities and other organisations through grant funding to improve biodiversity, access and make better use of renewable resources
UCR	Unclassified Road or Unclassified County Road These are minor highways, sometimes surfaced. They are generally maintainable at public expense.
Utilitarian routes	Path which is used by people going about their daily lives e.g. used to get to school, work, bus stops and local facilities.
Waymark	A means of showing the route of a public right of way. Oxfordshire uses round plastic discs with the status of the route and an arrow to show direction. Usually mounted on a wooden post or attached to stiles, gates and bridges.

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