12. Walking, Cycling and Rights of Way

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

Walking and cycling provide travel options that have the lowest carbon footprint and few adverse environmental impacts, and they contribute to improving people's health. They can reduce congestion and improve accessibility. Our core objective is to create the conditions where a greater proportion of trips, especially in urban areas, are made on foot or by bicycle.

Policies

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

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

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

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

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

12.1   Our strategy for promoting more walking and cycling includes:

* route-by-route auditing of existing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to develop programmes for improvement of important routes and facilities;
* developing pedestrian and cycle route networks by providing new or improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists;
* improving signage of pedestrian and cycle routes; and
* promoting the health, environmental, and financial benefits of increased walking and cycling, including use of rights of way and publicly accessible green areas.

Walking

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

Current Situation

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

Providing for pedestrians

12.4   To encourage more walking it is necessary to consider all aspects of the pedestrian environment including the pavement surface, amount and location of street furniture (e.g. lamp posts, seating and signal control boxes), pedestrian signing, and crossings of main and side roads. Oxfordshire County Council has begun a process of "de-cluttering" where signs, roadside equipment, and street furniture are rationalised and, where appropriate, reduced as part of any maintenance work undertaken in town centres

and shopping streets. We will continue this work as resources allow.

12.5   The quality of the pavement surface is particularly important for people with mobility problems. A key element of improving the quality of the walking environment is regularly inspecting and maintaining footways.

12.6   The connectivity of walking routes is crucial. This includes being able to cross roads safely without having to make a significant detour. It is also necessary to look at pedestrian routes and carefully consider the locations of facilities such as bus stops and taxi ranks to ensure that these complement the pedestrian network.

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

12.8   New developments should be designed to minimise walking distances and link known destinations with effective and attractive walking routes. These should also complement and improve current facilities, as well as providing new routes where possible.

12.9   Walking is an important factor for increasing public transport use. Improving walking access to public transport access points – rail stations, bus stations and particularly bus stops - is essential to enable and encourage the use of public transport.

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

12.11 Consultation and involvement are important components of planning for walking. Local users should be consulted and involved in audits of locations that have been identified for footway or other walking facility improvements. Drawing from a model developed by Living Streets, Oxfordshire County Council has developed walkability audits, a method of evaluating the quality of the street environment from the perspective of those who use it. Oxfordshire County Council has already used this method with parents in Oxfordshire to improve walking routes to schools, with staff at our new Banbury local office, and with staff at children's centres across the county. It has been used to successfully audit three walking routes proposed as part of the *Eco-Bicester* project. Proposals to improve the walking environment can often be brought-forward as part of wider public realm improvements, and opportunities for this should be taken whenever possible.

12.12 There is an opportunity to develop partnerships with local health authorities to promote the environmental and health benefits of walking, particularly as part of school and workplace travel planning.

12.13 Oxfordshire County Council will also consider the following when developing schemes to encourage more walking:
   * traffic calming measures to reduce speeds, particularly near schools, in urban residential areas and in villages;
   * pedestrian crossings that are safe and convenient to use;
   * rural safety measures such as new lengths of footway alongside, or set back from, the road;
   * pedestrian areas where vehicle access is restricted or prohibited, such as Low Emission Zones;
   * increasing the visibility of pedestrian routes to maximise safety and security; and
   * promoting improvements to walking facilities, including better maintenance and improved lighting.

Cycling

12.14 Cycling is a flexible, healthy, and relatively inexpensive mode of travel, and has a pivotal role in creating a sustainable economy. In congested areas it can be the fastest and most reliable mode of transport. It can facilitate economic development by reducing congestion and can enhance the experience and

create vitality in an area. Economic benefits can also be derived from reduced healthcare costs, reduced absenteeism, and improved productivity.

Current Situation

12.15   Nationally, cycling levels have declined slightly in recent decades: the distance travelled by bicycle fell by 2% between 1995/97 and 2008. However, cycling in Oxfordshire has consistently bucked this trend. Oxford has one of the highest cycling rates in the country and 5% of journeys to work in Oxfordshire are made by bike, whereas the national average is 2%. Automatic bicycle counts in Oxfordshire indicate that overall cycling levels may have increased slightly since 2005.

Cycling training

12.16   Cycling in built-up areas with high traffic volumes and speeds can be daunting to novice or 'lapsed' cyclists. Oxfordshire has a comprehensive cycle training education programme for primary school pupils (aged 9 years +) but access to cycle training for younger pupils, teenagers and adults is limited. This lack of training has an impact on cyclists' ability to assert themselves on the road. Appropriate training can dramatically enhance cycling safety, build confidence, and can influence other road users' behaviour. As resources allow, we will develop programmes for teaching better cycling techniques to all age groups.

Image and marketing

12.17   In order to encourage cycling it is important to understand why people do not currently cycle. Cycling attitude surveys can reveal trends and explanations tailored to particular areas. Solutions can then be tailored instead of applying a "one-size-fits-all" approach. An awareness of different types of cyclist – novice/experienced, commuter/leisure, confident/nervous - and their individual needs, will be encouraged.

12.18   Emphasizing the dangers and risks over the benefits can deter some people from cycling. Marketing and promotion of travel choices should target increases in cycling levels among low-participation groups such as women, teenage girls, over 45s, school children, disabled people, disadvantaged groups, and

ethnic minorities, for instance through "try-out" sessions. Cycling promotion should reflect cycling as an everyday activity, rather than one which requires specialist equipment or clothing.

12.19   The negative image of cycling needs to be addressed if relationships between different road user groups are to be improved. Awareness-raising activity should target car drivers, bus operators, pedestrians and cyclists to ensure that people generally know what is and is not allowed and the consequences of actions. *Bike Polite* or a similar initiative, as promoted by local cycling groups, could alleviate the conflicts and foster general acceptance and courtesy between different road users. It could also help to change pedestrians' perception of safety and the impact of sharing routes with cyclists.

Cycle infrastructure

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

12.21   Where cycle paths share footways conflicts with pedestrians can occur, and these paths are often unattractive for cyclists where they cross driveways and side roads. They also tend to be unattractive, and potentially dangerous, to experienced cyclists, but their presence can increase drivers' intolerance of on-road cycling. On-road cycle lanes are often of limited width and can re-enforce the view that cyclists should remain at the kerbside, even where this is unsafe.

12.22   The provision of cycling facilities can be controversial, especially where this involves the conversion of existing footways for shared use. An evidence-based approach is needed to determine whether new or altered facilities for cyclists will improve the overall transport system and contribute to the Council's wider objectives. This could follow a hierarchy that gives preference to on-road provision for cyclists where this can be achieved safely,

either by reducing the volume and/or speed of traffic or reallocating road space to cyclists. However, there can still be a role for shared-use facilities.

12.23 Cycle infrastructure, as with the rest of the highway network, suffers from wear and tear, and pressure on maintenance budgets can cause cycleways to suffer. It is important to maintain safe and user-friendly cycleways, as poorly maintained or badly designed infrastructure can discourage cycling.

12.24 Theft of cycles can discourage cycling. Secure cycle parking can deter theft but must be located in convenient positions at major destinations. Insufficient amounts of cycle parking can encourage 'informal' cycle parking on street furniture, which can affect pedestrians.

Developing Cycling Networks

12.25 Since 2001, Oxfordshire County Council's long term aspiration has been the development of dual cycle networks in its main towns. This approach has consisted of making conditions on main roads attractive for confident cyclists to use, while providing alternative routes comprising off road and/or quiet road sections for younger or less confident cyclists. It has formed the basis for the development of the cycle network in Oxford in particular, where it is strongly supported by cycle groups.

12.26 However, many of the quiet/off road routes are indirect and lack priority over traffic at junctions to the extent that journey times can be unattractive for commuters and other regular users. Furthermore, the experience of cycling on some main roads can be unpleasant even for experienced riders due to conflict with other traffic. Oxfordshire County Council remains committed to the principle that cyclists have every right to use the whole county road network including main roads, particularly in Oxford where there are large flows of cyclists on some main radial roads. However, future development of cycle networks throughout Oxfordshire will emphasise developing safe, direct, attractive, and well-signed routes which can cater for the majority of cyclists. In some locations a dual network approach may still be appropriate. All reasonable destinations need to be accessible by cycle and routes to these should be cycle-friendly if not part of the official network.

12.27 This process will include investigations of the following:

* improving safety and convenience on cycle paths at side roads and junctions;
* measures to improve cycle permeability in built up areas by the addition of new cycle links;
* measures such as contra-flow cycling on one-way streets and the use of direct "cut-through" routes;
* measures to reduce the hazards faced by cyclists at junctions;
* providing cycle "bypasses", allowing cyclists to avoid traffic signals, or advance stop lines;
* providing more and better quality cycle parking at strategic places, including at public transport hubs, for instance Park & Ride sites;
* promoting cycling as a quick, flexible, and cheap alternative for short trips;
* converting inter-urban footpaths/footways (and those providing links to employment centres) to bridleways or cycletracks to allow cycling;
* linking new residential or commercial development and existing businesses, employment, retail, leisure and health centres with signed cycle routes;
* improving access at some existing main employment sites, such as business and retail parks, and encouraging businesses to install cycle parking, changing and shower facilities, etc;
* providing safe routes to schools and colleges;
* routes to stations and other public transport hubs in order to facilitate multi-modal journeys;
* encouraging travel plans to include information that encourages cycling; and
* improving conditions for inter-urban cycling by joining-up existing routes and identifying new routes.

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

* sufficient space for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders (where appropriate) on shared or dual-use paths.
* properly maintained paths (particularly repair of damage resulting from adverse weather), kept free of obstacles and

over-growth. On-road cycle lanes should be of an adequate width to allow for safe cycling and included in road maintenance work, which should extend from kerb to kerb;

* public realm improvements designed to take account of cyclists. Provision for cyclists should be incorporated into improvements, especially where it provides an important cycling link;

* good signage of the best routes for cyclists, coupled with mapping and information;

* innovative techniques employed in road design, particularly cycle infrastructure. In areas where there is scope for increasing cycling levels, or where cycle safety is seen as a priority, cyclability audits will be carried out. These will focus on the existing transport network to identify current deficiencies and opportunities for improvement, evaluating the quality of the cycling environment from the point of view of those who use it rather than those who manage it; and

* cycle friendly traffic calming is also important, as features such as pinch points can force cyclists into the general traffic, increasing conflict between modes and the potential for casualties. Alternative measures such as speed cushions are more cycle friendly but, if road narrowing is unavoidable, the width of the marked cycle lane should be maintained to indicate to drivers that they are encroaching on cyclists' space.

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

Partnership working

12.30 Oxfordshire County Council will encourage work places and other locations to set-up or expand bicycle user groups (BUGs) to help promote and encourage cycling and inform it of problems/barriers and potential solutions. Working with schools, workplaces, the health sector, public transport operators, and cycle user groups, is important for any cycling strategy to be

successful.

12.31   We will work with our partners to provide, or encourage the provision of appropriately located areas where young people can ride their bikes in relative safety to generate interest in cycling.

Public rights of way and access to natural areas

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

12.33   People use public rights of way, cycle tracks, and open areas for recreation and commuting, and they also enable people to connect with nature and experience wildlife. In addition to transport, the paths provide opportunities for fitness, relaxation, education and play.

12.34   In addition to rights of way and areas of green space, walkers, cyclists, and horse riders are legitimate users of the road network, and these roads often form part of their journeys. They are vulnerable road users and so should have measures put in place to ensure their safety and consideration by vehicular traffic.

12.35   Under section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Oxfordshire County Council has produced a *Rights of Way Improvement Plan* (RoWIP) (2006) which sets out its vision for improving, modernising and sustaining access to the countryside for residents and visitors. The RoWIP is directly compatible with the Local Transport Plan and both strategies contribute to, and complement, each other.

12.36   As part of developing Oxfordshire's RoWIP, user groups, individuals and local councils were asked to supply views about access needs and their suggestions for improvements to the network. Since then, annual delivery action plans have sought improvements and there have been significant gains – but at the same time the network still needs improvement. Community Led Plans also often highlight the connecting, maintaining, and publicising of local walks, as well as identifying potential new routes, particularly cycle paths to nearby settlements.

Assessed User needs

12.37　There are three main types of non-motor vehicle user in the countryside: walkers; horse riders; and cyclists. Each person wanting to use a path has their own set of needs and expectations.

All users – require: an absence of obstructions and unnecessary physical restrictions to access; paths signed according to the ease of following the route; enough information about a route on and off site in order to assess its suitability for their intended use; secure car parking or, preferably, easy access from settlements or public transport; opportunities for refreshments, and toilet facilities; safe and convenient crossings of roads and rail lines; safe and convenient furniture on paths; and overall, an integrated and well-managed green network that allows them to explore and enjoy the whole of Oxfordshire with confidence.

Users with lower levels of agility – all of the above plus: gaps or pedestrian gates instead of stiles or field gates; handrails on steep slopes or beside steep drops; steps instead of steep slopes; resting places; and information about short, pleasant routes close to settlements and attractions.

Users with mobility impairments (wheelchair/pushchair) – all of the above, plus: absence of man-made obstructions; gaps or accessible gates; car parks with designated spaces and direct access; dropped kerbs; shallow vertical and horizontal slopes and minimal cambers; reasonably flat and stone/mud free surfaces; information at a suitable height and position; and well-publicised information and guide leaflets.

Users with visual impairments – all of the above, plus: absence of hazards within path surfaces and in the space surrounding the path's sides and to a reasonable height; well-defined edges, signing and information; and possibly tapping rails or Braille signage.

Cyclists – all of the above, plus: wide, well maintained traffic-free paths, with firm and smooth surfaces; no low branches or other hazards; gates should be easily opened.

Equestrians – all of the above, plus: wide paths with any reasonable surface, apart from sealed asphalt and sharp flint or

stone; no branches below 10 feet (three metres) in height; gates wide enough and easily opened from horseback; safe refuges at roadside enabling risk-free gate negotiation; links along the roadside to connect public rights of way and avoid traffic impacts; traffic should be controlled and aware where road use is necessary, using, for example, measures such as speed controls, better sight lines, and good road signage.

Challenges to meeting user needs

12.38 There are a number of challenges associated with meeting the needs and desires of residents and visitors to Oxfordshire, and meeting the authority's statutory duties. These come under the two areas of network availability (the physical aspects of the network) and network accessibility (the 'where' and 'how' this access can be gained).

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

12.40 Residential and commercial developments of all sizes may impact on the public's access. Development should not damage or reduce public rights of way and countryside access provision, either directly or indirectly. Residential and commercial developments should be integrated with existing public rights of way to enable the continued and increased use of the routes as part of a wider network. This will meet shared sustainable transport, healthy living, and environmental goals, and provide mitigation for any increased population or traffic impacts, as well as providing community benefit.

12.41 Public rights of way and accessible natural green spaces need to be well maintained, safe and easy to use, and they need to interact positively with the road network. This means that the

legal line, surface, drainage, infrastructure (bridges, gates, signs etc), vegetation management, and use of the land, should be fit for purpose across the whole of the county in all settlement types. It also means that safe road crossings, linking road verge routes, and the minor roads and unsurfaced highways network, need to be provided and maintained so that there is continuity of experience and safety.

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

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

12.44 Network Accessibility - Local residents and visitors need readily available and easy to understand information on where they can go and what they can and should do whilst they are using public rights of way and accessible natural areas. This includes options for how to get to the countryside, such as information on bus and train services.

12.45 The countryside is made up of a living and working landscape of farms and rural businesses that can pose potentially hazardous situations or offer opportunity for conflict, such as between livestock farmers and dog walkers. These situations mean that farmers and path users need mutual appreciation and respect, and the council can assist by providing information and positive intervention with all parties.

12.46 The public rights of way network and multi-purpose routes such as the *Phoenix Trail* (Thame to Princes Risborough) or other Sustrans routes, can cater for walking, cycling and horse riding

for leisure, and also helps users to build their confidence in an environment with less traffic. This can lead to greater use of non-motorised travel modes for commuting and social journeys as well as contributing to the local economy when used for leisure.

12.47 Unfortunately, to add to the issue of the disjointed network, information for less experienced users on the safety of a particular road that forms part of their chosen journey is sometimes missing. This could be information about the location of footways, cycleways or multipurpose verges, or whether roads offer comfortable space for pedestrians, cyclist, and horse riders. One way to address this is to promote routes that offer relatively safe options. Other approaches may include the provision of better links and providing more information on the ground and in local communities.

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

12.49 Vulnerable pedestrians, such as older and/or visually impaired people, or those with pushchairs and young children, may be especially apprehensive about the proximity of fast and perhaps inconsiderate cyclists. On public rights of way, fast moving and brightly coloured cyclists can startle horses and cause potentially dangerous reactions. Walkers on country paths can also be startled by fast moving cyclists or may not be aware that they are approaching and step into their paths. Therefore these should only be undertaken after consultation with local communities and user groups. Any proposals for additional shared access corridors should consider information and education on responsible use as part of their design.

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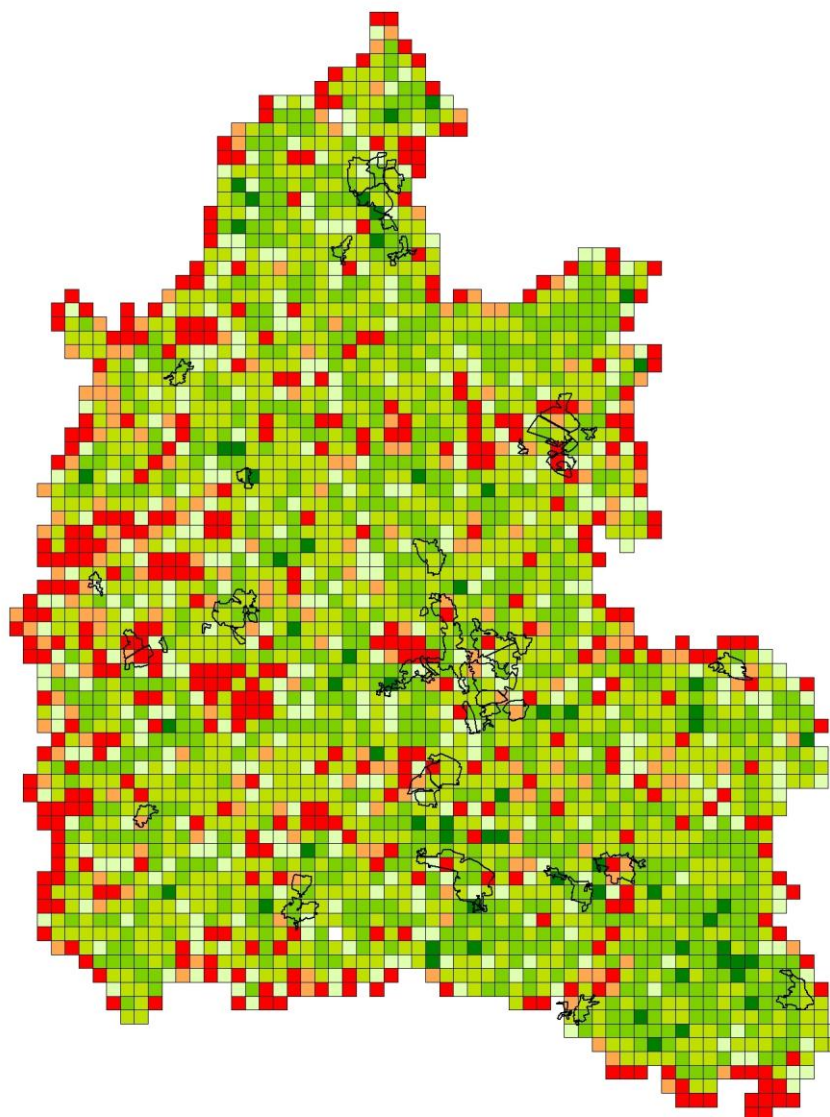## Oxfordshire's public rights of way network – assessment of connectivity

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

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

There are two graphics: the first shows the connected walking network options using all types of public right of way (footpath, bridleway, restricted byway and byway); the second is that connected network available to cyclists and horse riders using all types of public rights of way except footpaths.   It is not simply a count of the routes within each square, but rather is a count of the amount of connected network that each square has access to.
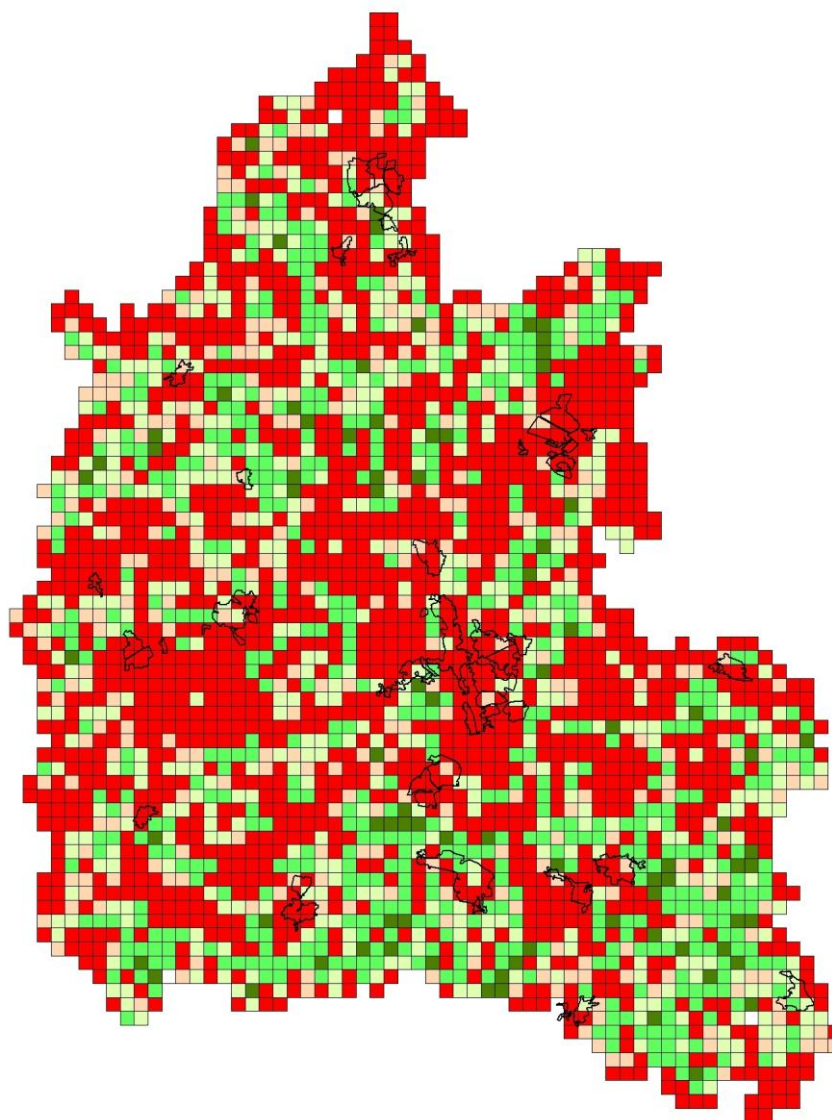
This information is intended to be used as a tool to help identify poorly connected areas that could potentially benefit from additional routes through the countryside, as well as measures on roads that could help improve connectivity and safety in areas with a more connected network. These could be stand alone projects or schemes that are linked to an area's Local Development Framework, green infrastructure strategy, or a particular development.

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

Walking_connected network_All rights of way

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

Cycling or horse riding___all rights of way except footpaths

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

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